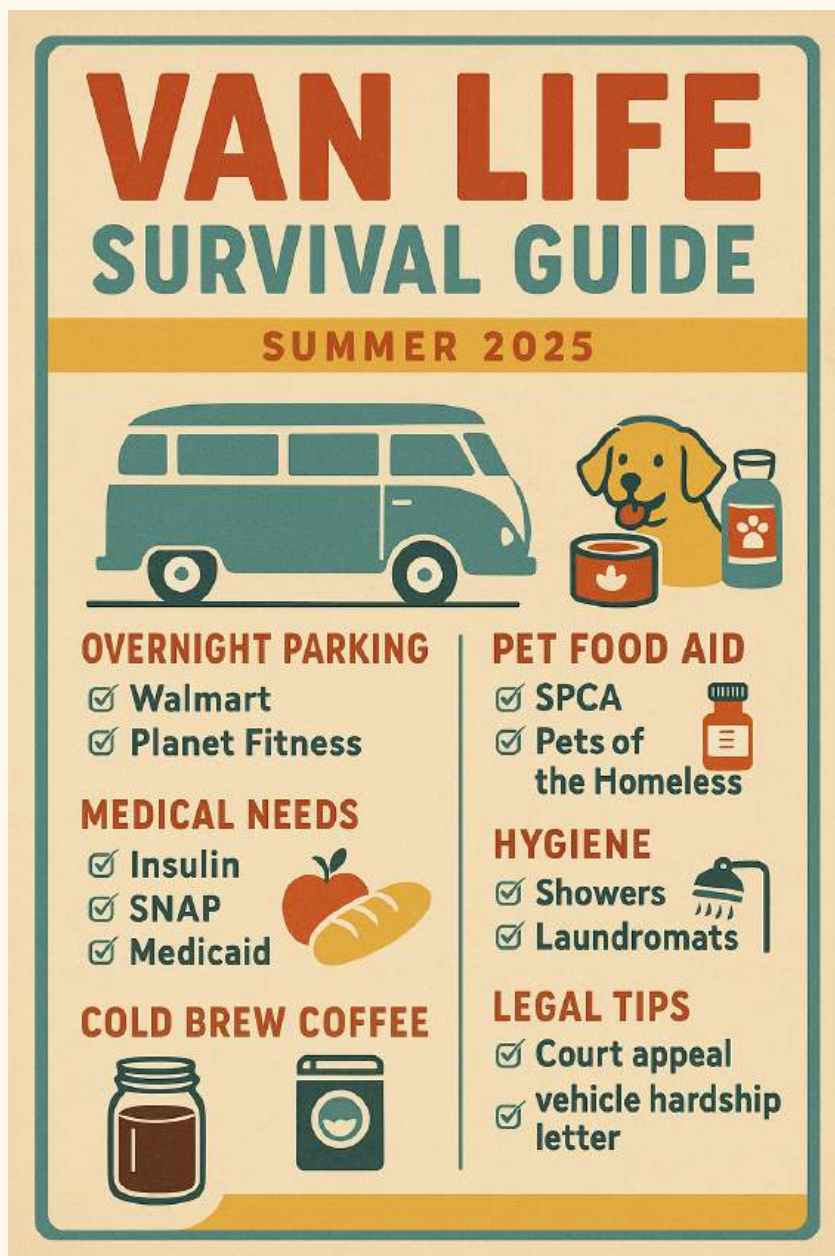


# VAN LIFE SURVIVAL HANDBOOK 2025

A Field Manual for Nomads, Dog-Guardians & Diabetic  
Road-Warriors in Montgomery County, PA



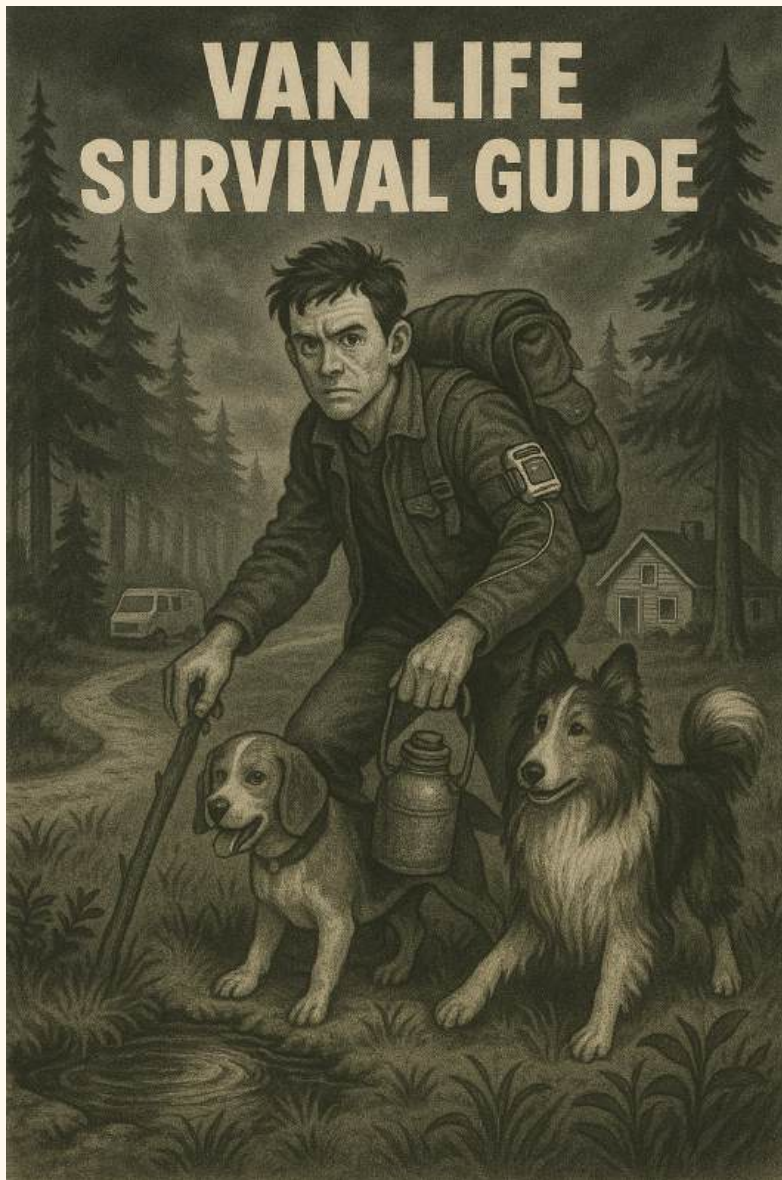
**Editorial Note** – *This handbook is intentionally narrative. Think Harper’s meets Popular Mechanics with a dash of Dog Fancy and a Twilight Zone centerfold. Skim the sidebars when you’re on one-bar cell signal; read the essays when you have library Wi-Fi and need perspective.*

## **Contents**

- 1. Prelude – How We Got Here**
- 2. Shelter & Stealth**
- 3. Hygiene Without Plumbing**
- 4. No-Stove Cuisine**
- 5. Insulin in a Moving Target**
- 6. Two Cunucus & the Budget Bowl**
- 7. Utilities: Power · Wi-Fi · Water · Weather**
- 8. Paper Shields: Mail, Docs & Legal Survival**
- 9. TAKE MY JOB – A Horror-Comic Guide to 2025 Hiring**
- 10. 72-Hour Contingency Drill**
- 11. Almanac of Resources**
- 12. Appendix – Résumé & Templates**

# 1. Prelude – How We Got Here

“Vanlife” used to conjure Instagram sunsets. In 2025, it’s a safety valve for workers priced out of rents and blindsided by layoffs. If you’re reading this in the Planet Fitness parking lot at 2 a.m., know this: Montgomery County is survivable. The suburbs sprawl with outlets, Wi-Fi, and sympathetic librarians. This guide treats your van as an ecosystem—power, food, canine morale, glucose control, and income all cycling in a 24-hour loop. Welcome to your very own comic-book survival saga, where you’re the hero living between the panels. The challenges are real, but so are the resources (and a few friendly monsters) waiting to help.



## 2. Shelter & Stealth

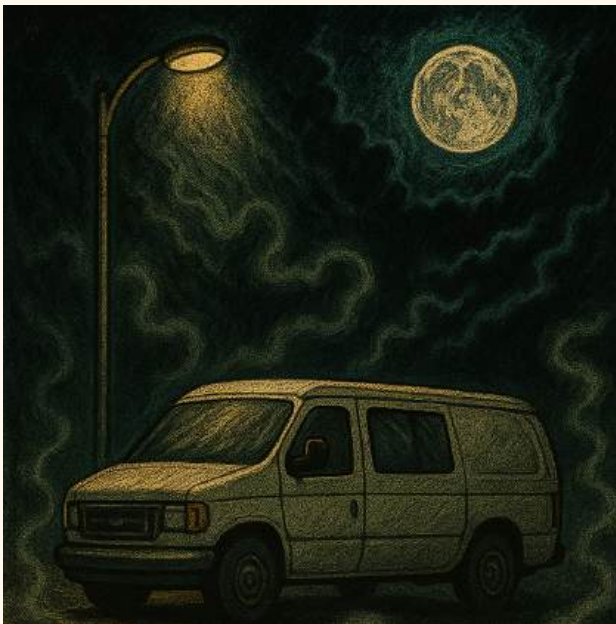
### 2-Minute Table – Where to Sleep & Why:

Spot	Hours	Amenities	“Rotational” Rule	Insider Tip
<b>Planet Fitness</b> ( <i>E. Norriton / Lansdale</i> )	24/7	Showers, outlets, Wi-Fi	2 nights/week max	Park under the light pole farthest from the door. Staff will ignore you if you wave hello at shift change.
<b>Walmart</b> ( <i>Hatfield</i> )	24h store	Restrooms 5a–11p, bright lighting	1 night (call ahead)	Call customer service to ask; log your license plate # with them—security sometimes checks.
<b>Cracker Barrel</b> ( <i>Plymouth Meeting</i> )	10p–7a	Quiet lot	1 night	Buy a \$3 coffee and leave the receipt on your dash as an unofficial overnight parking permit.
<b>Rest Area</b> ( <i>I-476</i> )	24/7	Restrooms, water	24h legal	Park near the semis for sound cover (their engines mask noise).

<b>Church/VFW Lots</b>	Varies	Water spigot (sometimes)	Weekly (Sunday return)	Volunteer at a Saturday pantry or event to build goodwill, then ask permission for occasional overnight stays.
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**Stealth Blueprint:** Reflectix accordion window panels, blackout curtains, and a red-bulb headlamp are your trifecta for invisible living. Dim your phone to  $\leq 10\%$  brightness and cut all lights by 10 p.m. Crack windows on opposite sides for cross-breeze (about 1") and run a vent fan if  $> 75^\circ \text{F}$ . Avoid idling the engine at night – nothing attracts vampire-like attention faster than exhaust and noise at 2 a.m.

**Sidebar – The 3-Lot Rotation:** Night 1 – Planet Fitness (Hatfield), Night 2 – Walmart, Night 3 – Cracker Barrel, then repeat. This 3-night circuit keeps local cops uninterested and neighbors oblivious. By the time anyone notices the “haunted van,” you’re already gone. 🧛‍♂️



**Sidebar – Ghoul’s Honor:** Resist the urge to park overnight in a cemetery. It may be quiet, but even if the undead don’t mind, the living will – security *will* escort you out. Save the graveyard for daytime dog walks (if you dare).

### 3. Hygiene Without Plumbing

**Showers (Humans):** Planet Fitness Black Card (\$24.99/mo, unlimited hot showers) is the gold standard. If you need a one-off shower, the TA Travel Center in King of Prussia charges ~\$12 for a clean shower stall (towel included). For a more community-oriented scrub, the local YMCA (e.g. Ambler YMCA) offers guest passes for about \$12 —hot showers and sometimes a pool dip as a bonus. In summer, an outdoor public pool (when open) or state park campground shower (French Creek State Park is ~40 min away) can be a stopgap. Always keep a backup plan: a simple solar shower bag or a black 2-gallon garden sprayer left on your roof for 3 hours will heat to ~100 °F, giving you a decent “**sun shower**” rinse when all else fails.

