

# Case Study Briefs

## **MARVELL** **Arkansas**

Deep in sleep, as she often is, Janiece dreams of becoming a doctor, and is oblivious to strangers talking above her. A bright, pretty 12-year-old with a clear and soft brown complexion, she has had chronic problems with her lungs and is often weak. When she becomes a doctor, she will explain later, she will “help other children be well.” Her brother Alvin, 9, curls up beside her on one of the family’s two beds, and wriggles closer to the fan and a mid-morning game show on the small black-and-white television at the foot of the bed.

Tina, 17 and the oldest of the five children at home, comforts her own 11-month-old baby, Eric. To care for him, Tina has dropped out of school—not yet completing the seventh grade. Eric is listless, his belly slightly swollen, his eyes troubled. His hair should be a jet black, but it is showing signs of turning reddish. Tina, explaining that Eric doesn’t like food very much, offers him a sip of her soda. He never cries, she says proudly. Tina doesn’t know what malnutrition means, and doesn’t recognize what could be warning signals in her baby.

Bernice makes her way up the broken wooden steps into the dark, four-room house. She is carrying a jug of water, filled at a neighbor’s outside faucet. There is no running water here, no well, no pump. She does what she can for her children—and now for her grandson as well.

The house, set back from the main road—U. S. Route 1 to Little Rock—is an island in a sea of bean plants. The fields are part of a big commercial farm; the beans will be picked by machine and sold to a national grocery distributor.

“My husband used to work for the man who runs the farm, so he lets us live here. . . .” She pauses. “My husband’s gone now,” she says, looking up as if surprised. “He left me some three years ago.... He’s married again now.”

She wipes sweat from her eyes and continues.

“We had a garden out there in the back last year. I raised some peas, some sweet potatoes. . . I raised some watermelons. And I raised some butter beans..., and cabbage. I had me a good garden.

“This year, he put all of it to beans,” she adds softly, looking out over the fields. “And I can’t break up that patch out in front. It’s too hard. We don’t touch them beans.”

Forty-four, Bernice grew up in the fields. She worked by her parents’ side, planting and picking, always for somebody else.

It used to be cotton mostly, but commercial farming has expanded in this fertile area known as the “Land of Opportunity,” and a wide variety of crops is now grown. The farms are largely mechanized today, with few jobs for people like Bernice. She, like so many others—girls and boys alike—was pulled out of school to help her parents. She was able to go as far as the fourth grade, but she has acquired no marketable skills.

She is accepting of her life, although at times she seems bewildered. And when she speaks of the lean stretches of time between when her food runs out and when her next allotment of food stamps arrive, she lowers her eyes, her face strained.

"I don't have no stamps left. We might get no check before next Monday, maybe. I got all week to go, maybe two. And I got no cash at all. No kind of money.

"I'll probably boil some beans today?" Her voice begins to trail off. "And some neck bones, maybe."

"Can I help you cook, Mama?" Alvin reaches up to throw his arms around his mother's neck. Bernice leans forward in her chair and pulls him into her lap. He presses back against her chest, his feet dangling almost to the floor. "He's tired of chicken," Bernice says.

"It got so they didn't want no more chicken," she explains. "They want the other kind of meat. And I can't buy that. When I buy some chicken I be trying to get enough. . . and if it's gone bad, we just have to make out. They going to have to be satisfied with it 'cause I can't get no more. In the kitchen there are only a few potatoes sitting in a box on the floor. A bag of beans and a box of oats are on the table. A rusted old refrigerator holds only a carton of baby formula. The freezer compartment, which doesn't work. contains a box of neck bones. There is no sign of chicken, or any other food.

"I guess I'll cook the beans outside on the woodstove," she says. Moving over to the gas range, she smiles sadly and adds. "Since we got no gas for this here." A "deep freeze," standing next to the stove, is equally useless to her today. It has broken down, just days after she completed payments on it.

"We carried the stove out back." Pointing to a singed hollow in the middle of the floor, she explains, "it used to be there—we use it to heat up the place in the winter.

"I got a few sticks of wood left..."

The winter is the hardest, she says. "It gets real cold. They do got a program here that helps folks with the heat. But I didn't get it.

"I bought wood for \$10 a load—as much as my uncle and I could get in his old pick-up and we shared that. It would last about a week.

"Last winter was real hard, too. The kids did get their meals at school. But I don't know if they will this year: it stops at a certain grade—I'm not sure which. There was a time last winter we didn't have any food at all in the house. I had the food stamps then, but I couldn't find nobody to take me to Helena to the store. It's about 30 miles from here You pay somebody to take you—for the gas and all. It's about \$10, sometimes \$15 a trip."

"I remember it was real bad," Tina breaks in. "We had nothing to eat and we were real hungry. I was mad."

Her voice barely audible, Bernice says. "I hate to see my children go hungry."

## COYOTE

### New Mexico

They are not Mexican-American, they say, but Spanish-American, their roots in this land going back over 100 years. Their small homes are dotted throughout this remote region of New Mexico, a land that long ago gave up all hope of adequate rainfall. Though widely scattered, these Chicano families share a number of things in common: a cultural heritage, a common language, an unshakable religious faith—and hunger.

Rudy and Rosita sit on the edge of a cot, one of the few pieces of furniture in the tiny, cluttered room. Their two children—Robbie 8, and Anselmo, 6—kneel on the floor in the corner, playing with a one-wheeled plastic car. Rosita does most of the talking. Rudy, withdrawn, huddles against the wall, staring at the floor. His right elbow, wrapped in an Ace bandage, is bent inward at an unnatural angle.

“Last September he shattered his elbow,” Rosita explains. “He hasn’t been able to work since. We went to this doctor in Albuquerque. He asked Rudy if he had any insurance. He told us pinpoint, ‘I only take patients that have money to pay.’ So we had to go to welfare.” She stops, to make sure she is understood. “We weren’t taking welfare before then.”

“He ended up going to another doctor in Los Alamos. Rudy was in a lot of pain but the doctor there, he didn’t want to give him medication. He told him to go back to work.”

