

**FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS**

*Long Story Short*. Director, **Natalie Bookchin**. 2016. 45 minutes.

Colour. Distributed by Icarus Films, United States.

This is an audio-visual narrative about being a human. *Long Story Short* presents us with a dialogue about poverty. The director interviewed over 100 people at homeless shelters, food banks, adult literacy programs and job training centres in Los Angeles and the Bay Area in Northern California. 'You don't really know how people are when looking at them until you ask them'.

The film editing is masterful. The interviewees are juxtaposed to each other and interchange according to the themes discussed. The effect is amazing in the sense that those who do not speak appear to be the audience of those who do; next to each other, to each other. The sound in the film is like a symphony. Silence has an important role in the entire talking show. The purpose of the film is to give voice to those who are rarely heard. Urban poverty is a global issue and it can come as a surprise to anyone. The goal of the film is to understand the cause of poverty and to stimulate debates about better public services and social assimilation.

'Money is power. You need money to feel like a normal citizen. You cannot participate without it in normal life. Without it, you are not a human! It is a new kind of slavery'. The film is shot in Los Angeles, California, where the rich live on the hills and the poor live downtown. The rich are distant and unfamiliar from the urban conditions. They do not know about urban poverty. According to the

participants, living on welfare is not a solution. One cannot live on monthly welfare payments and pay the rent. People work and still have no home. They simply do not earn enough.

Who are the homeless people? Do you really know who they are? It is common to think that they are mentally ill, but then, when you get into that position yourself you say: 'Me? I never thought of being homeless'. Most people do not understand that being homeless is hard work, unpaid, a 24 hour a day job. 'To work feels good. I want to work. But, I got no phone where they can contact me; no address; no shower to take before doing a job interview [...] We sleep in the car. Because of all that you are not comfortable, you are exhausted and that makes it hard to go to the interview. People can feel it'. [Silence]

The film introduces us to educated people, those who lost a good job and could not find a new one and thus slipped into greater depths, and homelessness. We also get to know those who were in jail. Most of the homeless interviewed, however, are ordinary citizens. Many have seen gunfire, police shooting innocent people only because they were living on the street. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We also learn that without good guidance, one can get on a wrong path in life. Many say that they did not have a good childhood. They followed their parents' footsteps with lack of mentoring and education. When the family becomes poor, the mother does two or three jobs, and the older children look after their younger brothers and sisters. 'When growing up we did not make the right choices. We did not have tools; role models! You have to learn it [...] You need to learn how to become

rich'. Some found their escape in alcohol, some in reading books, and some in social media. It is something that takes them out of the situation.

'Is there a way out? Lots of times there isn't!' At the end of the film, there is no actor and no audience, only an empty seat.

Daniela Vávrová  
James Cook University  
([daniela.vavrova@jcu.edu.au](mailto:daniela.vavrova@jcu.edu.au))

---