**Showers (Dogs):** Muddy pup? Skip the van’s interior bath. Tractor Supply Co. in Hatfield has a self-serve pet wash station (~\$10 or less) equipped with shampoo, tub and dryer. Pet supply stores like Petco or Pet Supermarket also offer DIY dog wash stations (around \$15). If funds are tight, a \$5 hose at a self-serve car wash bay can do in a pinch (go at off-peak times, use low pressure, and bring your own dog shampoo). **Pro tip:** Between baths, dog grooming wipes and a brush can keep Fido fresh and prevent that “wet werewolf” smell from haunting your van.

**Toilet:** A simple 5-gallon bucket with a gamma-seal locking lid doubles as a emergency toilet. Line it with heavy-duty kitchen bags and add pine pellet litter for composting and odor control (the pine neutralizes smells surprisingly well). stow it away after use, and always know the location of the nearest public restroom for proper disposal. Many restrooms in Montco (Walmarts, grocery stores, parks) are open during the day – plan pit stops to dump waste bags appropriately (never in nature, unless it’s a **bury-able** situation). If you’re stealthing and nature calls at 3 a.m., your bucket throne is your lifesaver.

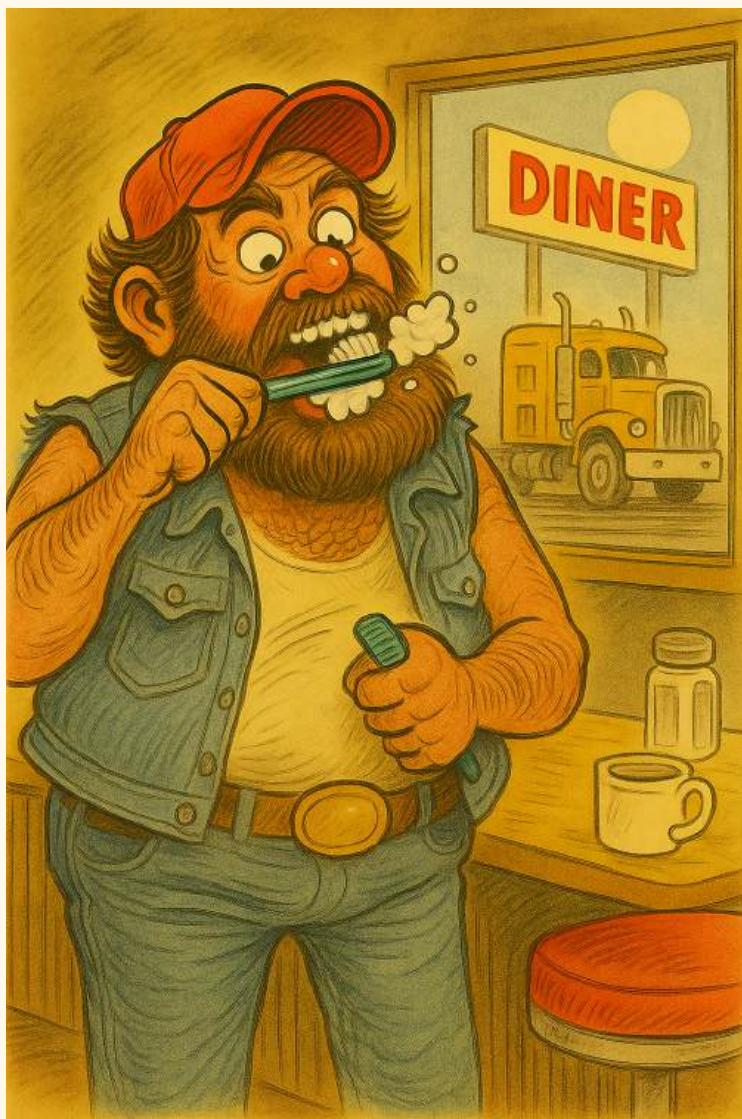
**Laundry:** SpinZone Laundromat in Lansdale (24/7 open) offers a mid-week discount (\$0.75 off per pound on Tue/Wed) for drop-off service . It’s brightly lit and you can do your own wash any time, which is great for night-owls running a “graveyard shift” laundry session. Other 24-hour options include Melody Laundromat in Glenside – useful if you’re down county. For safety, do laundry in the late evening or early morning when places are quiet, and guard your baskets like a hoard of gold. If quarters are short, consider local church programs or shelters; some offer free laundry days. In a pinch, hand-wash essentials in a collapsible basin and hang them inside the van (bungee a line, hang garments, and crack the windows) – you’ll feel like a ghost with sheets fluttering around, but at least they’ll dry overnight.

**Dishes:** For dishwashing without a sink, a plastic basin and biodegradable soap (Dr. Bronner’s works wonders) are your go-tos. Fill the basin with water from a park spigot or jug, wash, then **rinse at a public spigot** like the one at Norristown Farm Park. Pro move: Do your dish rinse at



dusk with minimal fanfare – it looks less conspicuous. After rinsing, set dishes on your dashboard or roof to air-dry (free sanitizing courtesy of UV rays!). **Safe Dishwashing 101:** Avoid washing directly in rivers or lakes – even “eco-friendly” soaps can harm critters. If you must wash in the wild, carry your basin 200 feet away from the water source to dispose of dirty water, and strain out food bits so you’re not summoning the local raccoons or lake monsters.

**Personal Grooming:** Keep baby wipes and dry shampoo on hand for days when a full shower isn’t in the cards. A small mirror and a headlamp let you shave or tidy up in the driver’s seat when needed. Libraries and malls often have spacious restrooms; take advantage for a quick sink bath (the old “truck-stop shower”: soap, rinse, and paper towel dry at the sink). Just don’t hog the space or you might get staff knocking – in true horror fashion – asking if you’re alright in there.



## 4. No-Stove Cuisine

Eating well without a stove or fridge is a **crafty art**. With a bit of planning, you can dine like a vampire king on shelf-stable fare that won't spoil your blood sugar or require fire.



- **Proteins:** Pack in portable proteins. Tuna pouches and canned salmon are lean, ready-to-eat staples (with omega-3s to keep your heart ticking). Also consider **canned chicken** – it's fully cooked, low carb, and high protein, perfect for wraps or salads. For plant-based options, grab vacuum-sealed **lentil** or **chickpea** meals. Individual lentil cups (the kind you microwave) can often be heated at a library or convenience store microwave. Peanut butter (the natural kind with no added sugar) is a diabetic-friendly powerhouse – spread on anything for instant fuel and satiety.
- **Carbs & Grains:** Prioritize **complex carbs** that are gentle on blood sugar. Instant oatmeal packets or instant polenta can be “thermos-cooked” by adding boiling water and sealing for 15-20 minutes – breakfast will be ready by the time you get to your first stop. Whole-grain tortillas beat bread for van life (long shelf life and less squishing) , and they make great vessels for tuna or peanut butter wraps. Rice cakes or whole-grain crackers (look for seed crackers with fiber ) pair well with canned goodies or cheese. For variety,



stock precooked quinoa or brown rice pouches – they keep well and only need a quick heat (or can be eaten at room temp in a pinch). High-fiber grains like quinoa are especially good for diabetics, providing steady energy .

- **Fruits & Veggies:** Fresh produce without refrigeration? Yes, you can! Choose hardy fruits: apples, oranges, and bananas come in their own “wrappers” and can last over a week, giving you vitamins and fiber. Citrus is great because it doesn’t require perfect storage conditions. For veggies, carrots, cucumbers, and bell peppers have decent shelf lives if kept out of direct heat. Cherry tomatoes survive surprisingly well for a few days. Don’t forget canned options: canned **beets** are full of electrolytes and last ages, canned spinach or green beans add greens to your meal (and canned spinach is packed with Vitamin A and lasts up to 4 years sealed) . Also consider dried veggies – seaweed snacks, dried beet chips, etc., for a crunchy fix with nutrients. And of course, dried fruits (raisins, apricots, etc.) for a sweet treat that won’t spike your sugar as much as candy.
- **Dairy & Alternatives:** Without a fridge, skip the fresh milk. Instead, grab **shelf-stable plant milks** (unsweetened almond or soy milk boxes) which last months unopened – great for mixing with instant coffee or cereal. Individual soy milk or **protein shake cartons** can also help keep calories up. Hard cheeses (waxed mini cheeses or aged cheddar) can survive a day or two in a cooler or even in a dark cabinet if it’s not too hot, and they make any cracker a decadent snack. Powdered milk or whey protein powder can boost your nutrition: mix with water for a quick shake or stir into oatmeal. Don’t forget **oat-milk powder** – yes, it exists, and it can turn your cold-brew coffee into a latte anywhere, no fridge needed.
- **High-Calorie Heroes:** When you’re burning energy (especially in winter or managing diabetes and need consistent intake), high-calorie shelf-stable items are your friend. Nuts and seeds – almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds – are calorie-dense, healthy, and require zero prep . Trail mix (go easy on the candy in it if watching sugar) is great for all-day nibbling. Granola or protein bars (choose ones with low added sugar) provide quick carbs and protein for on-the-go. A bit of dark **chocolate** (70%+ cacao) can satisfy sweet cravings with less sugar – plus dark chocolate has fiber and healthy fats . For diabetics, these options help avoid blood sugar rollercoasters by combining carbs with fats/protein. Always aim to pair a carb with a protein or fat (e.g. crackers with peanut butter, fruit with nuts) to slow glucose spikes .
- **Thermos Meals:** Leverage your vacuum flask as a passive cooker. At a morning coffee stop, fill your thermos with boiling water. Toss in quick-cook oats, couscous, or ramen noodles (prefer whole grain or brown rice ramen for better nutrition) and seal it. By lunch, you’ll have a hot meal waiting. Example: add oats, a spoon of peanut butter, and dried fruit to hot

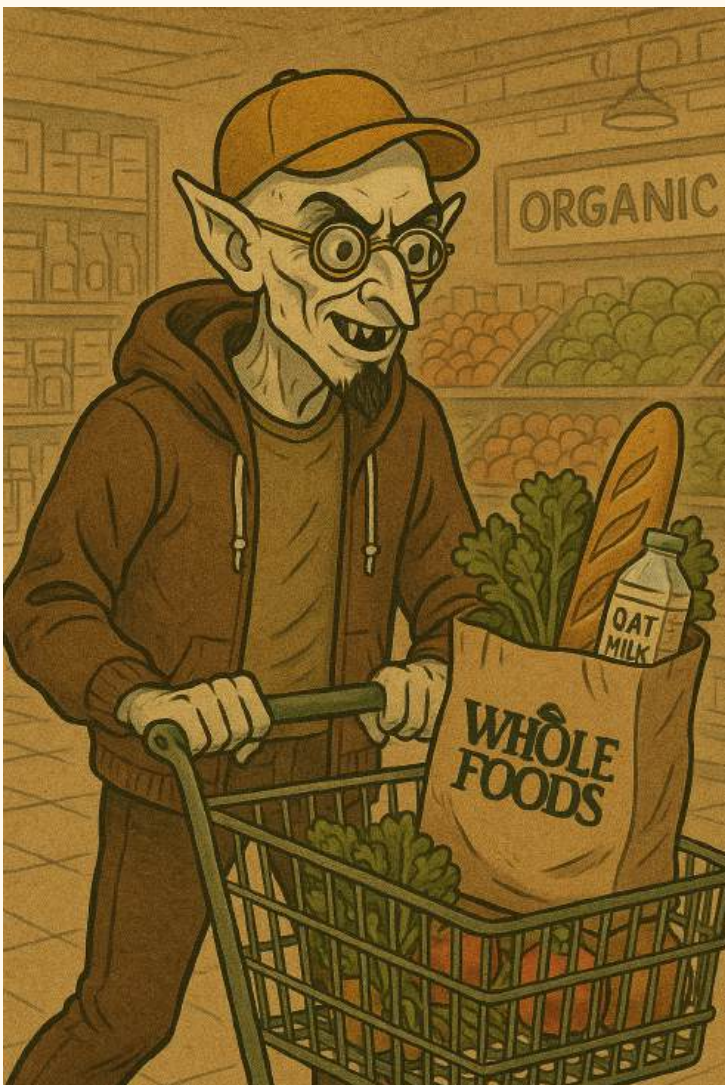
water – close the lid and by mid-morning it's thick, warm oatmeal. Or try couscous mixed with a bouillon cube and dried veggies – you'll get a savory stew by meal time. This method uses zero propane and no electric – just the magic of heat retention. **Safety tip:** Preheat the thermos first with a rinse of boiling water for best results, and be mindful of any food that might spoil (eat thermos meals the same day).