She smiles at the absurdity of the idea, her eyes resting on her husband’s deformed arm. “Rudy told him you can’t work a power saw high up in the trees with one arm. But in his report he put that Rudy was healed and didn’t need any medical assistance. So we are losing our welfare.” Another pause. “We owe the hospital \$2,000. Lord knows how we’ll pay that.”

Before the accident, Rudy’s power saw was the family’s main source of income. The Department of Forestry is one of the few major employers in the area—a county where unemployment runs close to 35 percent. Rudy would bid on tree-thinning jobs. He was bidding low, so he would get the work, but others were facing similar problems. Here in New Mexico, many fathers with hungry families are vying for work—the poor pitted against the poor.

Right now this family of four receives \$225 in welfare payments. Come August they will have to survive on the \$203 they receive in food stamps. “And they don’t eat enough as it is,” sighs Rosita, looking at her children. “Very little meat—that’s for sure. Mostly beans, potatoes and tortillas. Last year, they got one cold after another. We may fill the kids but we don’t feed them right. With the little welfare we have gotten, we’ve bought shoes and some clothes—they’d just been living on hand-me-downs. They’ll have to make do for school with what they have. It’s hard for them to hear. But it’s reality. That’s the way life is.”

Rudy has been shifting uncomfortably since the conversation turned to his children. He seems to withdraw even further into the shadows. The anguish of a father who cannot feed his children adequately is as painful as the constant throbbing of a deformed arm.

Only two other rooms make up this small, adobe house—a bedroom and kitchen. There is no plumbing. The only heat comes from a wood-burning stove. They have electricity though, tapped off a line from their grandparents’ trailer, nestled only a foot from their house.

The grandfather is 81; his wife, 77. Neither speaks English. They attempt to subsist on social security, but this past winter they didn't have enough money to buy butane gas for their small stove. Both got pneumonia.

A telephone, their one luxury, is the only link to the outside world. The grandfather has suffered several heart attacks in the past few years. They will go without food in order to pay their phone bill.

“We used to be able to help them a bit, when Rudy was working,” Rosita explains, “but now....”

The grandmother speaks. Her eloquent Spanish is translated into simple English. “We don't have enough. If there were someplace around here to get food—where they gave it out—we would go. We have no pride left.’

Outside, the wind kicks up dust. Tiny, sharp particles whip around the adobe house which has stood for four— maybe five—generations, always in Rudy's family. Rosita stares off into the distance. “Rudy—he's a good man, but now he's different. He used to laugh but no more. It hurts him when the kids see things and want them. Like new clothes. They say, ‘I don't want to wear that cause it's torn or it fits me small. ’” She looks toward the house, where Rudy still sits, wrapped up in his own thoughts, motionless on the cot. She sighs. “Life is hard.”

## **CHARLOTTE**

### **North Carolina**

In the early 70s, there began a migration of Indian people from the farmlands of North Carolina's southern piedmont area, to Charlotte, the state's growing capital city.

They came from small communities closely knit by long traditions, into a bustling urban atmosphere. While most of these Indian men and women had never been restricted to reservations as such, years and years of living in all-Indian towns, of sending their children to all-Indian schools—segregation was in force through the 60s—ill-prepared them for dealing with the anonymity of a metropolis.

Farmers with few skills, they found jobs hard to come by. Many in fact could not read the forms handed them when they applied for work, or when, swallowing their pride, they sought public assistance.

At first they bunched together in neighborhoods. But in the years that followed they moved apart, increasingly dispersing the fragile support systems they had informally built.

Some made it; some are still struggling. Today far more Indians than whites are unemployed. Their problems extend to substandard housing, inadequate education, and poor health and nutrition.

"We came up here in 1978," Carolyn, 28 and disconsolate, recalls. "My husband— we're both Lumbee Indians—had been working on a farm about a hundred miles south of here. But the work wasn't steady."

What her husband Roy, 38, has found is an unbroken chain of dead-end jobs. Laid off one, he finds another. He quits, and looks again. Today he is a night security guard, and he is angry.

"We don't get any kind of assistance," he says. "We make it on what we got—and that's not much."

Paid every two weeks, his \$279 checks must stretch to cover food for his wife, 8-year-old son Jackie and Carolyn's 78-year-old mother—as well as rent for their cramped two bedroom trailer; land rent for the tiny plot the trailer sits on: electricity; gas: and payments on furniture and a second-hand car.

Hot-tempered and frustrated. Roy runs a hand through his close-cropped, graying hair and says he is close to quitting again. The tension visibly builds in his wiry frame. He jumps to his feet and begins to pace.

"There was some equipment missing, and they said it was one of us on the night crew. I know it wasn't. I know it was one of them day employees.

"They made me so mad last night. I had to shove my hand in my mouth clear up to the knuckles to keep from saying anything. But one of these nights I'm just going to break loose."

Carolyn and her son seem to fade into the shadows as Roy's voice gains in volume and intensity. Sallie, Carolyn's mother—her face deeply lined and expressionless—sits woodenly, gazing into a private void.

"I used to have two part-time jobs. One time I even had three. But I couldn't feed my family on no part-time salary. So I found something permanent and full-time," Roy continues. "I'm able to feed my family now, but not too well."

With a week and a half left to go until he receives his next check, Roy has \$10 in his pocket. That \$10 is all the family has. Their supply of food on hand—pork chops, chicken, hot dogs, a little bologna, a few ears of corn, a pound of hamburger and one can of beer—won't last.

Before long they will have to begin borrowing from their neighbors; it is a custom they have never been comfortable with.

“You see that car out there?” Roy demands. “I'm paying \$120 a month for it, because I have to have it. I have no other way to get to work. Even at that, the gas alone amounts to \$30 a week.

“But I'd sell it and walk in a minute. I'd sell everything in this place to keep my son from going hungry!

“It's not fair.

“I know I could get a better job if I could read. I'm good at arithmetic, but I don't read too good. I only got as far as the seventh grade. And that's the first thing they ask when you go to fill out the forms to get a job. You can't lie about it, either.

“I tried—took up reading some and welding at a training center. But I need glasses. My wife does, too, but we can't afford that.

“They take out our money over here and they send it over there to feed those people across the border or someplace. That ain't right.

