

Sarah Bowden One-Page Artistic Statement

The most fascinating aspect of the Superman mythos will always be kryptonite. As a kid I recognized it was a huge contrivance that allowed Superman to fall into deadly situations, though somehow miraculously crawl out of them again, proving his own superiority along the way. Yet kryptonite's appearance brought out a new facet of our hero; under its radiation, he became vulnerable, human. It was that uncustomary weakness that drew me to the character. Some part of me knew that in order for Superman to appreciate his super-ness, he had to discover what it felt like to be weak first. Kryptonite is what I write about as a playwright, and how disadvantages -- whether they be social, economic or physical -- can shape one's identity and personal strength.

I've been hearing-impaired all my life. By the time I reached second grade, I needed a hearing aid to make up for what I wasn't catching when my teacher faced the blackboard. Having a tool reshape my hearing freed me up to think of my disability as a gift rather than a curse. The choice between wearing the aid or not on any given day showed me how differently I experienced the world as a hearing or non-hearing person, and the challenges I dealt with on a daily basis made me more thankful for the help I received from parents, teachers and disability counselors. Knowing I had control over my own state of perception gave me the power to define myself not as a victim of circumstance and genetics, but as someone aware of her limits, someone smart enough to use them as a way to define her identity and outlook positively -- the way Superman does by first accepting that something out there can hurt him.

My full-length play *The Magnificent Masked Hearing Aid* best represents my concerns as a dramatist. The play centers on an audiologist and father who discovers that his daughter is losing her hearing just as she begins her college application process. He tries to convince her to get surgical implants that would improve her hearing permanently, but she resists this option because she has spent her days living "in the gaps between seeing a thing ... and understanding it." If she can hear everything, she argues, her sense of identity and all her relationships will change; such a decision will affect her choice of school, her career and the rest of her life. The father becomes so desperate to keep in touch with his daughter, he destroys her hearing aid; she then agrees to the surgery because she has no other way to combat her worsening problem. By play's end, the father is struggling to define himself as the doctor and father who would do such a questionable thing to help his child, whom he's lost to emotional distance, post-surgery.

Everyone struggles with one aspect of their personality, physicality, or social condition, and it is hard to find a thoughtful discussion forum for these identity issues in our Internet-driven, impersonal age. By shining a light on how disadvantages mold us into the strong people we're supposed to be, and by doing that within the community formed during a theatrical performance, I hope to provoke an honest, present, and prolonged discussion about the values we hold in the modern world. By asking my audience to step into the shoes of another person, I am asking them to imagine how a loss can be perceived as a gain. Simply posing the question could make a major impact on the world.