- **Diabetic-Friendly Tips:** Maintaining stable blood sugar on the road is like dealing with a friendly werewolf – you feed it regularly so it doesn't turn on you. Carry quick-fix snacks for lows (glucose tablets, small juice box) and more complex snacks for daily sustenance. Great options include beef jerky (high protein, zero carb), pistachios or walnuts (healthy fats, fiber), and roasted **chickpeas** (crunchy, high fiber). These won't spike your sugar much and keep you full. Plan your meals and snacks so you consume roughly the same amount of carbs at the same time each day – routine can help manage levels. And hydrate! Blood sugar control is harder if you're dehydrated, so make use of all those water refill spots (see Utilities section) to keep a jug of H<sub>2</sub>O within reach.
- **“Cooler” Treats:** If you do have a cooler or mini-fridge that you run sporadically, treat it like a treasure chest. Reserve cooler space for: insulin (of course), a soy **yogurt** or two, maybe a hummus cup, or that fancy leftover sushi tray you scored on clearance (eat it within 24 hours or it becomes a science experiment). Use frozen water bottles as ice packs – refreeze them when you get a chance, or fill up a bottle with ice at a soda fountain for cheap. Remember, a cooler is not the Arctic: even lower temps only slow bacteria. When in doubt, toss it out. But properly managed, a small cooler (<50 °F) can let you steep a **cold-brew coffee** overnight or keep yesterday's chili edible till tonight.

**Cold-Brew Ritual:** (Because even in a horror comic, the protagonist needs their coffee!)

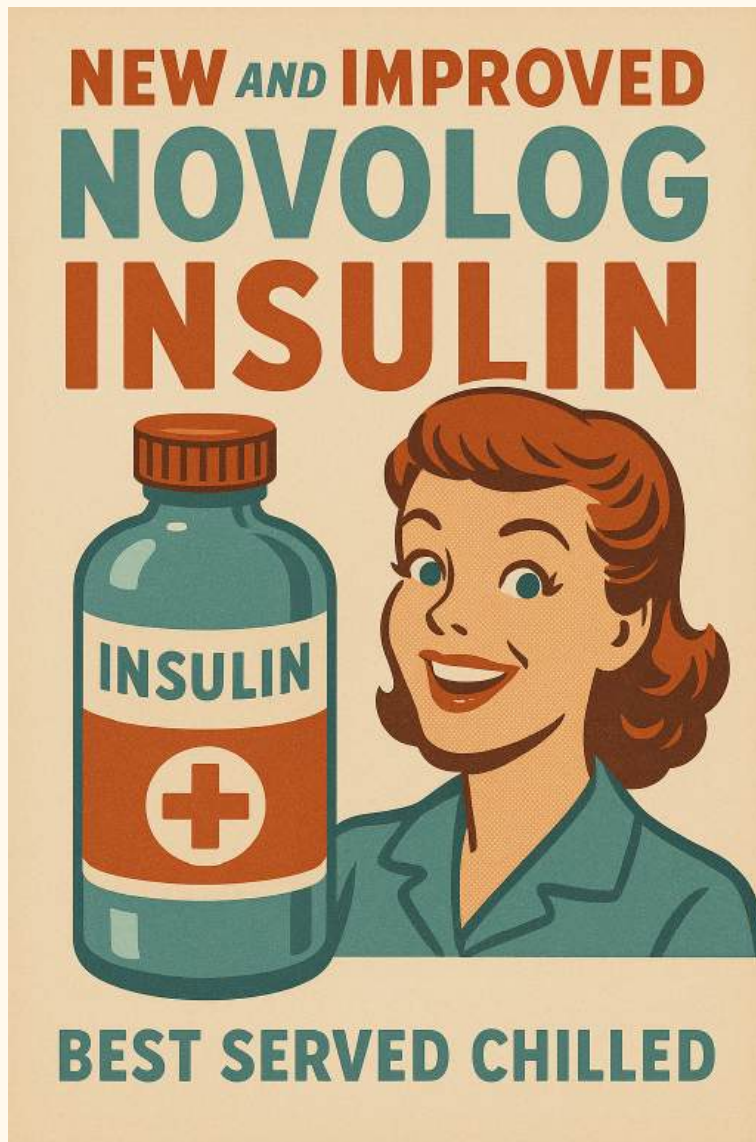
1. Grind 80 g of coffee beans into a mason jar (or any container).
2. Add 640 g of clean water. Seal the jar.
3. Steep for 12 hours in your cooler or a shaded spot (aim for <50 °F for a smooth brew).
4. Strain the concentrate through a clean nylon sock or cheesecloth into another container.
5. Cut the concentrate with water or a bit of that oat-milk powder. Savor it slowly for maximum bliss. Cleanup is easy: wipe the jar clean and toss the used grounds into a trash or dog-waste bin (nobody likes a caffeinated raccoon).

**Sidebar – The Nosferatu Nutritionist:** Eating healthy in a van can feel like battling a crafty vampire – the junk food will seduce you if you let it. But you have garlic in your arsenal (well, maybe garlic powder). The key is to stock up on real, whole foods when you can. Hit farmer’s markets for local produce (often cheaper at end of day). Farmers market eggs, if unwashed, last longer unrefrigerated than grocery store eggs – a boon if you have a way to cook them occasionally. And if you ever catch yourself eating cold SpaghettiOs by flashlight and feeling like a crypt-dweller, remember: even Dracula enjoys a gourmet meal now and then. You got this – dine like you’re immortal!



## 5. Insulin in a Moving Target

Managing diabetes on the road turns van life into a high-stakes thriller – but with preparation, you’ll always stay one step ahead of the **Insulin Goblin** (that pesky creature that tries to separate you from your meds). Here’s how to keep your insulin (and other meds) safe, potent, and accessible as you roam:



**Keep It Cool (but not frozen):** Insulin is a diva: it likes to live between 36–46 °F. If you have a 12V compressor fridge (e.g. a 25-quart BougeRV model), fantastic – plug it in for about 2 hours a day (perhaps while at Planet Fitness or the library) and pair it with a small 160 Wh battery pack like a Jackery . This combo can maintain safe temps reliably. No fridge? Don’t panic. Use a high-quality cooler with ice packs – you’ll need to refresh ice daily, but it can work. Even better,

invest in a FRÍO insulin cooling pouch (uses water evaporation to stay cool) – lifesaver in summer when your power access is iffy. Always keep a thermometer with your insulin so you know if things get too warm. If it’s winter, guard against freezing: keep insulin close to you or wrapped in cloth; a frozen vial is a dead vial.

**Resupply Without an Address:** Need to refill insulin, test strips, continuous glucose monitor (CGM) sensors, or pump supplies? You have options:

- **USPS General Delivery** – You can have your pharmacy or supplier mail to *General Delivery, [Your Name], [City], PA [ZIP]-9999*. For example: “John Doe, General Delivery, Lansdale, PA 19446-9999” . The main post office in that ZIP will hold your package up to 30 days. Always bring photo ID to pick up, and call ahead to confirm that post office offers General Delivery service (most do). This is a tried-and-true method for nomads receiving critical meds.
- **Pharmacy Pickup** – Chain pharmacies like CVS or Walgreens can be your best allies. In fact, CVS #791 at 1251 Sumneytown Pike, Lansdale, is highlighted by local van-dwellers as a friendly spot: it’s open late and doubles as a UPS Access Point . That means you could have shipments (like insulin pump supplies from Medtronic, or a new Dexcom sensor) sent via UPS to that CVS and pick it up there. Walgreens (e.g. 890 W Main St) partners with FedEx for pickups and is known for some of the friendliest pharmacy techs around (crucial when you’re explaining your unconventional living situation) . Rite Aid in the area tends to be quieter, which might mean faster service . In short, find a pharmacy you trust, explain that you’re on the road, and see if they can hold your meds or accept deliveries on your behalf. Many will accommodate if you ask nicely (bonus points if you consistently use that store for refills).
- **Overnight to a Friend or Hold Location** – In emergencies, you can often get your insulin supplier (or diabetic supply company like CCS Medical) to ship overnight to *any* FedEx or UPS location for hold. For instance, have a critical package sent “Hold for Pickup” at a FedEx Office or a UPS Customer Center using your name. They’ll hold it for a few days, giving you time to swing by. Some suppliers can even ship to a *clinic* or a local organization if you have an arrangement. Be resourceful: if you’ve made any friends locally (even a kind librarian or a church community), see if you can use their address for an important shipment.



**Supplies & Backup Plans:** Always carry more diabetes supplies than you think you need. Two is one and one is none – meaning have at least one backup for each critical item. Two meters (in case one dies or gives error), extra batteries for devices, backup infusion sets or insulin pens in case your pump fails. Stash a spare vial or insulin pen separate from your main supply (perhaps in a small cooler bag tucked in a secret spot in your van) in case the worst happens and your primary stash is lost or spoiled. The MontCo Community Health Center (1430 DeKalb St, Norristown, 610-278-7787) offers sliding-scale services – they might help with an emergency insulin script if you're in a bind and out of options. Keep their number in your phone.

**Blood Sugar Monitoring:** Power up your tech when you can. Charge your glucometer, CGM receiver, or insulin pump nightly if possible (a USB port in the van or an outlet at a café/library works). If you use a CGM that sends data to your phone, make sure your phone stays charged and your data plan is sufficient – many libraries offer free Wi-Fi if you need to sync or upload data. For CGMs with reusable transmitters, keep track of when it needs replacing or recharging. And toss a few old-school **glucose test strips** and a meter in your glove box as a fail-safe; technology can betray you at the worst times (like a true horror twist), so have analog backups.

**Emergency Plan:** Identify the nearest emergency room in whatever area you park each night – just in case of severe hypoglycemia, DKA, or any health crisis. Einstein Medical Center Montgomery (East Norriton) and Grand View Hospital (Sellersville, upper county) are two major ones in Montco. If you do end up in ER, social workers there can sometimes connect you with short-term resources for medications. Also, Montgomery County has an emergency crisis line (988 for mental health, or 911 for physical emergencies) – don't hesitate to use them if you feel things spiraling out of control. Better a scarecrow (false alarm) than a real scare with your health.

### **Sidebar – Post-Apocalyptic Pharmacy Short-List:**

(Ranked by a fellow road-warrior diabetic)

**1. CVS (1251 Sumneytown Pike, Lansdale)** – Long hours, helpful pharmacists, and doubles as a UPS pickup spot for packages. The staff have seen it all; they won't bat an eye if you roll in with your van-housed dog at 11 p.m. to grab insulin.

**2. Walgreens (890 W Main St, Lansdale)** – Possibly the friendliest techs in the county. They've been known to fast-track a refill if you explain you're living out of your vehicle and low on fuel (and energy). A true ally among the goblins.

