

Off the grid, by Pam Jundt

When I moved into my 1 bedroom condo in Windsor Gardens last November I upsized – significantly. Before I moved, I lived for 18 months in a 7' x 13' travel trailer. Before that, I had to downsize, significantly, from the four bedroom suburban house I live in for 25 years with my late husband and our two kids. After countless trips to the donation station, numerous ads on Craigslist, and one garage sale, I had condensed my life to 91 square feet. Finally, on a sunny late winter day I tootled off in my big truck pulling my little trailer, ready to explore the country, happy to let someone else worry about shoveling, mowing, raking and all the other headaches that come with homeownership.

Ahh the simple life or so I thought. My original plan was to live mostly off-grid on public lands - beautiful campsites for free. How hard could it be? After all, I had a fully self-contained trailer, a solar panel, and a 2200 watt generator. I shake my head now at my naiveté. What I discovered was living off-grid in a small trailer is so much more complicated than the YouTube videos lead me to believe. Fun yes, simple no.

When I disperse camping, I had to constantly monitor my holding tanks, batteries, water usage, propane tanks and how much trash I was throwing away. Since I had a diminutive RV the holding tanks were correspondently petite. Gray water is not too difficult to dispose of, but the black tank was another matter. I was either looking for dump stations or going behind a tree.

Power was another issue. I knew I could damage my batteries if I let them get too low. So I was always neurotically watching the volt meter. Most mornings I put out my portable solar panel, adjusting it every few hours to maximize production. If it was cloudy, then I ran my generator. At least I always enough power to turn on lights and more importantly charge my tablet so I could watch movies.

Getting fresh water was yet another concern. The worse time I had with this was when a friend and I decided to stay deep in the Shoshone National Forest in Wyoming. We parked our trailers in a high alpine meadow overlooking a breathtaking mountain range. We were thirty minutes from a cell signal and forty minutes from the closest town. The only water around was scummy pond water I won't even let my dogs drink. Fortunately, the little town of Meeteetse had a visitor's center. The lovely women that worked there let me fill my five gallon water jugs in their kitchen. They even helped carry them to the truck. They are a wonderful example of the many beautiful people I met on the road.

After several months of primitive camping on public lands, I discovered the joys full hook up RV parks. Okay, so the sites weren't free and the scenery wasn't as

spectacular. But oh was life simpler. I could use my microwave, run the air conditioner, take long showers and leave the lights on. Heaven.

I gave up RVing after my grandson was born. Even though life on the road was even more fun than I thought it was going to be, I decided to stop being a wanderer to become a grammy. I haven't regretted my decision. Besides I still have my trailer. I think I'll escape the heat this week and head to mountains for a couple of weeks. And when I get back I will no doubt, have a new appreciation for the simplicity of a flush toilet.