

# **The Hole in My Bubble**

Imagine you are going to Disneyland. It is early in the morning, you have your running shoes on, your backpack full of essentials, and a huge grin on your face. Cleverly, due to the hassle of parking in the Disney structure, you choose to park outside of it and walk over. You pass by a Denny's as your feet slap the pavement, making your way towards the happiest place on earth. Finally, you reach the walkway that leads into the entrance of Disneyland.

However, you walk right passed a small corner of sidewalk, seeing nothing special in the ordinary piece of everyday life. But, what you do not know is that every single night, when the sun goes down, a bearded man in a wheelchair practically lives in that little strip. He plays his saxophone for any scrap of money while people walk out of Disneyland, and most of these people do not even grant him a glance. The little piece of cement, is someone's home, and you did not even give it a second thought.

This is the consequence of what I call the bubble. Living in Orange County, it is easy for us to become victims of this bubble. We live in a place with beautiful green trees and large, sturdy houses, where poverty is often not staring at us in the face. We walk through life with this film covering us, blocking us from the knowledge that while it may not always be right in front of us, it is there all the same. I have walked this walk to Disneyland at least once a month for around the past four years, and not once did I know that I was twenty minutes away from the Santa Ana Riverbed, a place where several hundred people take refuge. I was so close to a community in dire need, and I did not even know it.

I have always been aware of poverty and the efforts against it that we need to make, but I don't think I fully realized that it is prevalent not just in popular cities. Homelessness is right here in Orange County, California. However, in fall of 2017, I auditioned for my school's musical, *Godspell*. Through the experience of this musical, my bubble was punctured, and I

began to see, *really* see, what lies behind the foggy film. It was as if someone had forced a new pair of glasses on my eyes, crushing my nose, but making everything that much clearer.

The musical *Godspell* tells the story of Jesus Christ explaining a series of parables. However, my school decided to set the musical in a homeless encampment. Every actor was to portray a homeless person except for Jesus, who would teach the parables to the people. After a full read through of the script with the cast, it was obvious how emotionally impactful *Godspell* is. But, it was during one of the very first practices that the cast was taught exactly the full essence of what we were doing. We spent the day watching a video starring impoverished families in Orange County. Our director, Amy Barth, felt that it was imperative for us to understand homeless people before portraying them. It was watching this video and seeing the tears on my cast members' faces that exposed me—and everyone else—to the reality of how blind we are to the needy people living in our community.

As a member of the ensemble, I was expecting to be a part of the play, but not exactly a key role. But, from the very beginning, I was shown how untrue this was. We were all told to create character biographies for ourselves, making up our character's backstory of how we became homeless and who we were. Writing my biography, I began to realize how accurate this is. None of the audience members will read my biography or know my character's story, but nonetheless, the story is there. I believe this is true of every person, including homeless people. We may not see the story written on their forehead, but it is still there.

“Becoming” a homeless person was an indescribable experience. It opened my eyes to how terribly they are treated. They can be sitting right next to us on the street, begging for money, sometimes even verbally doing so, and we ignore them. We treat them as if they are another speck of dirt on the ground. I always knew homeless people were ignored, but it was putting

myself in their shoes that made me understand a small fraction of how that feels. In the second scene of the play, Jesus comes to the encampment and sings the words, “When will thou save the people?”. As I was in character, I could not help but feel these words as if I were actually a homeless person. Every single time the actor sang this song, I could not help but allow a smile from bursting out. Homeless people have been cast aside to the fringes of society like an old article of clothing, forgotten and ignored. Yet, in this scene, Jesus comes to the homeless encampment and *recognizes* them.

Throughout the experience of acting as a person living in a homeless encampment, my vision of homelessness cleared an incredible amount. I now understand that we have to look past the word “homeless” and see that they are *people*. They are people who do not just need money, shelter, or food.

They need to be seen.

They need someone to look at them, like Jesus, and not avoid their eye. They need someone to smile or wave at them, treating them as the equal person they are.

I thought I understood the need of the homeless and who they are. But, it was through the experience of *Godspell* that carved a hole in the bubble I had been living in, exposing to me that homeless people are more than just homeless.

They are our brothers and sisters. They need to be treated as such, not strangers.