

At Red Rock Amphitheater: An unforgettable experience

The day that I found my purpose in life, sharing God's word through songs of worship.

Cassie Cummings

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It was February of 2017, my sophomore year in high school. My high school youth group at Crosswinds church in Spirit Lake, Iowa went on a mission trip to Denver, Colorado. My youth pastor, Pastor Stephen, grew up in Denver and he really enjoyed being able to spend the weekend doing mission work in his hometown. As a youth group, we were able to meet his parents and see the exact stage he walked across at his high school graduation. I thought that was neat getting to learn about his family a little bit while on a trip where we were also helping others.

We left Spirit Lake, Iowa, 680 miles away (a 10-hour drive), a day earlier than planned to beat the bad snow storm we would have driven into. On that Thursday evening, we packed our bags into a U-Haul trailer and loaded into two big vans and began the drive to Denver. That night we stayed in a hotel to get some sleep and were back on the road at 10am Friday morning. After a few more hours on the road we finally arrived in Denver.

That first night in Denver was an eye opener for many of us. We lived in a small town, Spirit Lake, IA, with a population of roughly 5,000 people, where everyone looked out for one another and homelessness was non-existent. In Denver, we were shocked and heartbroken to see as many homeless people as we did. There was not a street in downtown Denver that did not have at least two or three homeless people living in

between buildings and on sidewalks. We teamed up with YWAM (Youth with a Mission) on our trip so we did most of our things with them. That first night was just time to get a feel for what life was like in Denver.

When it got dark we split into two groups and one group went and did one activity while the other group did another. One activity was a scavenger hunt. We were to find various items the girl from YWAM that oversaw our group had picked out and different landscapes and features we would not see back home such as the mountain tops and views, the random coffee shops, and the busy downtown streets. The other activity we did was we walked around and talked about all the different organizations like soup kitchens and clothing drives they do what they can to help those who were homeless.

The lady that lead the informational activity brought us all to an empty lighted parking lot where we laid on the ground watching the stars and imagined living outside under the blanket of stars as if we were homeless. When she first told us all to lay on the ground we gave her a funny look as if to say “you want me to do what?” She told us “yes I want you to lay on the ground.” We all thought she was crazy but after she began talking to us and telling us all sorts of scenarios as if we were the homeless ones we began to realize why she had us lay there. Her intentions were not to make us feel uncomfortable but to make us see how much worse how life can be. It made us appreciate the things we have in life like good food, clean water, clean clothes, a place to call our home, family that loves us and many other things that we take advantage of.

Roughly around nine o'clock that night we went to the place where we would be sleeping the next two nights which was an old house that had been turned into more of

a house with rooms set up with multiple twin bunks to hold bigger groups of missionaries. We took showers and went to bed since we had a busy day ahead of us.

Not a one of us was happy about getting up at 5 the next morning but no one fussed about it. Saturday was the main day for mission work. Even though we were made to get up super early we still put on our happy smiley faces and got to work.

That morning we sorted and put cereals and oatmeal into serving size bowls and prepared a meal for the homeless people. It was held at the Colorado Convention Center in downtown Denver that we had set up many tables and chairs in to seat all the homeless people. When the host of the event told us they usually serve a couple hundred people we all thought they were kidding but then the doors opened, and we realized that they were not kidding at all. When we saw these people gorging themselves in that one meal, we instantly could not imagine living life the way they were. Some of those people the only meal they would get in a week was on Saturdays when they did the soup kitchen which is where they make and serve a meal free to the homeless. After hearing about that we knew that was the reason for so many of them eating much more than they should in one sitting.

Once we were done serving, we cleaned up the room, folded all the tables and chairs, and washed the dishes. We had a productive morning. After everything was done in the multi-purpose center, we went back to the place we were staying and cleaned up a little bit and changed clothes. The moment we all were waiting for finally came. It was lunchtime. After lunch we did another activity only this time, we split up into smaller groups of four or five and our task was to go out and talk to the homeless people. The goal was to put a smile on their face and share the love of Christ through

us without openly preaching to them about God. Many homeless people are without Christ because they think that if Christ were real, they would not be homeless.