“I just hope my son finishes school. If I live he will. Then he can find jobs and do right by his family.

“Things just ain't working right—not for us, they ain't.”

## **DALLAS**

### **Texas**

In the oppressive humidity of a Dallas late summer afternoon, the apartment building resembles the set for a Tennessee Williams play...a small courtyard overrun by weeds, dirt, gravel and garbage...electrical wiring dangling dangerously, enticingly exposed to small, curious hands...a narrow, corroded iron staircase that clearly spells disaster for the unsure steps of a toddler.

Inside live six Cambodian refugees, spanning three generations. The father—the male breadwinner—is not among them. He was killed under the Pol Pot regime. After five years of being shifted from one refugee camp to another, they have arrived in America, the land of opportunity, the home of plenty.

“We eat rice,” the eldest of the four children—and the only one of the six who speaks English—states simply. Because yesterday was Sunday, they also had a small chicken. But today, it is only rice.

The Khmer are a gentle people, hesitant to demand or impose. “It’s very hard at first because we don’t understand the money here,” the child says almost apologetically. “Maybe you buy more than you can afford because you don’t understand the value.”

Seventy dollars is spent each week on food for the six of them. They have no foodstamps. No one has taken the trouble to tell them how to apply.

In another corner of Dallas, another young refugee speaks quietly of the difficulties his family has encountered. He has spent the last three years on the move—from Laos, his home, to Thailand, to the Philippines and finally here in Dallas.

He lives with his parents and four brothers and sisters in three tiny rooms for which they pay \$350 a month in rent. Aside from a small kitchen table and two straight-back chairs, the only pieces of furniture are the mattresses scattered on the floor.

The five youngsters, ranging in age from 14 through 19, have walked the streets, looking for employment. But jobs for teenagers are hard to come by even under the best of circumstances and especially with “the problem we have with the language,” he explains.

Shopping—mainly for bags of rice, with the occasional luxury of dried fish, or fowl—is done at an expensive neighborhood grocery. There is no transportation to get to the more economical supermarket.

He talks of sometime owning a car but the written test for a driver’s license is beyond his comprehension of the English language. “Besides, it is too expensive to get a license,” he adds. He pauses. The absurdity of his dream—having enough money to get not only a license but a used car—stops him.

He is silent.

A young teenage girl stands near the wall. Her eyes are riveted to the floor. She has returned suddenly, unexpectedly from her job as a live-in babysitter in an affluent part of the city.

“They take advantage of her,” explains her young brother. “They don’t pay her what they promise.”

Was she not paid this time? she's asked.

She looks at the table.

Was there another problem?

She gets up, tears in her eyes, and walks into one of the small mattress-cluttered rooms.

The silence, heavily laden with unspoken thoughts, is finally broken.

“Back home,” the brother continues, “my mother didn't have to work. She stayed at home to take care of us. But now things are different. There is not enough money to pay for everything—food, rent, utilities. But she doesn't complain.”

His name is Nhut. He is 12 years old and an unwanted child in his own land, that disastrous blend of Vietnamese and Black American.

His mother works in a factory for minimum wage. She worries about what could happen to him while she is away.

The rent on their one-bedroom apartment in a slum section of Dallas is \$290 a month. The heat rarely works in the winter and the electricity goes off and on all year long. Often they can't even cook their meager vegetables and rice.

“It's a catch-22,” says a volunteer who distributes free rice to the Dallas refugee population, to keep the children from going hungry. “I called the landlord to say I was going to report him and he said, ‘Fine. I'll just close the place!’ Then they'd be out on the street. What would I have accomplished?”

“My mother has to borrow from friends at the end of the month,” says Nhut's 16-year-old sister. There is no government assistance; the forms are too complicated for their rudimentary English.

Do you have enough to eat? Nhut is asked.

He looks at his sister. Her face is expressionless. “We eat rice and vegetables twice a day,” he says.

“No, it is not enough.”

## **PINE RIDGE**

### **South Dakota**

Katherine Red Hail is an Oglala Sioux. She lives on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation. Over the past century, the Sioux have experienced a steady and agonizing decline, hastened by willful fraud, ignorance and muddled good intentions. The traditional "long-houses" which once were scattered across the reservation's low, treeless hills were deemed substandard by the government and replaced. Electric and propane appliances were installed, which few families can afford to fuel or maintain properly. Utility rates run as high as \$650 a month. Much of what little land is suitable for agriculture has been bought up by White farmers, who have access to money for tractors and reapers. With increasing automation, even the farmhand jobs have been lost.

Unemployment figures are largely a matter of speculation. In the summer of 1984, most guesses hovered around 90 percent. According to one government employee, the lowest it has ever been is 50 percent, during the heyday of the CETA program.

There is one significant private enterprise on the reservation, a moccasin factory. It has more than enough orders to turn a profit, but cannot afford the leather to fill those orders. It may soon be forced to close down. That is only one of the many vicious circles that define life on Pine Ridge, as obscurely and implacably as some lopsided wheel of fortune.

This is how Kate Red Hail tells it:

"I was going to school in Nebraska, at a college up there. We came back because of my elderly parents. We moved into the house next to them so I could keep an eye on them. We've been here since 1975. Just recently, I said to my children, 'Within the next two years I'm going to get just as much education as I can. I'll finish the courses that I left.' I said, 'We're going to leave the reservation.' I said, 'We cannot stay here.'

"You probably hear it from everybody, but we don't have jobs. And there's no chance for farming or any kind of self-employment. It's almost impossible to do anything, because we just don't have the resources.

"I remarried in 1978. My husband was actively looking for work, then he just kind of gave up. But then he gets a pension every month for being retired military, so economically we're a little better off than a lot of families, but not that much.

"I have a boy that wants to work. He's married. He's applied to almost every place around here. He tried to get on as a dispatcher at the jail, and he was promised. They said, 'Next time we get an opening, we'll put you in there.' Someone else got hired, and he got real discouraged. But he's always looking.

