



Why Is There a Bedbug on My Oscar?

By Thomas DeLorenzo
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Sometimes it's not about the Oscars -- news from Hollywood that is. In spite of what you read in the tabloids, this isn't the land of celebs running all over town in their Bentleys, charging whatever they want on Rodeo Drive. It's actually a town where one in seven people live under the poverty line. It's a town where over 60,000 individuals struggle daily with HIV/AIDS. It's a town, where in spite of whatever the Kardashians are cooking up next, has seen its median income drop nearly \$4,000 between 2007 and 2010, to a pretty impossible to live on here amount of \$52,384. This number, coupled with the fact that Los Angeles County has the highest amount of uninsured individuals in the State of California, makes you wonder how anyone can even afford to attend the Oscars.

As a city, we have always accepted a high unemployment rate of our most famous working stiffs -- the actors. AFTRA-SAG states that its typical unemployment rate hovers around 85%, making living on unemployment a way of life for most. However, when those actors work, they rarely make less than \$1000 a day, which is more than the rest of the town sees in a month. Los Angeles heralded in 2013 an unemployment rate of 11.3%.

I left Hollywood to attend law school in a section of Los Angeles we call Koreatown. It's not unusual for me to head home after classes, only to find the

Los Angeles Police Department has blocked off streets because some person decided it was important to run around the city pointing a gun at people.

I left Hollywood because of all of the social ills it attempts to address at those big awards dinners but really don't make a dent in. I left Hollywood because people need healthcare way before they need an Oscar.

My favorite Hollywood story involves an Oscar and healthcare. Hilary Swank was getting a prescription filled three weeks after she won her first Oscar -- only to find out she was not covered by her union's insurance any longer. The movie that made her famous also made her broke (initially, of course). She didn't make enough from Boys Don't Cry to qualify for SAG health insurance. The ultimate of ironies -- she can get meetings everywhere in town -- that is except a doctor's office.

I, too, have attended my share of Oscars, Emmys, Grammys and Tonys. Regardless of the name, they are all basically the same. A room filled with people who love each other that night -- but can barely talk to each other the next day.

I have even had clients win those trophies and -- best part -- say my name on television during their speech (validation is wonderful and rare in this town). I thought nothing could make me happier than those times.

I was dead wrong.

Last week, during my work as a law clerk at the Inner City Law Center, I found out. My client, a disabled American Veteran, who is also HIV positive, was living in a housing project for people with HIV/AIDS -- with bed bugs. The man was forced to sleep on a futon in the living room because the bugs had caused sores all over his arms and legs.

Sounds like just another night at the Oscars, right?

On Friday, I heard, probably, one of the most beautiful statements I had heard in a very long time. My client told me that because of my work, he going to be sleeping in his own bed that night.

It gave me great pause. Something I take so very much for granted -- being able to sleep in my own bed -- this man was denied. And now, because I merely made a well-placed phone call -- he was able to claim that territory as his own again.

I doubt more beautiful words were ever spoken before at any awards ceremony in this town filled with contradictions.