

Strange bedfellows



Couch-surfer Jeff Horning is making himself comfortable at the pad of filmmaker Morgan J. Freeman. N.Y. Post: David Rentas

Couch surf's up, dude!

By ANDREA MEYER

THERE I was at my apartment door, dripping wet from the shower and wearing only a towel.

"Put on some clothes, Miss," the man told me. "You're being evicted."

So the next few months found me couch-surfing, crashing wherever I could find a free bed: first at my next-door neighbor's place; then, in short succession, at a girlfriend's apartment in Williamsburg; house-sitting for friends in Little Italy; on a friend's couch in the Village; cat-sitting for another friend's parents on the Upper East Side; house-sitting in SoHo; and weaseling in on my sister's sublet in Williamsburg.

Not bad for a beginner couch-surfer. New York has always been a couch-surfing Mecca, thanks to so many people who want to live here and so few affordable apartments.

Film producer Gill Holland couch-surfed his way through Europe in his 20s, and now his 400-square-foot Village apartment is a crash pad.

"Couch-surfing Rule No. 1 is that sometimes you're the surfer, sometimes you're the wave," he says.

"I've had 17 nationalities stay at my place. Sometimes I wonder if my number and address are in 'Let's Go America.'"

The chance for abuse does run high. DeeJay Carolyn Bednarski couldn't get rid of a friend who overstayed her welcome.

"We charged her \$50 a week," Bednarski says. "Then it went up to \$75, and when I threatened \$100, she moved out."

Bednarski later learned her "guest" had been mooching off people for years.

"She was a pro at knowing my schedule, but she was in my room using my computer so many times, I started getting annoyed," says Bednarski. "It got to the point where no amount of money was worth having this person in my home."

Over the past 10 years, filmmaker Morgan J. Freeman grudgingly hosted many a couch-surfer — including, he says, "an Oscar nominee from 'Good Will Hunting,' who needed a floor to sleep on when he was playing at Brownie's."

Their friendship hasn't been the same. "Couch-surfers are the most despicable form of life," Freeman says. "People shouldn't come to an expensive city if they don't have money."

But many couch-surfers are riding the wave in hopes of building a nest egg.

Katya Meyer, who is trying to find work as a commercial producer, lucked into a surfer's dream when a former boss lent her his one-bedroom apartment (with a terrace!) in the West Village.

"He spends 90 percent of his time out of the country," Meyer says. "I will hopefully have my own place one day, but why bother spending the cash when I have a great place for free?"

And, of course, sleeping on other people's couches makes you ready for anything — even a tiny New York apartment.

When the technology bubble burst, techie John Dudley sold his house in Oregon and headed east. For eight months, he rode the wave before he found his own apartment (or *half* an apartment).

Says Dudley, "The best thing is, my couch-surfing days made me quite comfortable living in a 350-square-foot place, as opposed to my 2,200-square-foot house in Oregon."

How to be our guest

COUCH-surfers can either be the lowest form of urban life or the best guests — if they follow some basic rules (provided by longtime couch surfer Gill Holland):

■ **Make your bed.** "I can't tell you the number of times I've had to put the futon back into the couch position," says Holland. "I'm like, 'You're wasting my time!'"

■ **Always take your host out to dinner or bring a gift.**

■ **If you come from abroad, bring a gift from duty free — preferably alcohol.**

■ **Don't hog the phone.**

■ **Bring your own toothbrush.** (Believe it or not, some couch-surfers need a reminder on this basic hygiene matter.)

— Andrea Meyer