"It's easier for a woman to find a job than it is for a man. They've made us reverse roles, so the women go out to find jobs and the men are at home tending the kids. That leads into our social problems... drinking, families break up. And even the women's jobs are low paying. There's usually no future in the jobs we do get. I just got in the job training program here, and it pays \$3.35 an hour. Our total income for seven people averages about \$644 a month. The housing at the present time wants \$141. And after I pay that \$141, I have to get propane and lights, and that doesn't leave us anything.

"I live in a housing unit. When we moved in, that house was in really bad condition. There were holes in the walls. The windows were broken up. There were no screens. It was a filthy dirty mess. When we

first moved in there, I opened the refrigerator and the shelves and the door and everything fell out on the floor. Then the oven door fell off and then it just quit altogether. The housing people took that back and gave us another one, but we had to replace the refrigerator. I had to go to the public health service and tell the field nurse about the screens. I said, 'There's flies all over my house and on the food and everything.' So she came down and got the housing people on it, and they put up the screens. But they're rude, very rude. It's a 'we don't want to do it but you're forcing us to do it' sort of thing.

"We moved in there in July. And in November, when the first cold weather hit, I turned on the furnace and nothing happened. The kids and I lived in that house from the winter of '75 through the fall of '78 without a furnace. We heated the house with little electric heaters and used the oven to heat where we could. We closed off the bedrooms in the winter, when it got real cold, and we slept on the floor, in sleeping bags, in the kitchen to keep warm. And this kept on.

"The tiles were loose, so the kids and I got some Elmer's glue and glued the tiles back on. The floors are starting to give now. The basement walls are starting to crumble. And I think those houses we're living in were built in '72, so they're only 12 years old. You move in. You live there. It could fall apart around you and they'd never come and do any maintenance.

"We do get commodity foods: cheese, flour and some canned goods. That makes up about half our diet. We have meat maybe two days out of a month. That's about it. And the meat we do get is usually canned beef or canned pork. You know, I should be grateful because I'm getting something, but it's tasteless. We rarely eat fresh vegetables. And a lot of our commodities bulge anyway, so we have to toss a lot of it out. A lot of our flour has worms in it. We have to throw it out. But a lot of the older people go ahead and sift it and they use it. But you can imagine, if there's worms in the flour, there must be eggs that people are eating along with their bread.

"Probably anybody looking at us would think we're well fed because we're slightly overweight. But if you see Indians that seem a little overweight, that's because of their bad diets. They're just getting a lot of starch. The stores around here charge so much, I guess they have to, that you get a little sack of groceries and it's about \$27. Just enough for one meal.

"Some families have to go on one meal a day. We've done that. And some families haven't been even that fortunate. So, they have to go visiting someplace in order for their kids to get a meal. And that's no exaggeration. That's a fact. We've gone hungry lots of times. I know about that. Hunger's a part of our lives here.

"There's an old lady down the hill who gets only \$127 a month. She's expected to take care of all her expenses with that. She came up to my house one time and she asked me if I had food, because she hadn't eaten for a few days. I told her I'd give her what I could, and I gave her some stuff, and she cried. This is just one.

"When the elderly come to a senior citizens' place to get a meal, they get a cup of beans and a little square of fry-bread. That's it for them for the whole day.

"Sometimes I wish I could just have hundreds of dollars. I'd say, 'Everybody come eat!'

"But of course I can't do that.

"I feel that since we moved back here in '75, the past nine years have been just...I don't know what the word is for it...just existing. Just surviving day to day. I can't hack it anymore on the reservation. It's just...unemployment...problems...just big zero."

**ALAMOSA**  
**Colorado**

*"I finally asked her what she hopes for the children as she brings them up. She smiled, appeared not at all brought up short or puzzled or annoyed. She did hesitate for a few seconds. . . . "Well, I hope each one of them, my three girls and four boys, each one of them has a hot plate like that one over there and some food to put on it, and I mean every day."*

***Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers***  
***Volume II of Children in Crisis***  
Robert Coles, M.D.

The hot plates are lined up against one side of the large frame structure, a building hauntingly reminiscent of a deserted airplane hangar. A few rusted refrigerators and one or two sinks cover the other side. The floor is gray cement; the ceiling, a corrugated tin roof. Bare light bulbs dangle from above. A few hooks serve as closets. There are no partitions for privacy. Soiled mattresses, their bunting poking out of shredded corners, are stacked in a corner, awaiting the arrival this week of the seasonal farm workers, here to pick the lettuce. It is early evening but, with the late afternoon sun still beating down and little ventilation, the heat is overpowering. It is difficult to breathe.

Jessie is lucky. Her family has managed to escape the workers' camp this time, having found a dingy three-room apartment outside of town.

Up until last year, her husband had attempted to keep Jessie and the three kids—ages 14 months to 9 years—in a small apartment in El Paso while he followed the migrant stream, picking lettuce in one state, then another. Through a translator—Jessie's never had the opportunity to learn English—she explains that money's been slow this year, so Sam, her husband, could no longer afford to keep the apartment in Texas. So when he followed the lettuce crop to Colorado, Jessie—pregnant with their fourth child—and the kids came too.

"Sam, he didn't have much schooling," Jessie explains. "He was out working in the fields when he was young. His parents, they were migrant workers, too." Jessie's education ended in the first grade. Born in Mexico, her widowed father sent her up north with another family when she was 13. She picked alongside them in the fields till she was married. Once her two older children were in school, she returned to the fields, but she hasn't worked much since the young one was born. "We were hoping—dreaming really—allows Jessie, "of settling down. That he could get work on a ranch. But that hasn't happened. There don't seem too much chance for getting steady work."

The drifting this year has been hard on the family. The kids have been shifted from one school to another and then another. Many of the teachers around the border towns don't want to teach bilingually, Jessie thinks. Learning English has been difficult for her children. especially the boy.

"He'd get angry and say 'Mom, you speak Spanish, Dad speaks Spanish, they speak Spanish on the street.' But he's picking it up real fast now' she adds proudly. "If he could only stay in one school..."

But Jessie can't dwell on the future; she's riveted on today and how to feed her family.

When Sam was working the fields in California or Arizona, it was hard to get food stamps in Texas. She smiles absentmindedly at the bureaucracy of state agencies, the intricacies of employment documentation, the multiplicity of paper. “And if he couldn’t send any money...for example, in Texas this year, a lot of the lettuce crop was lost...” Her voice trails off. There is no need for the translator to interpret her silence.

