

# BARB HIGGINS...

## 'A Jewel of an Evening'



**Barb Higgins is co-anchor & co-producer of CTV Calgary's News at Six. She was the MC of The Moonlight Lounge, a gala to benefit CUPS' One World Child Development Centre, held March 14 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. Below she reflects on the words of the evening's headliner, Jewel, as she performed for an audience of 400. - Ed.**

"She's Hot!!!" That's how a co-worker reacted when I told him Jewel would perform later that night at the Hyatt Hotel. People paid \$250 a ticket to raise money for CUPS and the One World Child Development Center.

Fast forward to the Hyatt that night. Jewel steps onto a very small stage. She is alone. Her guitar rests on a stand and she leaves it there. She walks to the microphone and I don't even remember her saying hello. In an unusually quiet voice, she begins to tell us how a boss once thought she was "hot", and that's how she became homeless.

"When I was 19, I went into work one day and my boss wanted me to sleep with him. I of course told him 'No'. The next day was pay day and he refused to give me my check".

The room at the Hyatt is stunned into silence.

"I didn't have a lot and I'd been living paycheck to paycheck. That was the last straw. After he didn't give me my money, I lost my apartment. Then I couldn't afford first and last months' rent to get a new apartment, so I spent the next year living in my car."

The audience stays absolutely quiet.

"I know what it's like to be on the street so I'm really happy to be here in Calgary to play for you tonight to raise money for CUPS".

She played a song called "Hands". She wrote it after the first time she thought about stealing a can of food from a store. She says, "I looked at my hand as I reached for the can, and it was in that moment I decided it was up to me, and I would not let go of my dignity."

### HANDS

*Poverty stole your golden shoes  
It didn't steal your laughter  
And heartache came to visit me  
But I knew it wasn't ever after*

*We'll fight, not out of spite  
For someone must stand up for what's right  
'Cause where there's a man who has no voice*

*There ours shall go singing*

*My hands are small I know  
But they're not yours, they are my own  
But they're not yours, they are my own*

*I am never broken  
In the end only kindness matters*

I think most of us in the Hyatt that night were stunned. Jewel is a gorgeous young woman. She has long blond hair, the camera loves her and she has a huge and effortless voice. She dates rodeo cowboy legend Ty Murray, and has for 10 years. To look at her and listen to her you'd think she has life by the tail. She does - but she didn't always.

Later in the concert she tells us more of that time in her life when she struggled. "I was still living in my car, but I got a meeting with executives from a record label and I was really excited."

"I had to wash my hair. I didn't want to meet with them looking like I did so I went to a bathroom in a Denny's restaurant. Do you have Denny's up here?" The audience answers "Yes". She says, "Yeah, I think they're everywhere".

"So anyway, I go into the bathroom and I'm washing my hair in the sink using the hand soap on the wall and 3 women come in. They're dressed all nice and they just stare at me. One said to the others, 'Well, she seems pretty enough. I wonder what happened?'" Jewel acts it out on stage, as though she has her head in the sink. "All of a sudden I felt so embarrassed. I wanted so badly to tell them 'I'm meeting with a record company and I have to look nice'... but they just keep staring at me."

Jewel is still smiling as she tells us her story, but her movements are agitated. Her arms are flailing as she relives how she wants to plead with the women not to judge her. I feel frustrated myself as she tells it. I feel how frustrating it would be to know you're a good person, to know you have talent, and yet people can't-or don't want to-see beyond the surface.

She looks into the crowd and says, "I wish I knew where those women are now so I could show them, and say, 'See. I had talent.'"

As I sat in the audience I thought of my Mom, of all people. Mom has a deep belief that every person has something to offer the world. Whether we're a

mechanic, an accountant, a doctor or a singer, we all have something we can add to the world.

As I sat and listened to Jewel sing, I thought about her time being homeless. I thought what an incredible shame it would have been if she didn't get that break that turned her life around. She never would have been able to share the gift of her voice.

She's received 3 Grammy Award nominations, an American Music award and been on the covers of *Time*, *Rolling Stone* (twice), *People* and *Vogue*. Her first album, *Pieces of You*, went platinum 11 times! She's a huge talent... and there she was, standing on stage with a guitar, entertaining a crowd that paid \$250 per ticket to see her. "She was homeless?" I found myself thinking. It's really hard to believe.

How many other people are homeless, who have something to offer our society? I really think Mom was right, we ALL have something to offer. We might not all have platinum records to sing, but every person who's living on the street has something they could share with society. Many just need that first break.

Homeless people are often painted as those who take from society - but that night as I listened to Jewel, I found myself wondering what society misses out on because homeless people aren't in a position to give the gifts or talents they have.

After hearing her story and listening to her sing, I wondered - how many more "Jewels" are out there on our streets? ■

## Alone

by Collette Wolfe

I didn't want to admit it  
It was easier to lie  
And hide the hurt and emptiness  
To smile instead of cry  
I didn't want to face the fact  
That my life is full of pain  
And I long to stop my bleeding heart  
And maybe smile again  
I feel so forgotten  
So betrayed and so alone  
Without a trace of forgiveness  
And no soul to call my own  
I did not want to admit the fact  
I cannot spread my wings  
All my happiness has melted  
Into tears and other things  
It's hard for me to hide the fact  
That my body has no home  
And return to loneliness bow my  
Head and cry alone  
I wish that I was the happy  
Little girl again and I don't like to  
Pretend to be happy by taking pills  
I feel so alone ■



**A young client of CUPS' One World Child Development Centre. The Moonlight Lounge Gala benefits One World programs.**

Photo by James Witney

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