**3. Rite Aid (1856 N Broad St, Lansdale)** – Quiet and no-frills. Rarely a line, which can be a lifesaver when you're in a hurry. Not open as late as CVS, but solid as a backup.



**Van First Aid & Illness:** Keep a basic first aid kit with bandages, antiseptic, pain relievers, etc. For diabetic specifics, have glucagon (if type 1) or fast-acting glucose sources stashed in multiple places. If you get sick (flu, stomach bug), remember illness can wreak havoc on blood sugar. Have sugar-free hydration (electrolyte tabs) and easy carbs (broth, crackers) on hand. Know the location of urgent care clinics – many CVS and Walgreens have MinuteClinics that can handle minor issues (not free, but accessible). And if your insulin supply ever gets compromised (lost, spoiled), use that MontCo Community Health or local ER as noted – your life > cost.

Staying healthy on the road is a bit like surviving a horror movie: stay alert, have your tools ready, and don't be afraid to seek help from a good-hearted stranger when you need a deus ex machina to step in.

## 6. Two Cunucus & the Budget Bowl

Your dogs are both your sidekicks and your alarm system. Keeping them fed, exercised, and comfortable in van life is paramount (happy dog, happy life). **Food comes first:** the budget-friendly kibble strategy. Rotate between quality-yet-affordable dog foods to keep costs down and nutrition up:



Brand (Flavor)	\$/lb	Bag Size	Why It's Great	Buy @
<b>4health</b> (Healthy Weight)	~\$1.20	35 lb	Joint support, no dyes; moderate calorie for less-active van days	Tractor Supply (Hatfield)
<b>Pure Balance</b> (Grain-Free Chicken)	~\$1.25	24 lb	No corn or soy, good protein source	Walmart (E. Norriton)
<b>Wegmans Simply</b> (Nature Chicken)	~\$1.14	28 lb	Local brand, decent meat meal content, budget-friendly	Wegmans (KOP)

Rotate these if you can, to give your pups variety and cover any nutritional gaps. Tractor Supply often has sales (and remember that pet wash station we mentioned – two birds, one stone on your visit). Keep kibble in an airtight container in the van to prevent a) staleness and b) rodent intruders sniffing around for a free meal.

If you hit hard times, **pet food banks** exist. “Pets of the Homeless” (see Almanac for hotline) can direct you to local pet food donation sites , and the MontCo SPCA sometimes has programs to help owners with pet supplies. Don't be too proud to ask – better a fed dog from charity than a hungry dog out of pride.

**Exercise & Canine Morale:** A cooped-up dog can turn into a little monster. Luckily, Montgomery County offers plenty of daily walk options:

- **Norristown Farm Park:** A favorite loop with lots of shade and sniff-worthy ground (deer scents galore). There's a water spigot near the pavilions – great for refilling the dog bowl and your jug.
- **Evansburg State Park:** Trails and a gentle stream (Skipack Creek) where your dogs can wade in and cool off. The running water here is usually clean enough for a quick doggy splash – just watch out for slippery rocks. *River Safety:* Always check for posted signs about water quality; avoid letting them drink or swim after heavy rain (runoff can bring

yucky stuff). No known monsters in the creek, aside from the occasional snapping turtle.

- **Power Line Trail (Hatfield to Horsham):** A long paved trail for those high-energy days. Not much shade, so best in morning/evening. No water sources on trail, so carry plenty. The upside: at dusk, the long shadows of those power line towers make you feel like you're journeying through a sci-fi landscape.
- **Lower Perkiomen Valley Park:** (Near Oaks) – A bonus mention for hot days. The Perkiomen Creek here has calm shallows along the shore where many let their dogs frolic. It's unofficially dog-friendly for water play. Your pups can splash like happy swamp creatures. Just rinse them off after and check for ticks. If the summer has been very hot, watch for algae blooms (the water can develop a green scum that's toxic – if you see it, skip the swim and hit a hose elsewhere).

A tired dog will snooze through the night, which is exactly what you need when stealth parking. It's hard to be sneaky with two bored Cunicus wrestling in the van at midnight!

**Pet Hygiene & Health:** We covered bathing in the hygiene section – use those resources to keep the wet-dog smell at bay. Also keep up with flea/tick prevention; nothing will turn your van into a house of horrors faster than a flea infestation (imagine being trapped in a tiny space with vampire bugs – no thanks). Use monthly preventative meds (Frontline, NexGard, etc.) and check your dogs (and yourself) for ticks after outdoorsy excursions, especially in wooded parks. Carry a pet first aid kit: include tweezers (for ticks or splinters), styptic powder (for nail cuts), and some vet wrap bandage. MontCo has emergency vet clinics (VEG in King of Prussia open 24/7) – know where they are and tuck away a bit of cash or a credit card for pet emergencies. The **MontCo SPCA (610-825-0111)** can advise or help with low-cost vet care options , and **Pets of the Homeless (775-841-7463)** may assist with vet bill grants if you qualify .

### **Sidebar – Emergency Pet Aid:**

- *Pets of the Homeless:* 24/7 hotline at **775-841-7463**. They provide free guidance and can even coordinate financial assistance for urgent pet care for homeless/formerly homeless folks . They've been known to step in like guardian angels (or perhaps friendly werewolves) when a pet is in dire need.
- *MontCo SPCA:* (610-825-0111) for lost pets, cruelty issues, or sometimes help with pet food/supplies if you ask. Their main shelter is in



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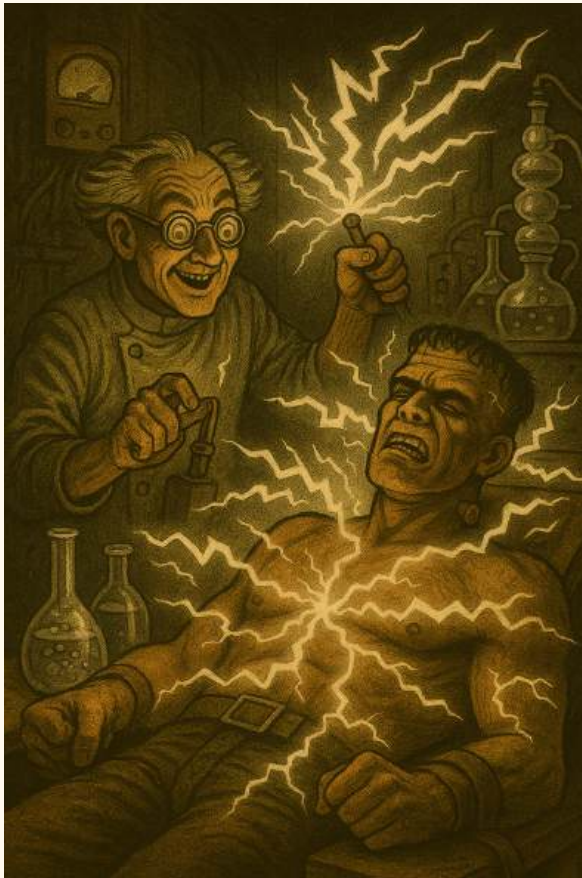
- *Local Vets:* Some vet offices have a free first exam for new clients (for example, VCA hospitals often do). You could rotate these if needed to get check-ups. Also, check if any vet schools (University of Penn in Philly) offer low-cost clinics.
- *Pet-Friendly Shelters:* If ever you had to go to a shelter or temporary housing, know that some places will let you bring pets or have fostering programs. Keep MontCo's "Your Way Home" number handy (listed in Almanac) – they can connect you to resources that won't force you to give up your dogs.

Finally, remember your dogs are adaptable. As long as they're with you, fed, and loved, they'll think vanlife is the greatest adventure ever – a never-ending car ride! Their joy can keep you grounded on the toughest days. After all, even in the bleakest horror stories, there's often a loyal hound by the hero's side, warding off the darkness with a wagging tail.



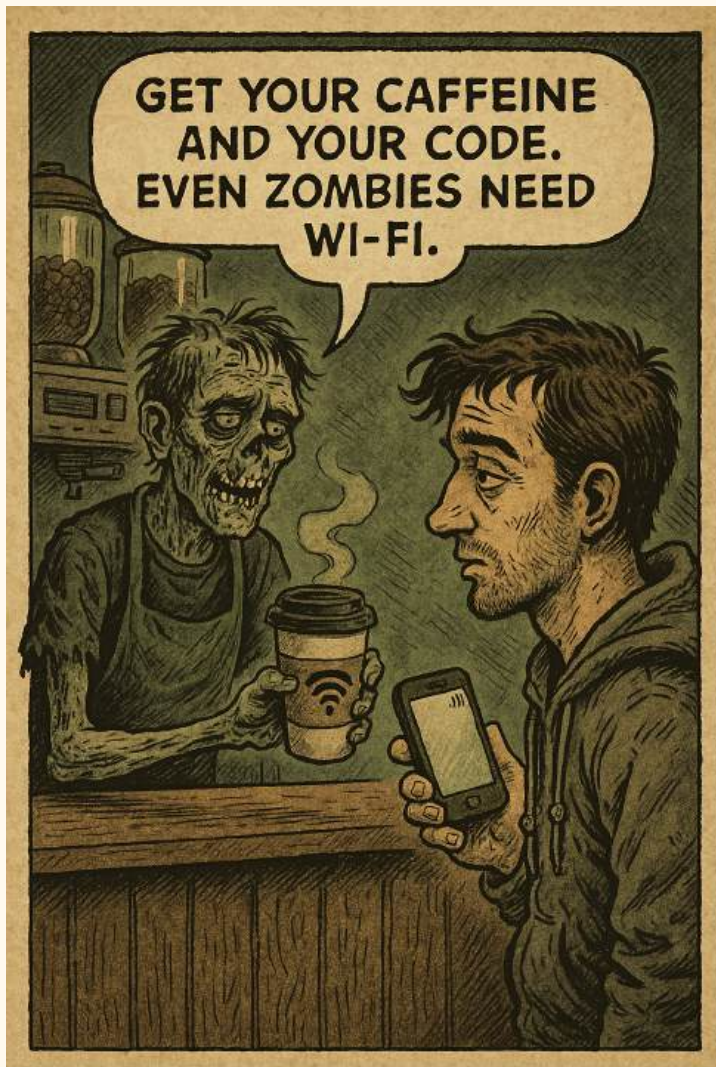
## 7. Utilities: Power · Wi-Fi · Water · Weather

Modern vans run on more than gasoline – you’ll juggle electrons, data, H<sub>2</sub>O, and Mother Nature’s moods. Here’s how to master the elements (muahaha):



**Power (Off-Grid Electricity):** For charging devices and keeping the juice flowing: a portable power station like a **Jackery 300** is worth its weight in gold. It can charge a laptop twice over , or keep a small fridge going for several hours. Refill it whenever you find an outlet. Good spots: library study cubicles (Lansdale Library has them, and welcomes quiet charging), Planet Fitness treadmills (yes, some PF locations have outlets on their machines for people to plug in phones – you can walk and charge), and friendly cafes. Also invest in a **NOCO GB40** or similar lithium jump starter – it doubles as backup power and can jump your van if the battery dies (a true nightmare at 3 a.m. in a Walmart lot). Some vanlifers rig solar panels on their roof, which in Montco’s mixed sun/cloud can supplement your charging (but winter yields are low). If solar isn’t feasible, no shame in the alternator game: when you drive, use a DC-DC charger or a simple 12V car outlet inverter to top up power banks. The key is to have layers of backup: cigarette-lighter USB chargers, power banks, and wall adapters – so you’re never in the dark. Keep an eye on the weather (see Weather below) and plan heavy charging for sunny days at parks or long drives.