Colorado has not been much easier. In January, it took two months to get the food stamps. The family ate boiled potatoes and onions most of the time. When they moved to their present location, Jessie had to return five times before she could find someone in the food stamp office who could speak Spanish. The family survived on meager donations of cereal, rice and beans from friends during that period. Jessie and Sam routinely skip meals so their children have enough to eat. Though she is now getting WIC assistance to purchase juice, milk, eggs and cheese, she is concerned about the impact of her inadequate diet on her unborn child.

In a society that often equates the worth of an individual with economic success, finding a sympathetic response to their problems is not easy. Many of the locals accuse them of simply “sucking off everyone else.” Finding adequate housing at a reasonable price seems a near impossibility; in fact, what they earn is barely enough to pay for the dilapidated places they rent, according to one private agency worker. The lack of stability takes its toll on the family. They must rely on just each other with their constant movement, and in contrast to the revered American myth that hard times weld a family together, this can result in alienation, desperation, even child abuse.

And when does the cycle end? Jessie dreams of putting down roots in one place, while acknowledging that Sam feels it is about time to start teaching the 9-year-old how to work the fields. The hope for tomorrow is strangled by today’s need.

## **DETROIT**

### **Michigan**

*“When the Big Three ain’t working, the people in Detroit, they’re starving—that’s the way the economy is built in Detroit City.”*

—Red, an unemployed auto worker from Detroit

Probably no American city is more symbolic of the recent “recession” than Detroit, Michigan. In 1981 and 1982, more than 300,000 men and women were out of work in the city of the “Big Three” -- Chrysler, Ford, and GM. The state of Michigan had the highest unemployment rate in the nation, 15 percent, while unemployment figures for Detroit alone were as high as 18 percent.

For many people, the recession—or, as the people here call it, the “crunch”—was their first experience with unemployment. A few were able to wait out the hard times and were lucky enough to be recalled to their jobs. Most, however, left work to which they would never return and are still coping with unemployment.

In an old Ford motor plant—closed three years ago because of the recession—an eight-month program trains minority men and women to become machinists in the tool-and-die industry, one of the few heavy industries presently experiencing manpower shortages. Most of the people in the program held steady jobs at one time, but have been unemployed for the last two to four years. While assured of finding well-paying jobs upon graduation, they receive no salary while in the training program.

The excerpts that follow are drawn from a discussion in a classroom on the second floor of the large training facility. Among the group seated around the table are:

#### **RED**

His friends call him Red because of the rose tint to his large aviator glasses. At 35, Red describes himself as more of a listener than a talker. He is divorced, but makes an effort to stay in touch with his three children.

#### **AL**

Al has been living in Detroit since the age of 2, but if you ask him, he will tell you that he is from Alabama. He is a powerful man. 6 feet 6 inches tall, with strong yet young looking features. Despite his size, he has a soft, quiet voice—which often drops to no more than a whisper, then amplifies to moments of forceful intensity. At 31, Al is the proud father of 10 children. His one goal in life, he says, is to instill strong character into his children. Because, he says, “strong character will outlast anything that you can buy.” In the four years that Al has been without steady work, he has refused to go on welfare.

#### **GERALD**

A self-portrait of Gerald shows a young man of about 30, head slightly bowed, gazing off to the right. The cloudy blue background of the painting gives it a hazy quality. Gerald is an artist, and the portrait hangs in the front hall of his house. Unable to make a living at his craft, Gerald managed without joining the training program in search of a secure career. He hopes to apply his artistic ability to mechanical drafting.

## **FRANK**

Frank, the one white in the group, has been out of work the shortest amount of time—a year prior to joining the training program. Despite the burden of unemployment, Frank feels that he made the most of his experience by spending time with his family. He speaks with pride of his two daughters. The 6-year-old, he says, is a born leader.

In their own words, this is the story told by Red, Al, Gerald, and Frank:

**Red:** You come to Detroit and you see guys hanging around corners, and running up and down just trying to survive. It's been that tough for the people in this city for the last six, seven, eight, nine years. I've never had it so hard as these last couple of years—the crunch. I was born in a real small, rural community right outside of Detroit. My mom and dad worked, so I wasn't disadvantaged. I could remember when we was younger even, when they had that recession in the late '50s, I could always remember my father going to work; it seems that he was never without a job—he never had to go on welfare, or collect unemployment compensation. Myself, I've always been used to a weekly paycheck. Then all of a sudden, the bottom dropped out. And you can't find a job. It's not because you don't want to, but you really haven't trained for nothing because it's a tradition here in this city that you go to the auto factory. You said, "I'm going to make just as much money as a guy with four years' college," so nobody trained for anything. We all just continued to work on that assembly line, or whatever you did inside the factory, and you made good money doing it. So, when the crunch came there wasn't nobody prepared.

**Al:** The situation was more or less that 34 years weren't enough to keep you in work. In a lot of instances they were laying off guys who had been with the job more than with their wives. The impact on the morale was so visible—it didn't take very much deciphering for you to figure out that there was something very bad that was happening here.

**Red:** When you're down and out, and you ain't got no money, and you don't know where your next meal is coming from, it's a depressing situation. You don't have time to think about nothing but the bare survival. And I've been in that situation, where I didn't even have a place to stay. It's a situation where you just got to worry about surviving—eating, sleeping, you know. And I don't even mean washing up; I mean just staying alive. Living like an animal, truly, is what my existence was for the last year and a half.

**Gerald:** You see this? (*Gerald points to a small red mark on his right arm.*) I give blood twice a week. I get \$10 each time. How about that? It's come to the point where people are giving their own blood just to survive.

**Al:** The man on the street is doing a lot of things about surviving. . . and the thing is, you're so locked up in what you're dealing with, and with your problems, that you forget that everyone else is doing the same thing. . . just trying to survive.

**Red:** I survived by doing some of everything. I took on odd jobs, whatever I could find. But I got frustrated trying to look for work. The work I did find was so demeaning and the pay was so bad, there wasn't any incentive to even stay on the job.

