

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

By
Karen "Kadie" Ford

What I learned was that there are many negative aspects to living a life of poverty. These aspects create stress which leads to health problems and can lead to death, imprisonment or insanity.

I also considered that there are a few positive components of living a life in poverty. They are increased creativity and character building.

Increased creativity comes when you learn to make do with shoddy material but you use brain power and talent to improve that material, sort of like MacGyver.

Character building is seen when one does not give into the "dark side" of poverty but you allow God to use poverty to teach life lessons and bring out the best in you as an individual.

Living in poverty is very hard. There is always more month than money. Many challenges arise that inhibit the obtaining of the basic needs of life. Life is endangered from external and internal sources.

When you grow up in poverty some things are not blatant. They don't scream, "You are poor!" You just learn to cope from day to day. It's the proverbial "frog in boiling water".

Sudden poverty is difficult to withstand. You want to awaken and have the *bête noir*, waking nightmare, be over and life to go back to "normal". But you realize that you may never be free and your life truly is a walking, waking nightmare, which for you IS normal.

The biggest problem for people in poverty is support. You can live a long time without money. You can live for a while without food, clothing and shelter. But even the homeless unconsciously set up a network of support. Those who don't want to be isolated from society and unbothered must depend on the people who run the shelters, the people who throw away the cardboard that they use for temporary shelters over the grates in the city, they depend on those who protect them from night terrors: robbers, bullies, gangs, and also they depend on those who supply them with drugs and or sex.

The problems that take the most energy to deal with are different for each person in each situation. It depends on the individual's resources and how well they are able to recognize and utilize these resources.

Poverty is not the same for everyone. It can differ in many ways depending on their history, outlook, education, money flow, number of children, marital status, employment opportunities, etc. The basic sameness of poverty is that in each instance

something vital to that person's needs is lacking, whether it is support, the basics of life, or mental acuity.

Some middle class and wealthy people came from poverty and use their means to support charitable organizations. Others remember but don't let it touch them in thought or action. Some in these classes, on occasion, take a jaunt over to the 'east end of Cheapside' to look with pity or disdain. Many of the persons from these classes have never known poverty, will never know poverty, and they simply don't care how or what the 'other half' does to live. Yet those who know compassion do bother to check it out and they realize that people are suffering due to lack and look for ways to eliminate the problem of poverty.

Yet, even those who try to be cognizant of the plight of those in poverty don't always know what its like to believe "IT (life) will always be this way", "IT is what it is", "that there is NO way out", and "Earth is a hell of a place"!

Because the middle and wealthy classes' mental model consist of money, they take the stance that money can get them whatever they want. They have come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter if the people around you hate you or are doing things for them "for the money". All they care is that the ones beneath them DO IT.

The middle class and wealthy class spend their time networking and enjoying what their money can buy. Some of them work at jobs that they would do for nothing, they enjoy themselves all day and night, week after week. Month after month, year after year they work when they want to and take days, weeks off to rest, and then they take vacations!

Their biggest worry is keeping their privacy and the worry that some nefarious character will come along and take their wealth

It's extremely hard to get out of a life of poverty. One has to resist the pull of those who have known and been associated with you in poverty and also push against those on the other side of the situation, who don't want to share the "pie" with you thinking you undeserving of the better things in 'their' life. Not only are you in a tug of war with society but you are also in a tug of war with your own psyche. You have to convince yourself that

- a) you can break free and
- b) its okay to do so.

When you live in poverty for a long time its no longer poverty—its LIFE. Life is not always fair or just and acceptance can be blessing or a curse.

Everyone needs to see our mental models of poverty. EVERYONE. Those who are impoverished and those who have the power to aid others whether by jobs, money, support, food, shelter, or whatever!

REFLECTIONS
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- I learned I am richer than I thought I was, yet poorer than I like.
- I am not unique in poverty. I am not the richest person. I am, however not utilizing my resources advantageously. I am afraid and this class was a huge step for me. What if I actually succeed in breaking free? God, help me.
- Poverty in America is shameful and more insidious than in third world countries
- Where I am now, is living in generational and situational poverty with the added bonus of bad choices and all the prizes behind doors one, two, and three. Disabilities, ignorance of wealth, and fear of everything. Will I once again fall through the cracks?

If I had known that I was growing up poor; I would have started earlier, so that I would be done by now and gotten it all out of my system.

Written during the 2nd Bridges Out of Poverty, Getting Ahead Club 2/2011

UPDATE:

- Since last class created a portable, reusable mental model for classes
- Given my presentation at churches, and meetings
- I have lost some weight.
- I am now in counseling to work through issues and learn life skills
- Joined the Bridges Out of Poverty Steering Committee
- Training to be a Literacy tutor in Cass County
- Joined what Literacy workgroup
- Followed my role-model mentor around to paint cars, go to my first artist gallery opening
- Gone back to church and volunteered to be the Sabbath School Superintendent and sponsor of the young people's group
- Turned down two director positions because of my health issues
- Decided to have surgery (losing weight for that)
- Weathered an eviction threat (Planning to write about this)
- Decreased the amount of fan fiction I read
- Gotten new items for personal beauty
- Set up a budget and KEPT IT FOR TWO MONTHES STRAIGHT!
- Have not given up trying to keep the budget for a year
- Checked my mental model and found out that I had moved forward
- Cried more, Laughed more
- Expressed myself more
- Decided that being single is not such a bad thing
- Been more honest with Christ, myself, and others
- Kept breathing