**Wi-Fi & Connectivity:** Internet is the lifeblood of working nomads (and let's face it, binge-watching something in your van to fight loneliness). Montgomery County has several reliable free Wi-Fi spots. **Libraries** are top-tier – free, fast, and you can park outside after hours to snag a signal (just be discreet and use a sunshade so your laptop glow doesn't attract attention). Lansdale, Norristown, and Willow Grove libraries all have parking lots where a stealth surfer can blend in. **Panera Bread** is another haven – no login or purchase required, though it's polite to buy a coffee eventually. Their Wi-Fi tends to be solid and 24/7 (if you park nearby at night, you might still catch it). Indie coffee shops like **Common Grounds Espresso** in Norristown have Wi-Fi but usually need a password – buy a drip coffee and kindly ask the **barista (zombie or otherwise)** for the code. They'll oblige and maybe even give you refills if you become a regular. Many Starbucks in the area are open until 9–10 p.m. and have reachable parking lot signals too. One more tip: if you need truly unlimited data, consider a prepaid mobile hotspot plan (Visible, for instance, offers unlimited on Verizon's network for a flat rate – great for streaming those midnight monster movies).





**Water (Finding & Using):** Water, water everywhere, but where to fill up? Carry at least a 5-gallon jug (Reliance jugs are common) and refill it religiously . Prime spots:

- **Planet Fitness fountains:** Always there as a backup – it might take a while to fill a big jug and you may get odd looks, but it’s clean and free. Tip: Fill during off-peak gym hours (mid-day or late night) to avoid a crowd.
- **Public Parks:** Many county and state parks have seasonal spigots or fountains. For example, *Norristown Farm Park* has a water spigot by the picnic pavilion and another near the community garden. *Evansburg State Park* offices or campground areas often have an outdoor faucet (accessible during warmer months). *Green Lane Park* (up in the north of Montco) has campgrounds with water – if you’re there, you can fill a jug discreetly at a spigot (just be respectful if campers are around).
- **Manna on Main Street (Lansdale):** Not just a food pantry – they have an outdoor spigot that they don’t mind people using off-hours . They know their clientele might be living rough, so they’re kind about it.
- **Gas Stations & Car Washes:** Some have water taps (especially self-serve car washes – look for a hose bib). Always ask the attendant if you can use it – most won’t mind if you bought some gas or a snack. Wawa, for instance, often has an outdoor spigot near the air pump area for water/antifreeze – you can fill a bottle quickly, though a 5-gal jug might be pushing it without permission.
- **Streams and Creeks (for emergency only):** Montgomery County’s natural water sources (Schuylkill River, Perkiomen Creek, etc.) are *not reliably clean for drinking*. If you must use them, filter and boil the water. Invest in a good filter (Sawyer or Berkey) if you plan to go off-grid in the sticks. Otherwise, use creek water only for washing or flushing. The Schuylkill in particular can have runoff and even industrial pollutants. Treat all natural water as suspect unless you’ve purified it. Also note: in late summer, some creeks can develop harmful algae blooms (if you see bright green scum or the water smells foul, keep your dogs out and don’t use it).

**Safe Dishwashing & Bathing in Nature:** As mentioned in Hygiene, if you wash dishes at a park spigot, do it quickly and don't leave a mess. Parks are generally cool with people rinsing water bottles or even washing veggies at a spigot, but dishes with food residue are borderline – avoid drawing complaints by scraping plates and using a little Dr. Bronner's so it doesn't smell. For bathing yourself or a pet in a creek or lake, pick a spot away from picnic areas and boat launches. A *moving* water source like a creek is better than a stagnant pond (less bacteria) . Check for any posted signs – occasionally, after say a hurricane, the county posts warnings if water is contaminated. And an old camper tip: if you do take a dip in a river, do it upstream of where people might be fishing or playing, and obviously never use soap directly in the water. Use just water to rinse mud off, then do a soapy scrub on land 200 feet away with water you carried – leave no trace of your horror-show hygiene routine!

**Weatherproofing & Climate Control:** Montco weather can be as unpredictable as a werewolf's temper. Summers are humid and can bake a van; winters are cold and can turn it into an icebox. Preparation is key:

- **Heat (Summer):** Reflectix all windows each morning to bounce off the sun . A cheap emergency Mylar blanket glued to your roof interior helps insulate against radiant heat . For your dogs, get a raised mesh cot and a cooling gel pad – it keeps them off the hot floor and dissipates heat . Seek shade by day (park under trees or on the north side of a building). Keep a rechargeable fan running – even a small USB fan can make a difference circulating air. Have bug screens (DIY with mesh and magnets) so you can crack windows more at night without inviting a mosquito massacre. In extreme heat waves, daytime in the van is a no-go: treat your pets to an afternoon in a pet-friendly air-conditioned space (some pet stores or even malls allow leashed dogs briefly) or drop into a cinema or library for yourself. Always always have water accessible for you and pups.
- **Cold (Winter):** Insulation is your friend. That same Reflectix helps keep heat *in* at night. A four-season sleeping bag or heavy duvet will be your cocoon. Consider a safe portable heater for emergency warmth – e.g. a Mr. Heater Portable Buddy (propane) with a *carbon monoxide detector in the van*, and crack a window if you use it. Many vanlifers avoid propane heat when sleeping due to risk – instead, we pile blankets and use hot water bottles. Boil water (or get it very hot from a rest stop coffee machine), fill a Nalgene, wrap it in a sock, and tuck it with you – old trick but effective. For dogs, throw an old coat or blanket on them; they'll figure out how to burrito themselves. Keep your house battery warm (bring it into your sleeping area) because batteries hate the cold and will perform poorly if frozen. If it's going to be sub-freezing, prop open your cabinet with plumbing at night or use a tiny electric pipe heater tape on your water jug, to keep it from freezing solid. And always have a plan to **get to warmth** if a severe cold snap hits – whether that's



renting a cheap motel, staying with a friend, or at least parking near a 24/7 store and taking periodic warm-up breaks inside.

**Weather Alerts:** Sign up for ReadyMontco alerts or just use a weather app with notifications. Storms can roll in fast. When you hear thunder on the horizon, implement your **Storm Protocol:** Park at a spot with no trees overhead (the Hatfield Walmart is perfect – nothing tall around) . Parking in an open lot prevents tree limbs from turning your van roof into Swiss cheese during high winds. Turn your wheels into the curb (or towards a wall) and set the parking brake – strong winds have been known to nudge vehicles. If you have a roof vent, retract or close it to avoid rain blasting in . Keep your phone charged and a weather radio handy. In this area, severe thunderstorms and the rare tornado are the main threats – know your safe havens (large concrete buildings or highway rest stops). In winter, heavy snow could strand you – keep a snow brush and small shovel, and park facing out of a spot for easier escape.

**Utilities on the Cheap:** Remember you can tap into public resources for some “utilities”:

- **Charging Stations:** Some parks and trailheads have outlets (e.g. Evansburg State Park office exterior has one). Outdoor outlets at churches or pavilions can be a sneaky charge point (ask permission for regular use).
- **Propane Refills:** If you use small propane canisters (for a stove or heater), places like Tractor Supply or Ace Hardware in Montco do refills cheaper than exchanging at a gas station. Plan ahead so you’re not caught empty on a cold night.
- **Internet Data:** If you’re really data-poor, know that some places have truly free public Wi-Fi 24/7 – notably around the county courthouses and community centers. It might not be fast, but it’s enough to check email or send a message. Some buses and trains also have Wi-Fi; one van-lifer we know would ride a SEPTA train back and forth for an hour, charging devices and downloading shows, then get off where he started (for the price of a ticket, it was a mobile office!).

In short, harness every modern convenience available to you, and have backups for your backups. The grid might feel like a fickle friend when you live on the fringes – but with ingenuity, you’ll keep your devices humming, your water flowing, and your wheels rolling, come hell or high water (sometimes literally).

## 8. Paper Shields: Mail, Docs & Legal Survival

Living without a fixed address means you must become a bit of a ghost in the system – but even ghosts need to get their mail and pay their bills. Here’s how to manage your paperwork life when you’re a nomad:



**Mail Receiving Strategies:** Without an address, you have to get crafty so important documents and packages can still reach you:

- **UPS & FedEx Access Points:** As mentioned earlier, many CVS stores (like the one on W Main St in Lansdale) serve as UPS Access Points . You can have packages (Amazon, eBay, etc.) sent there by using the store’s address and your name. They’ll hold items for around 7 days. Likewise, Walgreens often act as FedEx pickup spots. The beauty is these are secure and indoors – no risk of porch theft. Just bring ID when picking up.

- **USPS General Delivery:** We covered this for meds, but it works for any mail. Use *General Delivery* at a convenient post office, and inform senders to ship via USPS. This is great for checks, DMV documents, etc. The post office in Norristown (or any large town) can hold your mail – you just walk to the counter and ask for General Delivery pick-up. Tip: Go during mid-morning; avoid end of day when lines are long.
- **Mail-Forwarding Services:** In the long-term, consider a mail-forwarding service like Traveling Mailbox or Escapees (popular with RV folks). They give you a stable address and will forward or scan your mail. Not free, but if you start getting a lot of official mail (bank stuff, legal notices), it may be worth it for peace of mind. Some even have an option for a Pennsylvania address which could help with vehicle registration or insurance paperwork requiring a “residence.”
- **Friends/Family:** If you’re fortunate to have someone in the area you trust, you can ask to use their address temporarily. Even just for certain critical things (say you renew your driver’s license – using a friend’s address to receive the new ID). Just be mindful not to burden them; pick up your mail promptly and maybe offer a token of thanks (like a gift card or a favor) for their help.

**Document Safety:** Keep digital backups of all vital documents. Scan or photograph your driver’s license, vehicle title, insurance, medical prescriptions, pet vaccination records – everything – and upload to a secure cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.) with offline access . Also, keep an encrypted USB drive hidden in the van with these scans as a second backup. Losing your wallet or a single piece of paper shouldn’t mean you lose your identity. A little prep will turn potential horror into a mere inconvenience.

### **Legal Life (Staying Street-Legal):**

- **Registration & License:** Ensure your vehicle registration address is up to date – P.O. boxes aren’t allowed, but if you had a prior address you can still use (like a family member’s), it might be easiest to keep using that for DMV purposes until you truly have nowhere to tie yourself to. Pennsylvania law requires an address change 15 days after moving, but practically, many van-dwellers maintain a “domicile address” on paper. If you can’t, consult a legal aid about using a shelter or church address (some might allow it).
- **Insurance:** Don’t let it lapse. If money’s tight, shop around; even a basic liability plan keeps you legal. Some insurers may not like the idea of you living in the van (risk factor), so perhaps don’t volunteer that information. You’re “traveling a lot for work” – which is true, since life is work! Also, renter’s insurance can sometimes cover personal belongings in

a vehicle – a hack if you worry about theft (check policy details).

- **Moving Violations & Tickets:** Stay on top of your driver status. If a random parking ticket blows off your windshield, you might not know you owe money until a fine or suspension notice arrives (to that address you're not at!). Check PennDOT's online system periodically for any fines or holds. Consider using a service like USPS Informed Delivery, which emails you scans of incoming mail – it can tip you off to anything from a toll violation notice to a jury duty summons.
- **Voter Registration & Civic Duties:** Pennsylvania lets you register to vote with a “non-traditional residence” – you can literally draw a map of where you typically stay. If civic participation matters to you, look into this; Montgomery County voter services can guide you. Jury duty might be a tricky one if summoned – but if you have that mail forwarding or friend's address, you'll at least know if you're called.