As Christians we found it very hard not to just blurt out and tell these people of God's word. We knew we needed to be careful not to upset one of them because they were under enough stress being homeless that we were unaware if they would get violent or not. Some of these homeless people were some of the sweetest people you would ever meet. In this task we were also given eight dollars as a group to find a homeless person who was maybe missing socks or maybe needed some gloves and go into a store and buy them something. The group I was with found this scrawny elderly man who had nothing but a tee shirt and shorts on outside in the below freezing temperatures, so we went into one of the thrift stores and bought him a big fluffy blanket to wrap up in. That elderly man was so appreciative of that and we felt that we had done one of the best things we could have for that man.

It was beginning to get dark, so we all gathered back in the park to go somewhere for dinner. I have always been a very picky eater. Some of the restaurants we ate at I did not like what was on the menu, but I ate what was ordered because I did not want to be rude. After our meal, we went back to the city park where we then just walked the sidewalks looking for parking meters that were about to expire and pulled some of our own money out and added minutes to parking meters as a generous thing to do for those people. We ended the night with ice cream for dessert before heading back to the place we were staying to shower and go to bed.

The following day we attended a church service in the Colorado Convention Center that was very different from anything I had ever been to, but it was a good

service. After service we packed up our things and loaded up the trailer and began the journey out of Denver as far as we knew anyway. Come to find out we were not quite heading home yet. We had stopped at Pastor Stephen's parents' house, then began the journey to the Rocky Mountains. This was my first experience with elevation changes. Denver is nicknamed the Mile-High City because it is exactly a mile above sea level.

When we got to the trails at red rock we just hiked for a while until Pastor Stephen had decided he was going to lead us to a different place. He directed us to the Red Rock Amphitheater. That was the highlight of the trip for me, not only was it a very pretty view but when we reached the top, we worshipped the lord through songs of praise. Tanner, one of the kids in the group, had decided he was going to bring his guitar with him on the hike. At first, we all thought he was totally out of his mind but then when we all gathered at the top level at the welcome center of the Amphitheater he pulled out his guitar and started playing.

At first, not many of us were paying any attention to it then all the sudden we gathered over to the wall and became this little church choir. This was the day that I found my purpose in life, sharing God's word through songs of worship. Not everyone is a Christian and that's perfectly fine so we knew that there would be some people who would frown upon us singing praises to God in a public place. Personally, I felt more at peace while we were singing. While some people were yelling some nasty mean things at us, others were recording, singing, and gathering to watch. It felt so good to touch the lives of others while doing something I love. When we got done singing and started to head to a different part of the hiking trail Pastor Stephen Informed us that his graduation ceremony had been at the Red Rock Amphitheater. I could not quite imagine the

amount of people there for the ceremony. Hundreds and thousands of people were there that day to watch the graduating class walk the stage.

After we got back on a hiking trail through the mountains we started to go higher up in elevation until eventually I started to get very light headed and dizzy, so I had to stop with one of the chaperones at the bottom of one of the hills as the rest of the group kept going higher up. They reached the top of one of the highest peaks in the Rockies and finally decided to come back down. When they met up with us at the bottom, we headed back toward the vans to go to this fancy pizza place.

On the car ride to the restaurant I began to get very sick feeling and had to climb from the back of the van to the front of the van to help minimize some of the bumpiness to prevent vomiting inside the van. By the time we arrived at the restaurant I had a headache so bad i could not stand light and all I wanted to do was sleep. I was so miserable, but I still tried to eat at least one slice of pizza. After we ate, we loaded up into the vans and began the journey back home to Spirit Lake, Iowa. We were sad to see the trip end but by the time we got done in the mountain and eating dinner most of us slept on the way back. We had a blast and definitely bonded as a group on this trip. I became friends with people I had never talked to in school or at church.