**Al:** [*Al stands up, towering above the group, his voice loud and angry.*] The question I keep asking myself is "What did I do wrong?" How did I fail? I have always been a good American.

*[Al sits back down and stares at the table. The group is silent for several moments.]*

**Gerald:** There's a lot of frustration.

**Al:** A lot of frustration, an enormous amount of it. And the thing of it is, while you're dealing with your problems and they're so frustrating...this frustration is like a lot of little bombs just waiting to go off. I remember one Christmas, this was one of the worst years that I have ever experienced. My wife and I couldn't afford to buy our children Christmas presents to put under the tree. And I remember watching my little girl, my baby girl, standing up in her crib. She had holes in her underwear, holes in her socks, and I remember the frustration just rising up inside of me. Somebody was going to get hurt that night. Because when you start seeing your baby in this kind of situation, and if you're a man, you're going to do something about it. *[Al's voice intensifies.]* If you are a *man* you are going to do *something* about it. It might be dumb in society's eyes, but when it comes down to survival, and taking care of yours, you're going to do something. It don't make no difference whether it's white, black, green, purple or blue—it don't make no difference if it's a friend, a brother, or a cousin—you're going to do something about your situation.

I've been there, and I think just about everyone in this room has been there too. This is the kind of person that's going to say, "I ain't got nothing to lose," and that kind of person is very dangerous and vicious.

**Frank:** It just seems like the system is not set up for a guy that's trying to be honest and decent. And then you look out on the street, and everybody that's selling dope is doing fine. It's amazing. I don't understand the system. And it gets frustrating, because I don't want to be a damn crook. I don't want to have to lie to people, or steal. I don't want to do those things, but the only people that are making any money is the people that are doing that.

**Al:** And that's why we have so many crimes, and all the social problems that we have now. The thing that really bothers me is that these kinds of situations tend to make bad people out of good people—and I see it happening. Guys I know that aren't really robbers or thieves, but they feel like they're forced down to it—this is more or less what they've got to do to survive. I mean, guys that I grew up with are just turning into things that I never thought they would—it's a form of mutation to me. I've always held them in the highest esteem, but they are turning into some things now. . .some kind of street animal things that I never felt they would.

*(Later, the discussion turns to hunger.)*

**Frank:** There's really a lot of times when there's just no food in the house to speak of. We get \$79 a month in food stamps and the reality is, to feed four people, that would last about four days, maybe, depending upon what kind of staples you want. We don't eat a hell of a lot. My wife and I eat the least amount of anybody. We try to feed the kids, because I can manage without anything. I'm the type, I can just live on staples—things you can put in the cupboard and they'll last. So, that helps some. The kids love macaroni and cheese, both of them. But you know, you get so busy trying to figure out how to pay bills that are just up in the damn moon somewhere—we can't even eat. And it's hard to make a decision sometimes between trying to buy food, or using the money to pay a bill. You've got to eat, so a lot of times I'd say, "Well, come shut off the gas, shut it off, because I can't keep paying it."

**Red:** Sometimes I don't eat breakfast and I won't eat dinner because I just don't have the money to eat with. Welfare only gives you so much. And most of the time I take my food stamps, \$72 a month, and give them to my niece because she's in poverty too, and try to help her out. Fortunately, I do have people in the city—my pride was keeping me away as long as possible. I would go in and ask my sisters. "I'm awful weak, could I have something to eat?" But at times, if it wasn't for them. I might have laid down and just died.

*[The group is silent. The discussion turns to children.]*

**Gerald:** When other kids have certain clothes and toys that my kids don't have, I try to trade it off and tell my kids that they've learned responsibility. You know. "You do a few things, I just can't give you everything." But if you see your kid want these things so bad—if the peer pressure is that much—it makes you want to go Out and steal something, so that you can give them these things. You don't want to see *them* doing it—you want them to have the things, and not let peer pressure turn them into a bad record. I see boys that are on the street selling dope, and they're so young, barely teenagers. They're making more money than their father, who's unemployed, and they stop respecting him. They say, "Dad, I'm making \$200 a day—and I'm making more money than you ever made in a month. I'm making it in a few days."

**Al:** When you can get a 6-year-old child saying something like, "Oh, wow, we got a phone, now we're almost normal— all we need now is a car and that way we could do other things, and it would be all right"… you see, it's the small things, they take small things and blow it up.

**Gerald:** You look at the media and all you see is comic book stories—you see "Dynasty" and "Dallas." You see all these stories about the "haves," you don't ever see stories about the "have nots." The kids today, they're bombarded by these funny books, telling them there's so much they could have. These kids want to have these things. I didn't grow up under that kind of media barrage. Also, the kids were able to scrape around and do a little hustling. When we talk about the old days, the apple carts and things that you could do—these kids don't hustle nowadays. You catch grown people out and trying to make the hustle, just trying to eat and survive. These kids don't have anything to do. They don't have pride in themselves.

**Frank:** What are kids going to think when they see a world where they got to be a crook to survive?

**Red:** What I think it done to my kids was. . . I regret now that the crunch came, because I've got a boy that's in the Army, and he chose to make money rather than to take up a couple of scholarships that he had been offered. And I think about it today, you know. I can understand him, being at that age—the age of 19, wanting some money. But in a sense it really hurt me because the last three or four years I wasn't able to help him at all. So, I can understand him wanting to go out and get some of the things that he's been craving, but I hate that he blew the opportunity of getting educated.

**Frank:** I want my kids to have it a little better than I did, because I didn't have anything. It's hard to picture what my kids are going to have to. . . what the hell kind of situation they're going to be in with the way things are now. We've got ourselves in a mess, and somewhere, somehow it's got to be straightened out, because our kids are going to pick up what we're doing—whether it's good or bad, the kids are going to pick it up. Everybody's got to start raising their kids to start caring what the hell's wrong now, because they're going to be the people running this whole show. They have got to be brought up a certain way, with certain qualities, strengths and beliefs, or it's not going to change. The system's got to be changed. There's no getting around it, we're just killing ourselves.