**Financial Survival & Repossession Prevention:** Perhaps the scariest specter in van life is the repo man. Your vehicle is your lifeline; losing it could be catastrophic. Here's how to keep the *Grim Reaper of Repossession* at bay:

- **Stay in Communication with Lender:** If you have an auto loan, the moment you know you can't make a payment, call your lender. Most banks and credit unions have hardship programs. For instance, **PFCU (Philadelphia Federal Credit Union)** allows one to request a loan deferment via secure message or phone . Explain your situation – job loss, medical issues, whatever the case – and request a hardship deferment or payment plan. Many will grant a one-time skip or work something out if you talk to them. Ghosting your lender is the worst move; it makes them far more likely to send the vampires (repo agents) after you.
- **Hardship Letter:** It helps to follow up any call with a written hardship letter (or email). We've included a template in the Appendix for guidance. In short, state the reason you fell behind (briefly and truthfully), state your willingness to pay and a proposed plan, and mention any steps you're taking to improve your situation. Be polite, and if possible, include some documentation (e.g. proof of job applications, unemployment filing, etc.). This creates a paper trail that you are trying in good faith – could be useful if things ever went to court or for appealing to the lender's humanity (yes, they have some).
- **Repo Drill:** If despite your best efforts, you suspect repossession is imminent (payments are way behind, lender has been calling, etc.), enact the **72-hour repo drill:** Remove all critical items from your van and *store them elsewhere*. That means medications, important

papers, irreplaceable personal items – get them into a backpack and keep it with you. Many van-lifers have sadly woken up to their home on a tow truck and lost not just the vehicle but everything inside, which may be trashed by the repo company. Don't let the repo vampire walk off with your insulin, your laptop, or your dog's ashes – whatever you treasure. Lenders are *supposed* to inventory and keep personal belongings for you to claim, but mistakes and “losses” happen frequently. It's safest to assume you won't get anything back easily.

- **After Repossession:** If the van does get taken, contact the lender's recovery department **within 24 hours**. They'll tell you how to get your personal items (usually you have to go to the impound lot). In PA, you typically have a short window to pay the balance or negotiate a reinstatement. If you can rally money (maybe family, a quick personal loan, or credit card advance) to get the van back, do it sooner rather than later – storage fees rack up daily. If you can't, at least retrieve your stuff and your plates. Then, sad to say, you might be looking at shelters or alternative living until you get back on your feet (use the Almanac resources for housing and financial aid in that case).
- **Financial Assistance Hotlines:** When things go south, know who to call. Montgomery County's Community Action Development Commission (CADCOC) at **610-277-6363** offers caseworkers who can connect you to emergency aid programs (they have small hardship grants, and they do free financial counseling) . Pennsylvania 211 is a general helpline that can refer you to local resources for rent, utilities, and sometimes car repair or payment assistance . The Salvation Army of Norristown (**610-275-4183**) sometimes provides gas cards or other support to homeless individuals . For longer-term credit/debt issues, **Clarifi** (a credit counseling service in Philly) at **215-563-5665** can help negotiate with creditors or make a plan .
- **Legal Help:** If you face legal troubles – be it traffic court, debt collection, or if a cop gives you hassle for parking – remember that **LASP (Legal Aid of Southeastern PA)** in Norristown has a branch (877-429-5994) . They provide free legal advice to low-income folks on civil matters. They've seen it all, and they might help you handle a ticket or understand your rights if you ever feel they were violated. Keep their number; hopefully you'll never need it.



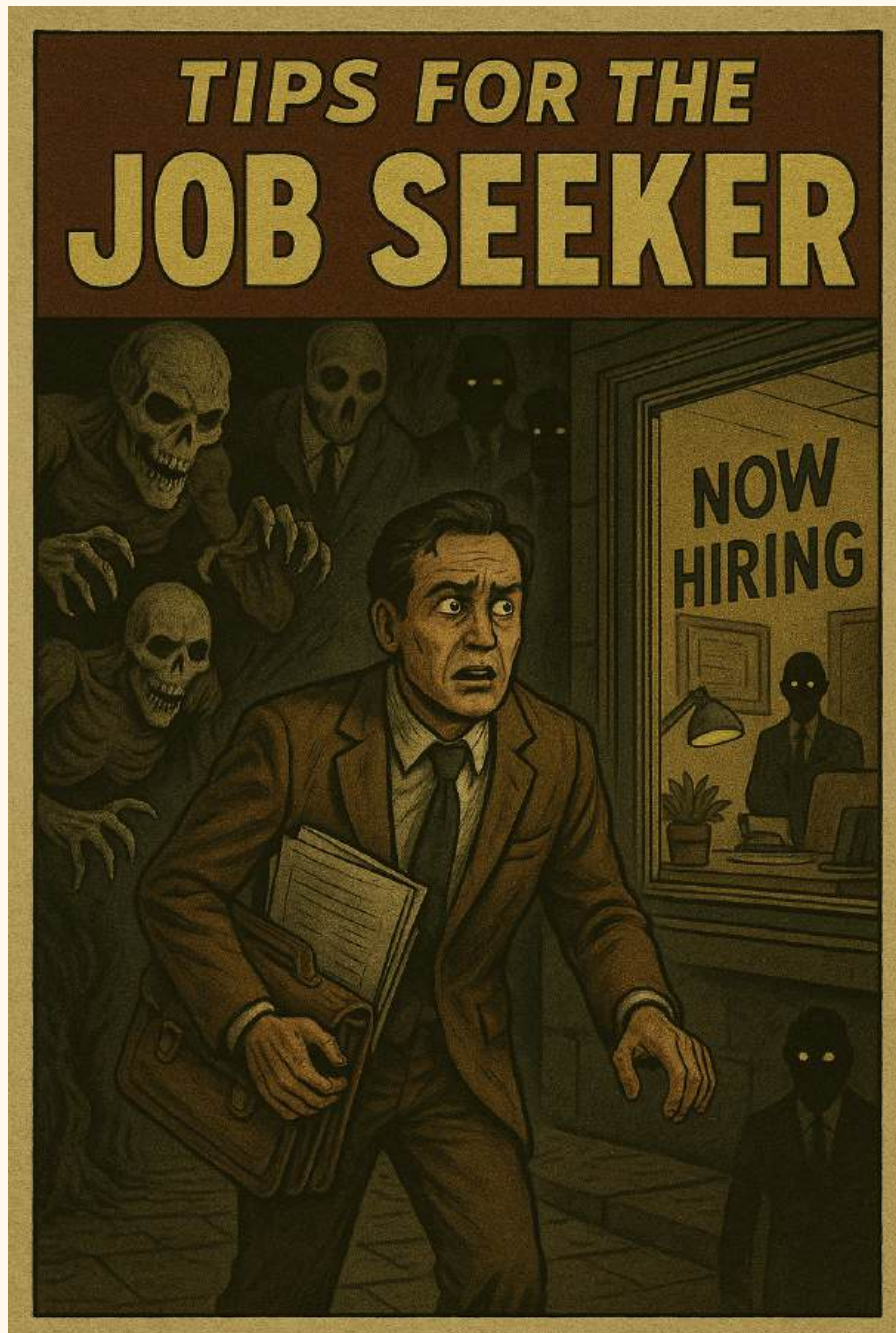
**Self-Defense (Paperwork Edition):** Consider an “in case of emergency” folder somewhere accessible. Keep a copy of your vehicle registration, insurance, and maybe a note explaining your medical needs (if diabetic) and emergency contacts. If you ever are found in some situation (say a medical emergency where you can’t speak), that folder could speak for you.

In summary, paper shields are the unsexy, invisible part of van survival. But they can spell the difference between a mere plot twist and a tragic ending. So shield up: handle your mail, safeguard your docs, and keep the bureaucratic beasts at bay.



## 9. TAKE MY JOB – A Horror-Comic Guide to 2025 Hiring

The job market in 2025 can feel like a macabre carnival – full of tricks, illusions, and the occasional treat. But you're not just a spectator; you're in the freak show, trying to sell your skills while living out of a van. The good news: remote work is more common than ever (thanks, 2020s!). The challenge: standing out in a sea of applicants and maintaining professionalism when your interview might be from a front seat. Here's your guide to scaring up employment:



**Real Job Boards Only:** Focus your energy on legitimate job boards that cater to quality positions, especially remote work. Skip the sketchy sites and endless scrolling. Top picks in 2025 include **Remotive, Otta, BuiltIn, Write the Docs, Idealist, and EdTech boards**. Set up 5 solid email alerts or saved searches – and then stop the obsessive refreshing. These boards aggregate good opportunities; let them work for you. Scammers and multi-level-marketing schemes are the real horror villains – don’t invite them in by spraying your resume everywhere. Stake your heart (and time) on quality leads only.

**30-Minute Daily Sprint (Job Edition):** Consistency beats binge-applying. Every day, spend a focused 30 minutes on job hunting, structured as follows :

1. **Two Tailored Applications:** Quality over quantity. Pick two jobs that truly fit your skills and craft a custom resume/cover letter for each. This means tweaking your keywords to mirror the job description and writing a fresh paragraph in the cover letter about why you love that company. Employers can smell a generic application like a zombie smells brains – and they’ll toss it. Don’t be generic; be specific and sincere for those two apps.
2. **One Cold Outreach:** Identify a company or organization you’d love to work for, even if they have no postings, and send a brief cold email (or LinkedIn message) to someone in the department. Formula: “Hi, I see you do X. I love X and even took the liberty of fixing a small thing in your publicly shared project. If that’s useful, I’d love to chat about contributing more.” Essentially: “Saw your docs; fixed a sample. If useful, let’s chat.” . This bold approach can sometimes open doors that weren’t even there.
3. **Update Your Tracker:** Maintain a simple spreadsheet of applications (job, date, status, any notes). Update it daily – this helps you see patterns and ensures no opportunity falls through the cracks. Plus, when an employer calls you out of the blue, you don’t respond like a confused ghoul; you’ll know exactly which role it is.

**Resume & Portfolio as Artifacts:** Your resume is your avatar in the land of the employed. Keep it concise (1 page if possible) and make sure it highlights remote-work skills (self-motivation, communication tools proficiency, etc.). Consider adding a link to an online portfolio or GitHub if relevant – something to prove your skills in action. In the Appendix, we’ve included a sample “Road-Warrior Resume” template to help. Importantly, don’t shy away from your unique situation if it has advantages. Living in a van and managing a complex life can be spun as “excellent problem-solving and adaptability.” Maybe don’t lead with “I live in a van down by the river,” but demonstrating resilience is a plus.

**Ace the (Virtual) Interview:** Given your living situation, virtual interviews are a boon – no one needs to know you’re parked behind a Wegmans during the Zoom call. Some tips:

- Find a quiet spot with a non-distracting background. If you can’t get to a library private room, then at least sit in the back of your van with a blank wall or curtain behind you. Use a virtual background if needed (just test it – glitchy backgrounds can be more distracting).
- Use your phone as a hotspot or ensure you’re in a place with rock-solid Wi-Fi (coffee shop Wi-Fi can be iffy for video; consider a friend’s house or a coworking space day-pass for important interviews).
- Dress one notch above what you think the company expects. This helps you get in character, even if you feel silly putting on a blazer in your van. It psychologically boosts confidence and shows them you care.
- **Have notes ready:** One advantage of phone/Zoom interviews is you can glance at notes. Write down key points about the company, questions to ask them, and bullet reminders of your relevant stories/achievements.
- **Address the elephant if needed:** If there’s a gap in employment or an odd piece of your resume, be ready to spin it positively. E.g., “I took time to upskill in XYZ while also managing a complex relocation,” (hey, relocating to a van is complex!). No need to mention the van unless relevant; focus on what you learned in that time.

**Network like Dr. Frankenstein:** In the digital age, networking is less about cocktail parties and more about online communities. Join relevant forums or Slack groups (TechPhilly, RemoteWork subreddit, etc.) and be helpful there. Share knowledge or resources – when people see you as a contributor, they’re more likely to tip you off to jobs. And don’t forget your past colleagues or bosses: drop them a line, let them know you’re looking. Sometimes the scariest step is asking for help, but those connections could resurrect your career faster than you think.

