

HEAVENLY NEWS
“A Blessing in Disguise”
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Ever heard that one before? I know... pointless question. Of course we all have. But have you ever had a moment where you understood the blessing behind the happening? Maybe that's the question worth asking. How many of us would “yes?”

Sometimes when the best laid plans go awry an unexpected result comes our way. How lucky each person must feel in that moment when out of frustration something truly remarkable occurs. Palm Sunday 1997 was one of those watershed moments in my life that solidified my love for the heavens above, and it happened when I wasn't really paying attention. As a sophomore at Humboldt State University my spring break was drawing to a close and it was time to return to school.

In the days leading up to this trip, Comet Hale-Bopp languidly drifted across the night sky with its two-colored tail shining brightly for all to see. I caught a ride from some fellow students from Markleeville – two girls who lived in the same dorm hall as myself, avoiding an 8-hour bus ride back to school.

Our trip was abruptly derailed by a blown engine just outside of Woodland. I suppose it's not easy to drive a car when the radiator has a silver dollar-sized hole in it. Of all the rotten luck, *why did this have to happen?* Here we were, still a good five hours or so away from our destination, and we were stranded.

While I silently stewed, one of traveling companions informed us her aunt and uncle were coming with a loaner car for us, but wouldn't be there until around 4 o'clock that afternoon. *Great!* I thought as I rolled my eyes. Maybe that cramped bus ride wasn't looking so awful at that point. When the car arrived ... it was a two-seater with a hatchback door. I mean could this get any worse?

So being the gentleman I wish I was, I took the rear window. I didn't really mind as the trek continued through the coastal mountains and the twilight set in. Out came the comet next to a full moon with me pressed against the rear window. Nice view, and surprisingly comfortable. Then the night sky got way more interesting.

I noticed the moon growing progressively more rusty colored and dismissed as smoke from a fire burning somewhere around us. As the miles went by the moon's color deepened and became darker like it was being covered up. When I realized I was watching a lunar eclipse in progress, I must have been boiling over in the back of the car.

“Oh my God,” I shouted. “Pull the car over!”

We stood beneath the stars and took in a rare celestial double hit. Before long, more cars traveling the highway that night stopped as well, and as a group of complete strangers we gathered in awe. Within the shadow of the Earth, the full moon's light was snuffed out almost completely, and the comet was beyond belief. A few minutes passed and we decided to continue home.

I say it was a blessing because as anyone who has spent any time around the City of Eureka knows, it's one of the foggiest areas in the country. This night was no different. As I arrived to tell my roommates what we witnessed I realized that had it not been for a blown engine and a few hours of angst we never would have experienced such an event. I

still feel guilty for feeling so sour earlier that day, but I suppose that's how we learn. Thank you, Woodland.

If you have any stories like this we at the Cameron Park Community Observatory are always ready to offer an ear and share our own experiences. Please visit us any Friday, Saturday or Sunday evening when the sky is clear. For more information about the Community Observatory and driving directions go to www.communityobservatory.com.