

#ret #hw

1 | Haight-Ashbury

- alex
- perfectly bright?
- all about background

During our exploration of Haight-Ashbury street, we interviewed a man lying down on the edge of the sidewalk (my friend Jack's first question: "so, where you living now?"). We continued talking, and the man told us his story. He and his brother (lying down beside him) had traveled here using their stimulus check. Where they came from – I think it was Illinois – was too rainy. He told us how he couldn't get a job because he didn't have an ID, and had been trying to get one for quite some time. His lucky break was that his mom finally responded, allowing him to hopefully get his ID. Having experience in the field, he aspired to be a plumber. He told us that his brother worked making wings at a restaurant. They told us what they had learned about being homeless: living downtown was a bad idea, because that was where all the drug addicts were. Living on Haight, however, had a lot of drama – everyone was constantly gossiping. But both were better than where they came from. They said that everyone there went to jail: all their friends, family, even those who "didn't even take any drugs or drink." They explained how the private prisons made a profit by having more inmates, leading them to round up the less fortunate and imprison them all. Being in and out of jail became simply a fact of life. We chatted about the weather, the field trip, and some politics. Then, we thanked him for his time, and went on with our field trip. Right before we left, he called out, "I'm Alex!"

Alex was kind, bright, and remarkably personable. But he was living on the street. With different circumstances, he would have fit right in with us Nueva kids. Alex's biggest aspirations were to be a plumber, because that was all he was allowed to aspire for. Us Nueva students are allowed to aspire for so much more, not because we are smarter, not because we are better, but because we were simply born with different circumstances. Blaming the homeless for their circumstances is a misconception. Our society wants badly to erase problems by calling the less fortunate inherently lesser. Haight-Ashbury is a place where those erased from moral concern through illusions of superiority have coalesced, slowly shattering these illusionary band-aids while these marginalized groups have done anything but be lesser. Artwork, color, and history saturate every inch of Haight-Ashbury. Its immense cultural innovation has forced it back into public eye, no longer able to be discounted.

But Alex's family is still imprisoned, and he has cardboard for a bed.