

My Survival Story: Living In A Car For A Year

You have to sacrifice if you want to get ahead in life. That's what I have learned after living in my car for over a year. It was a big lesson of survival that made me realize what a man is capable of when is following his dream.

From August 25th 2012 until over a year later, I slept and lived in my car, in Los Angeles, California. I moved to Los Angeles for a dream, but did not realize how expensive it was to live there. So I began planning in my head and thinking how I might save money and how I might get out of the frustrating living situation I was in at the time.

I decided living and sleeping in my car would be an idea that would satisfy both of those things I wanted for my life in Los Angeles. And it was truly a survival experience. Read another inspiring story on our article [A Prepper's Story: Headed To Alaska To Survive Off-grid.](#)

Throughout my time sleeping and living in my car, I learned a tremendous amount. There are many different aspects when it comes to sleeping and living in a car successfully, and it takes a plethora of survival skills. It truly is a "survival" experience attempting to live in your car.

I was doing this so I could save money and get ahead in life. I saved a great deal of money and had extra money I wouldn't have had if I was paying rent somewhere. I would have had no money for anything else if I had to pay \$1000 a month for rent like many others in Los Angeles. [Read here our article on things to be aware of when relocating.](#)

Especially in this economy today, you never know when hardship may hit and having these survival skills in your pocket may

just save your life one day when you experience hardship. I did have a job and no one would have ever guessed I slept in my car and that is how it should be. More attention is worse when living in one's car.

Surviving Means Going Through Many Tough Times

It was a very tough time as well. But it did in fact help me achieve my goals of saving money and being able to live on my "own" in my car. It didn't come easy getting that life though. There were many learning experiences. And I began writing a book about how to survive living in one's car.

I moved to Los Angeles and did not really know anyone. When I began sleeping in my car it was a scary time. I had no friends, and I knew if I tried to make some friends eventually they'd find out I lived in my car and wouldn't accept me anyway. How would I get a date, I thought to myself? Who would date someone living in his car?

After a long day at work as a security guard, walking around, patrolling, writing reports, I would get off and have to go sit at McDonalds for a few hours until it got dark.

Many people complain because they are already so tired after a hard day at work. But then they get to go home and relax and lay down on the couch and talk to their friends or family.

After my long hard day, I could not just go lay down and relax somewhere. I always had to wait until it got dark outside before I could go to sleep at my spot.

There was no way to lay down in the back of my car while the sun was out. It was much too hot out to do that. I had to go sit in a fast food place around a bunch of strangers until it got dark.

It was tough not having anyone around to help me out and no one to hang out with in the beginning when I didn't really

know anyone. It was quite a lonely life. I felt like I constantly had to be on guard against everything.

I had to watch out for homeless people walking around the streets when I was going to the store to get some food. My back tail light was broken so I had to be careful not to get stopped by cops because it only drew more attention to myself. Though cops usually respected that I lived in my car anyway. The ones I came across.

Many times I was in the back of my car at night, with all my towels up over my windows, worried and wondering when I would get a break from all this. When I'd get to have a normal life and have friends and be able to come home watch TV and make a steak?

I cried a couple times in my car when I felt absolutely hopeless. But most of the time I was very thankful for the life I had. I was glad I had my car. I had a computer, I had a job. I essentially had everything I needed. I knew I had no reason to be ungrateful. I knew there were many others in Los Angeles and around the world who were a lot less fortunate than I was.

It did feel like a never ending cycle at times though. Doing the same thing every day. Alone.

I moved here to achieve a dream and I got this. It was rough. But I always tried to keep in mind how thankful I was for everything I had.

What It Takes to Survive when Living in a Car?

There are many important aspects to surviving living in one's car. The key thing I found to living in my car successfully was keeping a low profile in all I did. That way, I could have the longevity to stay in my car as long as I needed to.

How to Get Your Food

When it comes to food, there are many options when living in your car. My purpose living in my car was saving as much money as I could. So I keep that in mind when thinking about food.

- Canned foods: There are canned foods such as beans, pastas, and tuna. Have a can opener ready or preferably have an easy to open top. That makes things much easier. Canned fruits or fruits in plastic cups work as well. They store well too.
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are easy to make in a car. Just have a plastic knife to use to make it.
- Homeless shelters: Sometimes or much of the time homeless shelters give free food away as well. Just find one in your local area.
- Protein bars: These are pre-packaged, somewhat healthy and easy to eat on the go.
- Fast Food: This is a somewhat cheap and accessible option but I generally went for the foods that were in a grocery store as they were cheaper.
- In grocery stores, they usually have a bakery or already-cooked foods section and these are somewhat affordable as well. I used to get 2 pieces of fried chicken and some potatoes and it was decently priced and nice to have some “real” food for a change sometimes.

Where to Sleep

Where to sleep is probably one of the key elements of surviving when living in your car.

A good sleeping area can make or break you living in your car. You have to find a place that is safe but also a place where you can stay on the down-low enough to not be noticed.

I personally slept at a 24-hour grocery store I used to work at. I lucked out, but I'd say if you can manage to sleep at a 24-hour store somewhere that would be good. Or in a neighborhood that is safe where you can stay under the radar.

Once you do find that place you have to make sure to do everything you can not to be noticed.

Also your car has to be primed and ready.