**AI:** Maybe somebody in charge or somebody that's part of the controlling structure of this country might realize that there are a lot of good people being hurt—a lot of them who are being forced to hurt themselves—because of this whole situation. If we don't do something soon, we are going to evolve into something very, very sick.

# For Family of a Dead Child, A Long History of Troubles

By JOE SEXTON

NEW YORK, Sept 4— Prison was only the last stop on Carla Lockwood's miserable family journey. one that over the years brought the troubled mother and her children into contact with far more institutions than just the city's child welfare agency. Before- her 4-year-old daughter, Nadine, was found dead last week, there were public schools, hospitals, the housing authority, welfare benefits offices, a private social service agency.

The Lockwoods had faced homelessness and sought emergency shelter, along the way becoming clients of one of the city's highly regarded private social-service agencies; the family had been aided by a housing subsidy from the city, only to be cut off eventually from welfare benefits and food stamps by the city's Human Resources Administration; three of the eight children had not gone to the local public school for a year or more; three had been born addicted to drugs at one of the city's prominent hospitals, one with an extensive program for dealing with just such dangerous family predicaments.

In the end, the mix of bad fortune and good intentions, blessings, mistakes and a mother's apparent act of malice, did not prevent Nadine from dying. The city's Medical Examiner said today that the child had died of malnutrition and dehydration, reduced nearly to bones. At her death, a week from her fifth birthday. Nadine Lockwood weighed 15½ pounds. less than the weight of an average 1-year-old.

"Our investigation," said Nicholas Scoppetta, Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services, "will focus on the performance of the child welfare agency, but it will also include all the agencies, schools, hospitals and neighborhood-based organizations that came into contact with this family. Of course, the child welfare agency should take the lead in integrating the efforts of others trying to assist troubled families. But the saying is that it takes a village to raise a child. Where was the village?"

The Lockwood family's first stop after leaving the Manhattan apartment of Ms. Lockwood's mother in 1991 was an apartment provided by the Children's Aid Society, a private nonprofit organization that then had Mr. Scoppetta as its president. According to that agency's records, Nadine Lockwood was a month old when she arrived with four siblings and her mother at a renovated apartment on West 118th Street.

The family stayed for eight months at the apartment, offered day care, health care services, job training and other resources. Staff members, according to agency reports, instantly identified Ms. Lockwood as an "overwhelmed parent."

An agency official said that Ms. Lockwood often failed to get her children organized for school, and attendance was a recurring problem.

Despite the fact that Ms. Lockwood had a three-year history with the city's child welfare agency, . both Nadine and another girl, Natasha, had been born with drugs in their system, prompting investigations — that information was never shared with the Children's Aid Society. The Lockwoods had been sent to the agency as a "housing referral."

The Children's Aid Society, whatever its concerns about Ms. Lockwood's fitness as a parent, never saw physical evidence of neglect or abuse and never made a report to the city child welfare agency.

The Lockwood family, given a special housing subsidy, was moved into an apartment at 961 St. Nicholas Avenue in May 1992. The oldest daughter, Nicole, enrolled at Public School 52 but was removed at age 12. According to child welfare records, Nicole never attended school after 1994. The caseworker who examined the family in 1995 also concluded that two other children, Nathan and Natasha, had not gone to school for a year.

The dysfunctional family, supported in part by an absentee father, Leroy Dickerson, was granted welfare benefits in 1995. The benefits included \$498 a month in food stamps.

But starting in May 1995, the various city agencies, apparently with no contact among themselves, began to withdraw help.

On May 31, the City Housing Authority ended its grant of \$621 a month to pay rent, a subsidy it had provided since 1992. It cited Ms. Lockwood's failure to verify her income and to reapply formally. There is no indication of an investigation of her circumstances.

A year later, on June 22, 1996, Ms. Lockwood was cut off from her welfare benefits altogether. The reason cited on her records was a "failure to recertify," meaning Ms. Lockwood had not submitted the proper paper work or shown up for an interview.

The termination appears to have been done by mail, and no caseworker was assigned to assess Ms. Lockwood's condition or that of her children. It is unclear if the child welfare agency was ever informed.

## What do we know about the poor

Reducing poverty is the fundamental objective of economic development. It is estimated that in 1985 more than one billion people in the developing world lived in absolute poverty. Clearly, economic development has a long way to go. Knowledge about the poor is essential if governments are to adopt sound development strategies and more effective policies for attacking poverty. How many poor are there? Where do they live? What are their precise economic circumstances? Answering these questions is the first step toward understanding the impact of economic policies on the poor. This chapter draws on a number of detailed household surveys done over the past ten years or so, including some conducted by the World Bank, to estimate the number of poor people and to establish what is known about them.

### **Three poor families**

We begin by focusing on the people this Report is intended to help—by telling the stories of three poor families living in three different countries. These families have much in common. For them, the difference between a tolerable quality of life and mere survival depends on their capacity to work and on their opportunities to work. Lack of education, landlessness, and acute vulnerability to illness and seasonal hard times affect all of them to varying degrees. Problems such as these are at the core of poverty.

#### *A poor subsistence farmer's household in Ghana*

In Ghana's Savannah region a typical family of seven lives in three one-room huts made from mud bricks, with earthen floors. They have little furniture and no toilet, electricity, or running water. Water is obtained from a stream a fifteen-minute walk away. The family has few possessions, apart from three acres of unirrigated land and one cow, and virtually no savings.

The family raises sorghum, vegetables, and groundnuts on its land. The work is seasonal

and physically demanding. At peak periods of tilling, sowing, and harvesting, all family members are involved, including the husband's parents, who are sixty and seventy years old. The soil is very low in quality, but the family lacks access to fertilizer and other modern inputs. Moreover, the region is susceptible to drought; the rains fail two years out of every five. In addition to her farm work, the wife has to fetch water, collect firewood, and feed the family. The market town where the husband sells their meager cash crops and buys essentials is five miles away and is reached by dirt tracks and an unsealed road that is washed away every time the rains come.

None of the older family members ever attended school, but the eight-year-old son is now in the grade family hopes that he will be able to although there is pressure to keep him at home to help with the farm in the busy periods. He and his two younger sisters have never had any vaccinations and have never seen a doctor.

