

Poverty - Biographies of Struggle

Bio 1: Emerson Foy

Emerson Foy was born and raised on the tough streets of Buena Park California. He was raised in a lower-middle class neighborhood by two loving parents. Emerson attended the local elementary school where he earned decent grades. Education was never a focus in his life since his parents were both high school dropouts. Emerson's dad, Nick, worked in home construction and his mom, Gina, worked part-time in a warehouse as a clerk.

When Emerson graduated high school, college was never an option since his parents couldn't afford tuition. Emerson decided to follow his father into the construction industry. He made decent money, enough to feed himself and have a little extra money considering he still lived at home with his parents.

The recession of 2006 hit Emerson hard. The housing market dried up and he lost his job. Then his parents retired, and moved out of states. Unfortunately, Emerson found he was unable to afford housing. After months of collecting unemployment, and staying with friends, Emerson found himself living in his car in the local beach parking lot.

With no other skill set and housing related unemployment at 16%, Emerson is looking for odd jobs around town just to put food on his plate. Emerson's wages are so low that he is below the poverty line. He is scared that he will not be able to feed himself in the future and is fearful that he will never pull himself out of poverty.

Bio 2: Mary Alvarez

Mary graduated in the top 3% of her senior class at University High School in 1985. After high school she went on to earn a BA from Long Beach State University in accounting. While at college, she met her husband Kurt, whom she married a few years later.

Mary and Kurt decided to start a family, having their first child, Emma in the summer of 1994. The couple decided to have three other children, each two years apart in age. Mary enjoyed the challenges of motherhood, and the opportunity to give her children more than she had growing up. With Kurt leading a successful career, Mary welcomed the opportunity to stay at home with their four children.

Life was good for the Alvarez family until Kurt died in a tragic car accident. Mary was devastated and struggled to do daily activities. To make things worse, the family had not purchased life insurance. Mary realized she had to pull herself out of the depression and get a job to provide for her family and started to look for work as an accountant. Unfortunately, she found it difficult to find gainful employment because she had no formal work experience. Even with a degree in accounting, the economy was in a recession and the accounting firms were not hiring. The only work she could find was a part-time bookkeeping position twenty-minutes away from her home. The job did not pay well and she found it impossible to provide for her four children. As a single mom Mary earns so little that she is considered impoverished by the U.S. government. With four mouths to feed, Mary is concerned about finances and fears this will negatively affect her children's future.

Bio 2: Peter Vasiliev

Peter is the son of Alex and Natalie Vasiliev. In 1968, Alex and Natalie migrated to the United States in 1968 to seek employment in California. After finding jobs in Los Angeles California, Alex and Natalie had Peter, the first of their three children. Unfortunately, Peter's parents always struggled to find jobs that paid well. With money tight, Peter grew up in a life of poverty.

Unable to send Peter to preschool, his parents enrolled him at the local elementary school. Peter struggled in school from the beginning. Since he only spoke Russian at home, he struggled with English only instruction and quickly fell behind.

Peter's parents found it difficult to make ends meet and as a result had to work multiple jobs, which kept them away from the house. Consequently, Peter had too much freedom and no one to guide him through the difficult decisions of life.

Peter is not afraid to put in an honest day's work. He worked odd jobs in high school just to help his parents put food on the table. Peter's fortunes turned quickly as he began hanging out with the wrong crowd instead of going to school. Like many young boys in the neighborhood, Peter got caught up in the local gang. As a 16 year old, Peter had several issues with the law and spent time in a juvenile facility. His life quickly spiraled out of control. Unfortunately, his girlfriend became pregnant, which added another mouth to feed and more responsibility.

After his son was born, Peter dropped out of the gang and tried to make a good life for his family. However, with no high school diploma, Peter found it very difficult to find gainful employment. When he worked, he worked hard, but an unskilled laborer does not make much money. Even working 40 hours per week, Peter finds himself still below the federal poverty threshold. To make matters worse, he just found out he is expecting twins. At 18, Peter will now have to provide for a family of five.

Peter does not know if he can provide for his family. To try and save money he has moved in with his uncle. Although his children do have a roof over their heads Peter is still fearful that his children will be forced to live the same life of poverty he has lived.