I had dark tint on my windows some of the time I slept in my car. If you don't, you can put dark towels up in front of all windows. You have to be conspicuous though and make sure no one is around when you put them up. Just go to your spot, park, shut the car off and set the towels up. That is what I did.

Make sure you choose the same place for sleeping every night. It makes things a lot easier. Don't tell anyone where you sleep.

Have the radio off long before you get to your spot so you don't draw any attention to yourself. Additional tip: do not open your doors once you get to your spot or get out of your car at all. It only draws more attention to yourself.

Where to Take Showers

Keeping your hygiene good is absolutely key to sleeping and living in your car and staying unnoticed.

The more you are noticed the worse it is for you, so you have to keep the appearance of a normal person living in a normal house. In other words, you have to give an appearance you are not homeless, or you will be kicked out of a lot of places you may hang out at.

I took showers at a gym. I got a monthly gym membership. It was only \$40 a month, so it was not much. I got to both work out and get clean. I recommend having a backpack with everything you need for the shower and a combination lock to lock up your stuff while you are in the shower.

Where to Spend Your Spare Time At

There are a few options of where to hang out on your day off work or when you have free time.

- Fast food chains. They usually have free WiFi for laptops. If you keep a low profile, it's likely you will go generally unnoticed. Just make sure to keep to yourself for the most part. I didn't even buy anything much of the time and no one cared to be honest.
- Public libraries are great places to hang out in your spare time especially if you have a laptop. There is free WiFi that does not expire like many food places. There are usually a good amount of seats. It is nice and cool inside or warm depending on the climate where you live.
- Malls are a decent area to hang out at as well. To find a seat and read a book or walk around. Just as long as you don't have to pay for parking to be at a mall then it's great.
- The gym is a great place as well. You can work out for a while to kill time and be inside.

Also, if you have made any friends or anything like that, then that will help a ton as well.

Key Items You Need to Keep in Your Car

- Gallon of drinking water: It's important to always stay hydrated when living in your car. You are always going, on the move much of the time. There were many times it was after work and I hadn't had any water. It was always nice to have my gallon of water in the backseat under a towel. It costs about \$.25 to fill it up at a grocery store.
- Pain medicine: Very useful when you have any kind of pain. There were many times while I was living in my car, it was late at night and my head was throbbing. It was nice to reach in my little soccer bag and take some pain medicine and be able to sleep peacefully after

that.

- Car fan: At night time I find it tough to sleep without some background noise, so this came in handy. It costs about \$20 at an automotive store. It is enough wattage to be on all night and not kill the battery. Many nights it is too hot to sleep in a car without a fan. In the summer time, if I didn't have a fan I would have suffered greatly.
- Power inverter: This is a device you can plug into your cigarette lighter and charge your laptop, cell phone, or any other electronic device as long it is a small enough wattage. It costs about \$20 at many stores. Be careful what you charge. Some things will kill the battery if you charge it too long. Try to charge things while driving when possible because it doesn't use the battery. The one I had was 100 watts, which means anything you charge has to generally generate less electricity than that.
- Sleeping Bag: A good sleeping bag is key in any environment. Even in Los Angeles during winter and many times in other seasons too I needed it. If I hadn't had a good sleeping bag, I would have frozen and been very uncomfortable the entire night.
- Snacks/food: It is important to always have some sort of food in your car. Preferably on the floor on the passenger seat side as I did. I used that section for my food. It was easy when I got hungry, I could just reach over and grab a banana to eat when I needed it. It's crucial to always have at least some stuff ready to eat anytime you may need it. Not eating can cause many problems. There were many times after work I was extremely hungry and was leaving work and had a piece of fruit I reached for and ate right from my car.
- Jumper cables: Sometimes for a couple different reasons, I found that my car battery died and I needed a jump. Most likely because I left the lights on or I charged my electronics too long without driving. It was a pain

standing in front of a store asking people if they had jumper cables. I eventually got some jumper cables so when my car battery died, all I had to do was ask anyone who had a car around me if they could give me a jump rather than also having to ask them if they had jumper cables too.

- Vitamin C: Living in your car is not a normal thing obviously. There is more wear and tear and hardship than if you had a place to live. So it's important to keep your immune system up. Vitamin C boosts the immune system. Anything you can consume with a lot of Vitamin C is great. Oranges or any drinks that have vitamin C in them are great. You cannot afford to get sick in your car when you already have enough other things to worry about.
- Spare keys container: Having spare keys around are very important while sleeping in your car. You never know when you may need them. I kept a spare key for my car always in my wallet. Also, I went to an automotive store and got 2 containers for about \$10 that store keys and have a magnetic cylinder on the back so you can connect it to any metal at the bottom of your car for when you lose or lock your keys in your car. Make sure to put it where no one can see it. Make sure no one knows it is there. Only you.

Overall, it was sort of an adventure living in my car. I learned a lot. I became a lot stronger than I had been before I came to Los Angeles and lived in my car. It made me realize what I am capable of. That people can adapt to any situation.

Advice for anyone sleeping in their car or homeless would be that you have to stay mentally strong and continually aware and focused of everyone and everything around you. Pray a lot. Keep your head up. Always know it is not forever and it's only a temporary situation. You will get out eventually.



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This article has been written by J. C. for [Survivopedia](#).