**Side Gigs & Stopgaps:** While hunting the big prize (a stable job), consider gig work to stay afloat. Driving for Uber/Lyft can be tricky if your car is also your home (wear and tear, and you might need to keep it extra clean). But delivery apps (UberEats, DoorDash) give you quick cash and no one sits in your passenger seat. Montgomery County has plenty of hungry suburbanites ordering food. Just watch your fuel costs. Also consider seasonal or temp work: retail around holidays, temp agencies for office gigs. Even a short warehouse stint might bridge a gap. These aren’t long-term



solutions, but they can keep the coffers from going bone-dry and show future employers you're responsible enough to do what it takes.

**Mindset – Don't Become the Blob:** Job hunting can ooze and consume all your energy if you let it. Set boundaries (hence the 30-min sprint). Rejection is normal and not personal – think of yourself as the hero wandering through a spooky forest: there will be lots of “No Trespassing” signs (rejections) but you only need to find one secret passage (job offer) to change the story. Keep learning in the meantime. There are tons of free courses and certs (Google, LinkedIn Learning through many libraries, etc.) – pick up a new skill if it aligns with your goals, especially if it's something to fill a known gap in your resume. It shows initiative and keeps your brain sharp.

In this horror-comic job saga, you face a two-headed beast: one head is Job Insecurity, the other Life Instability. Tackle both heads step by step, and remember, every monster has a weakness. For the job market beast, it's persistence and creativity. You're not just another zombie applicant; you're the resourceful, road-tested protagonist who can handle challenges most can't fathom. Play that up, keep pushing forward, and soon enough you'll hear those magical words: “You're hired” – the happy ending to this particular tale (or perhaps the start of a new chapter).

## 10. 72-Hour Contingency Drill

Sometimes life goes *full* Twilight Zone – a cascade of bad luck or a sudden emergency can leave you reeling. That's when you execute the 72-hour contingency drill: a three-day action plan to stabilize your situation. Think of it as the emergency protocol when things hit the fan (figuratively... hopefully not literally from your composting toilet).

### Day 1: Secure Base & Essentials

- **Dawn:** If you've been kicked from a parking spot or had a scare (police telling you “move along,” etc.), first secure a safe parking spot for at least the next 24 hours. Planet Fitness or a 24-hour grocery store lot is ideal for night fallback. Pay for a day at a campground if you have to – knowing where you'll sleep is priority #1.
- **Morning:** Charge all your devices to full (cooler, phone, battery pack) – you might need communication and maybe to keep insulin cool during the turmoil. Hit Planet Fitness or a friendly outlet (treadmill, library when it opens) to juice up. Fill your water jugs completely. Basically, pretend a storm is coming (even if it's a metaphorical one) and top off all utilities: power, water, fuel (get gas in the tank).
- **Afternoon:** Restock food cheaply. Go to Manna on Main Street's pantry or any local food bank on their open day (keep a list of pantry days/times in Montco). If it's not open,

Walmart canned goods aisle – get enough non-perishables for 3+ days. Don't forget dog food if you have dogs; MontCo SPCA can assist in an emergency with pet food, or some pantries carry pet items.

- **Evening:** Review money on hand. If crisis is financial (job loss, etc.), apply for what you can immediately – e.g. unemployment online, SNAP (food stamps) via the Compass website or Hunger Coalition offices. These won't kick in within 72 hours but starting the clock matters. Also, send out a distress call to any personal support: a trusted friend or family member – not necessarily asking for money, but letting someone know you're going through a hard time can rally emotional support and sometimes unexpected help. Park at Planet Fitness for the night, take a hot shower, and breathe. You survived Day 1.

## Day 2: Triage the Problems

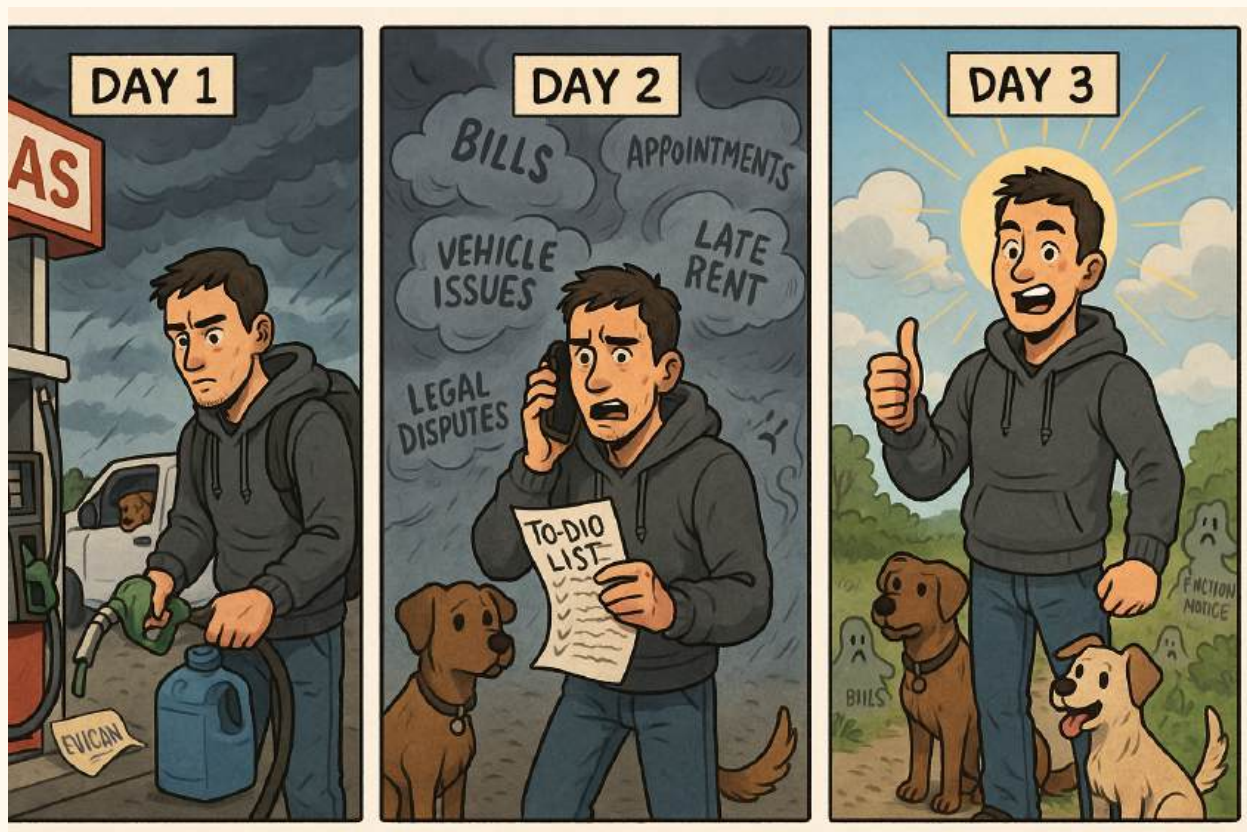
- **Morning:** Make a list of the critical issues. Categorize: Financial, Health, Vehicle, Legal, etc. Address each systematically. For example, Financial: if zero income now, prioritize applying to aid or side gigs. Vehicle: if it broke down, call local charities or churches; some have programs for emergency car repairs (they exist – ask 211 or Your Way Home). Health: call MontCo Community Health Center for an appointment if you're unwell or out of meds. Legal: call LASP if you got an eviction or ticket. Breaking it into categories keeps the Hydra from feeling overwhelming.
- **Midday:** Utilize resources: hit the Manna free lunch or dinner if they have it, or Keystone Opportunity Center if you're near Souderton for aid. If you have pets and are struggling, call Pets of the Homeless hotline and see if they can assist with vet care or food (they can often pledge payment to a vet if your dog is injured). Make at least one call or email per problem category – the point is to initiate contact with helpers.
- **Afternoon:** Check in with the employment front. If you lost your job, that's a big one: update your resume (maybe at the library computer), and consider that cold email approach now. Sometimes "I'm immediately available" can land you quick contract work. Also scour those gig options (Amazon Flex, food delivery sign-ups) and get onboarded. This can bring cash within a week or two.
- **Evening:** By now, you've thrown some bottles into the ocean (figuratively) – day 2 is about reaching out. Treat yourself to something comforting but cheap: maybe that \$1 Wawa coffee or a library DVD for the night. You've earned a mental break. Park somewhere safe (rotate if need: maybe Walmart tonight if PF last night, just keep low profile). Journal or

note what you achieved today – you likely did more than you think.

### Day 3: Execute Solutions & Secure the Future

- **Morning:** Follow-up time. Call back any messages left for you. If you emailed a hardship letter to your lender on Day 1, call to confirm they received it and ask for next steps. If 211 or agencies gave you referrals, call them first thing (these places get busy – early is better). Check the status of that unemployment claim or any quick-turnaround help (like Emergency rent/utility programs – even though you live in a van, if you have a storage unit or phone bill, some programs might help cover those to free up cash).
- **Midday:** Send out at least 3 job applications (if job loss was the issue) or hustle on the gig work you lined up (do a few deliveries to test the waters). If your van needs immediate repair to run, and you have a little money or a credit card: Day 3 might be when you bite the bullet and go to a mechanic. Some will allow you to do a post-dated payment or split payment if you explain – it's a long shot, but worth asking. Also, consider pawning/selling any non-essentials of value today – short-term cash infusion to get you over the hump. Guitar you never play? Old electronics? Montco has pawn shops and Facebook Marketplace – list it, meet in a public place. Cash is king in emergencies.
- **Afternoon:** Health and mind check. Day 3, things might be feeling slightly more under control or at least clearer. If you're running on adrenaline, take an hour to rest. Nap in a shaded park spot with windows cracked. The problems won't vanish, but you need to keep your strength and wits. If you have one, call a mentor or someone whose judgment you trust and do a quick recap of your plan – outside perspective can offer an idea you missed.
- **Evening:** By now you should have some arrangements in motion: maybe a promise of a loan deferment, an interview scheduled, a place to park for a couple nights (perhaps a coworker or friend said you can use their driveway), etc. Solidify anything that's tentative. Write down any deadlines (e.g. "Documents due to welfare office by X date" or "Second interview on Friday at 2pm"). Create calendar reminders. Basically, you're closing out the immediate crisis management and setting yourself up to transition back to regular day-by-day mode. End Day 3 with a little self-care: maybe splurge on a planet fitness hydro-massage or a drive to a scenic overlook (Montco's not big on mountains, but even a quiet lot overlooking the Schuylkill River can be peaceful). You stared into the abyss this week and didn't blink – that's worth acknowledging.

**Remember:** This 72-hour drill is scalable. Not every crisis will be full-blown – sometimes you can compress this into a 24-hour blitz of problem-solving. Other times, multiple 72-hour cycles are needed. The point is to have a structured response rather than panicking. The vanlife might sometimes feel like you’re one step away from chaos, but having a checklist and timeline turns chaos into just a series of tasks. And tasks, you can handle. You’ve got your trusty manual (this book!), a network of helpers, and that scrappy survivor spirit. When things go bump in the night (literally or metaphorically), you’ll activate your plan and get through it, one day at a time.





## 11. Almanac of Resources (Quick Dial)

When you need help fast, here's a handy one-page almanac of key Montgomery County (PA) resources and contacts. Think of this as your survival cheat-sheet – tear it out (or screenshot it) and keep it at the ready:

Need	Organization/Resource	Contact Info / Details
<b>Emergency Shelter</b>	<i>Your Way Home</i> – Montco Homeless Intake	610-278-3522 (Call Center, 24/7)
<b>Food (Free)</b>	<i>Manna on Main Street</i> (Lansdale)	215-855-5454 – Food pantry & free meals
<b>Food (Free/Alt)</b>	<i>Keystone Opportunity Center</i> (Souderton)	215-723-5430 – Pantry, Mon–Thu 9am–2pm
<b>Dog/Pet Food</b>	<i>MontCo SPCA</i> (Conshohocken)	610-825-0111 – Pet food bank & vet referrals
<b>Pet Vet Care</b>	<i>Pets of the Homeless</i> (Nat'l hotline)	775-841-7463 – Vet care grants & pet food
<b>Showers &amp; Gym</b>	<i>Planet Fitness</i> (multiple locations)	\$25/mo Black Card – Unlimited gyms/showers
<b>Showers (alt)</b>	<i>Ambler YMCA</i> (guest pass)	\$12/day guest – Showers, gym, pool
<b>Laundry</b>	<i>SpinZone Laundromat</i> (Lansdale)	24/7 self-serve – (Tue/Wed discount days)

<b>Mail Pick-up</b>	<i>USPS General Delivery</i>	Use nearest P.O. (See Section 8 for format)
<b>Packages</b>	<i>UPS Access Point (CVS) / FedEx (Walgreens)</i>	Provide ID within 7 days of delivery
<b>Prescription Rx</b>	<i>Montgomery County Community Health Center (Norristown)</i>	610-278-7787 – Sliding-scale clinic
<b>Pharmacy (24h)</b>	<i>CVS Lansdale (1251 Sumneytown Pk)</i>	215-362-2240 – 24/7 pharmacy, UPS Access Pt.
<b>Mental Health</b>	<i>Suicide &amp; Crisis Lifeline</i>	988 (Call or Text 24/7, nationwide)
<b>Legal Aid</b>	<i>LASP – Legal Aid Southeast PA (Norristown)</i>	877-429-5994 – Free legal help (civil cases)
<b>Financial Help</b>	<i>CADCOM (Comm. Action) (Norristown)</i>	610-277-6363 – Emergency grants, counseling
<b>Gas Vouchers</b>	<i>Salvation Army (Norristown)</i>	610-275-4183 – May assist with gas or other needs
<b>Employment</b>	<i>PA CareerLink Montco (Norristown)</i>	610-270-3429 – Job finding & training help
<b>Free Phone</b>	<i>Assurance Wireless (Lifeline)</i>	1-888-321-5880 – Free gov't phone & service
<b>Vehicle Trouble</b>	<i>Free Roadside Assistance (limit) – State Farm, AAA, etc.</i>	Check if your insurance or bank offers free towing/assist (many do for customers).

<b>DV / Crime Victim</b>	<i>Laurel House (Domestic Violence) / Victim Services Center</i>	800-642-3150 (DV 24/7); 888-521-0983 (sexual assault) – Confidential help.
<b>General Helpline</b>	<i>PA 2-1-1 Southeast</i>	211 (24/7) – Referrals for any human service need

Keep this list updated with your own notes (e.g., a particularly kind librarian’s name, or the hours of your favorite pantry). Sometimes just scanning through these contacts can remind you that you’re not alone – a whole network is out there, ready to help you fight whatever monsters (figurative or literal) you’re up against.

**Keep This Manual Within Reach:** Slip it behind the driver’s seat; sync the PDF to your phone. Share pages with the next traveler you meet at dawn in the Walmart parking lot. And if tonight’s parking lot feels cold and lonely, remember: you’re not alone – you’re just in motion, part of a community of road-warriors writing their own survival stories. Safe travels, friend, and welcome to the journey.

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## 12. Appendix – Résumé & Templates

### A. “Road-Warrior” Résumé Template

*(A stylized template for a van-dweller’s resume that balances professionalism with the resourcefulness your lifestyle demonstrates.)*

**Name:** YOUR NAME

**Phone:** (XXX) XXX-XXXX

**Email:** youremail@example.com

**Address:** Nomadic – Based in Montgomery County, PA (Valid PA Driver’s License)

#### **Professional Summary:**

Resourceful and adaptable [Your Profession] with X years of experience in [Your key areas]. Proven ability to work independently and remotely, managing projects and deadlines from unconventional environments. Combines creative problem-solving (honed by life on the road) with strong [industry] skills. Seeking a role with a forward-thinking company that values initiative, resilience, and results.

#### **Skills:**

- **Remote Work Savvy:** Proficient in Zoom, Slack, Google Workspace; able to self-manage time and tasks effectively.
- **Technical Skills:** [List relevant to your field – e.g., Programming (Python, JavaScript), Graphic Design (Adobe CC), Writing & Editing, etc.]
- **Adaptability & Problem-Solving:** Quick to troubleshoot unexpected challenges (from IT issues to logistics) – no stranger to thinking on my feet.
- **Communication:** Strong written and verbal communication (e.g., authored a personal blog with 5k monthly readers, “Tales from the Van”).
- **Project Management:** Experience leading [teams/projects]; comfortable with Agile methodologies and tools like Trello/Jira.



## Experience:

**Job Title** – Company Name (City, State or Remote)

Month Year – Month Year

- **Key Achievement/Project:** Led a [size]-person team to deliver [project/outcome]. Achieved XYZ (quantify results: “increased X by 20%,” “completed project 2 weeks early,” etc.).
- Implemented [specific task]. Utilized [skills or tools] to [do something beneficial].
- Collaborated with [departments/clients] across multiple locations, demonstrating effective remote coordination and communication.

**Job Title** – Company Name (City, State or Remote)

Month Year – Month Year

- **Key Achievement:** [Your proud accomplishment here].
- Responsibilities included A, B, C – with emphasis on [something that shows reliability, like “consistently met deadlines” or “maintained 99% client satisfaction”].
- Innovated a solution for [challenge] – e.g., created a new workflow that saved X hours weekly.

*(Repeat above structure for additional work experience; focus on relevant roles and any freelance/gig work that showcases your skills. If you had to include a gap, you might list something like “Independent Projects – Various (201X-201Y)” and bullet what you learned or did during that time.)*

## Education/Certifications:

- **Degree,** School – Year. (If no formal degree, list any relevant courses or certifications: e.g., “Google UX Design Certificate, 2022”).
- Any relevant certifications (e.g., “AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner, 2023”).

**Additional:**

- **Volunteer Work:** (Optional) e.g., “Tech Mentor at CodeClub (2024) – coached 5 students weekly on basic web development.” Shows community engagement and leadership.
- **Publications/Portfolio:** (Optional) Provide a link, e.g., “Portfolio: [www.yourportfolio.com](http://www.yourportfolio.com)” or “GitHub: [github.com/yourusername](https://github.com/yourusername)” if applicable.
- **Interests:** (Optional and keep brief) Can list a couple, even something personality-driving like “Travel writing, Van conversion DIY, Rescue dog training” – humanizes you and might be conversation starters.

*References available upon request.*

**Resume Tips:** Keep it to one page if possible. Tailor this template by adjusting tone – you know your industry best. For a conservative field, maybe tone down the “Tales from the Van” type language; for a creative or tech field, a hint of your unique journey can make you memorable. Always double-check formatting and typos. Save and send as PDF (not MS Word) to preserve layout.

**B. Hardship Letter Template (Loan/Financial Assistance)**

*(Use this template to craft a hardship letter to your auto loan lender, or any creditor, when you need to request leniency such as a payment plan, deferment, or other assistance. Customize the parts in [brackets] with your info.)*

**Date:** [Month Day, Year]

**From:**

[Your Name]

[Your Account Number (if applicable)]

[Mailing Address (if you have one or use a reliable friend's/PO Box)]

[City, State, ZIP]

**To:**

[Name of Lender or Company]

[Attn: Hardship Department]

[Address of Lender]

[City, State, ZIP]

**Subject:** Hardship Assistance Request for [Account #XXXX or Loan #XXXX]

Dear [Lender Name] Hardship Department,

I am writing to formally request assistance with my [auto loan/personal loan/credit card account] due to an unexpected financial hardship. I have been a reliable customer since [Year you started], and until recently, I have made all payments on time.

**Nature of Hardship:**

In [Month Year], I experienced [a job loss / a significant reduction in income / a medical emergency]. Specifically, [provide a brief but specific explanation: e.g., “My position at XYZ Company was eliminated due to budget cuts,” or “I had an accident that required surgery, limiting my ability to work for two months.”]. This situation has severely impacted my finances. My current income is approximately \$[XX] per [week/month], which has made it impossible to meet my regular payment of \$[loan payment amount].

**Steps Taken:**

I am actively working to improve my situation. [If job loss: “I have applied to numerous positions and have interviews lined up.” If medical: “I am recovering and expect to return to work by [date].” If general: “I have cut all non-essential expenses and am seeking additional gig work to boost my income.”]. I fully intend to repay what I owe and restore my account to good standing.

**Request:**

I respectfully request one of the following options to help me through this period:

- A deferral of payments for the next [2 months/3 months] with those payments added to the end of the loan term.

- A temporary reduction of my monthly payment to \$[affordable amount] for [3-6 months] without marking my account as delinquent.
- Alternatively, a loan modification or extension that could lower my payments.

Any relief you can provide will significantly increase the likelihood that I can avoid default and continue as a paying customer.

**Supporting Documentation:**

I have included [unemployment letter/medical bills/relevant documentation] that verifies my circumstances. (Attach copies of proof if available, e.g., termination letter, medical bills, etc.)

I deeply appreciate your consideration of this request. I value my relationship with [Lender Name] and am committed to resuming normal payments as soon as I am able. I would be grateful for a prompt response to discuss potential solutions. You can reach me at [phone number] or [email].

Thank you for your time and understanding.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Account Number]

[Your Contact Info: phone and email]

*(End of letter template)*

**Hardship Letter Tips:** Keep the tone polite and appreciative. Stick to facts about why you can't pay and what you're asking for – this isn't the time for an overly emotional story, but do convey the seriousness. Including proof of hardship increases credibility. Always follow up a few days after sending if you get no response. Document every communication (dates, names of reps spoken to, etc.). This letter not only appeals to the human side of the lender, it also becomes part of your file – often the first step before they'll grant any modification.

## C. Sample Cold-Email (Job Inquiry)

*(Reference Section 9 – use this when reaching out to a company for whom you’d like to work, even if they haven’t advertised openings. Adjust to fit your style.)*

**Subject:** Quick Question – [Your Skill] help for [Company Name]’s [Project/Area]

Hello [Name of person, or “Team” if not sure],

I hope you don’t mind the outreach – I’m a [your profession] who’s been following [Company Name]’s work on [mention something specific, e.g. “your open-source XYZ tool” or “your recent product launch”]. I’m really impressed by [something they do; be genuine].

I took a look at [their documentation/code/blog] and noticed [mention a small issue or potential improvement – e.g., “the API docs have a few typos in section 2” or “an opportunity to improve SEO on your blog posts”]. As a [your skillset, e.g. “technical writer/developer/designer”], I went ahead and [fixed it / drafted a sample revision]. Please find it attached – free for you to use.

If you find it useful, I’d love to chat for 15 minutes about how I could contribute to [Company Name]’s mission on a larger scale. I’m currently [briefly mention your status, e.g. “looking for my next project”]. Given my experience in [relevant experience] and my passion for what you’re doing, I believe I could add value to your team.

Either way, thanks for the inspiring work you all do – it keeps folks like me motivated.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your title or tagline, e.g. “Full-Stack Developer & Tech Enthusiast”]

[LinkedIn or portfolio link]

[Phone]

*(End of email template)*

This approach highlights initiative and provides value upfront. It’s unconventional – but as someone living an unconventional life, you’re all about breaking the mold! Just be prepared: if they respond, make sure you can actually deliver on what you’re pitching. It’s a foot in the door, and sometimes that’s all you need.



*The End – or rather, To Be Continued...*



Every van dweller's story is a work in progress. Use these tools, templates, and tips as you write your own chapters. When in doubt, remember: you have an army of fellow nomads and kind strangers (and a few friendly fiends) out there ready to help. Stay safe, stay resourceful, and keep on rolling.

**Good luck, and happy haunting on the highways!**