#### *A poor urban household in Peru*

In a shantytown on the outskirts of Lima a shack made of scraps of wood, iron, and cardboard houses a family of six. Inside there is a bed, a table, a radio, and two benches. The kitchen consists of a small kerosene stove and some tins in one corner. There is no toilet or electricity. The shantytown is provided with some public services, but these tend to be intermittent. Garbage is collected twice a week. Water is delivered to those who have a cement tank, but this family has been unable to save enough for the cement. In the meantime, the mother and eldest daughter fill buckets at the public standpipe 500 yards away.

Husband and wife are Indians from the same mountain village in the Sierra. Neither completed primary school. They came to Lima with two children almost four years ago, hoping to find work and schools. Although they have jobs, the economic recession of the past few years has hit them hard.

Better-off neighbors who arrived in Lima three to six years before they did say that it was easier to get ahead then. Still, husband and wife are hopeful that they will soon be able to rebuild their house with bricks and cement and, in time, install electricity, running water, and a toilet like their neighbors. They now have four children, after losing one infant, and the two oldest attend the local community school, recently built with funds and assistance from a nongovernmental organization (NGO). All the children were given polio and diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT) inoculations when a mobile clinic came to the shantytown. Community solidarity is strong, and a community center is active in the shantytown.

The father works in construction as a casual laborer. The work is uncertain, and there are periods when he must take any odd job he can find. When he is hired on a construction site, however, it is frequently for a month or so. His wife worries that he will be injured on the job like some of his fellow workers, who can no longer work and yet receive no compensation. She earns some income doing laundry at a wealthy person's house twice a week. To get there she must take a long bus ride, but the job does enable her to look after her one- and three-year-old children. She is also in charge of all domestic chores at home. When she is away from the house for long periods, the two oldest children take morning and afternoon turns at school so as not to leave the house unattended. There have been many burglaries in the neighborhood recently, and although the family has few possessions, radios and kerosene stoves are much in demand. The family lives on rice, bread, and vegetable oil (all subsidized by the government), supplemented with vegetables and, occasionally, some fish.

*A poor landless laborer's household in Bangladesh*

In a rural community in a drought-prone region of Bangladesh a landless laborer and his family attempt to get through another lean season.

Their house consists of a packed mud floor and a straw roof held up by bamboo poles from which dry palm leaves are tied to serve as walls. Inside there is straw to sleep on and burlap bags for warmth. The laborer and his wife, three children, and niece do not own the land on which the shack is built. They are lucky, however, to have a kindly neighbor who has indefinitely lent them the plot and a little extra on which they are able to grow turmeric and ginger and have planted a jackfruit tree.

The father is an agricultural day laborer and tends to be underemployed most of the year. During slow agricultural periods in the past he could sometimes find nonagricultural wage labor—for example, in construction in a nearby town—but he lost the strength to do much strenuous work after a bout of paratyphoid. He therefore engages in petty services around the village for very low pay. The wife typically spends her day cooking, caring for the children, husking rice, and fetching water from the well. She is helped in these tasks by her thirteen-year-old niece, whose parents died in a cholera epidemic some years ago. The woman and her niece are always on the lookout for ways to earn a little extra. Such work as husking rice, weeding fields, and chopping wood is sometimes available from better-off neighbors. The nine-year-old son attends school a few mornings a week in a town an hour's walk away. The rest of the day he and his seven-year-old sister gather fuel and edible roots and weeds. The sister also looks after the baby when her mother or cousin cannot.

The household spends about 85 percent of its meager income on food—predominantly rice. Family members are used to having only two meals a day. They hope to struggle through to the rice harvest without having to cut down and sell their jackfruit tree or the bamboo poles supporting their roof.

## The life and death of one child: Rakku's story<sup>1</sup>

### The chain of causes

The account below is drawn from *Rakku's Story*, a book by Sheila Zurbrigg based on a true incident that took place in a village in India. (We have condensed and somewhat modified the original version.) The story vividly illustrates how a child's death—in this case from diarrhea—is the final outcome of a long chain of inter-related causes. Links in the chain included severe diarrhea and dehydration; extreme malnutrition; crowded, unsanitary living conditions; and lack of clean water. These, in turn, had many underlying causes. Rakku's story points to some of the many links in the causal chain.

### *Rakku's story*

Rakku had wanted to only breastfeed her baby. This had long been the tradition of women in her village. However, in order for her family to survive, Rakku had to work in the land owner's fields from dawn to dusk. With the long hours of separation from her baby, she had little choice but to give her baby other foods. Soon she no longer could produce much breast milk.

As both a landless peasant and a woman, Rakku was doubly disadvantaged. For long hours of exhausting work, she was paid too little to adequately feed her family. Since the age of seven, her older son, Kannan, had been helping make ends meet by taking the cattle of several landowning families out to graze in the scrub.

While she was working in the distant fields, Rakku left her baby in their wattle hut in the care of her five-year-old daughter, Ponnu. Each morning before dawn, Rakku would haul water from the distant water hole. She would pound a few handfuls of ragi (millet) and cook it into a gruel for the family to eat. Although there was often not enough ragi to fill all their stomachs, Rakku would always leave a little on the plate, instructing Ponnu to feed it to the baby while her mother was at work in the distant fields.

Even with the older children also working, the family's earnings could scarcely buy enough food. The baby, like the rest of the family, often went hungry. Worsening malnutrition and repeated bouts of diarrhea soon became a vicious cycle. Sometimes Rakku took the sick baby to a traditional healer, who gave him rice water and herbal teas.

The baby would usually get better for a few days, but soon Rakku's baby became thinner and thinner. One day he developed such severe diarrhea that did not get much better even when Rakku gave him the traditional remedies of rice water and herbal tea. His "runny stomach" continued for several days, until the baby was as limp and shriveled as a rice paddy in a drought.

In desperation, Rakku decided to take her baby to the hospital in the city. This was a hard decision, as Rakku had to miss a day's work and a day's pay. At best, this meant a day without food, for the family had no reserves. At worst, Rakku might lose her job — the consequences of which she was afraid to think about. She knew that a wiser mother would let her sick baby die to preserve the rest of the family. But Rakku's love for her baby was too strong.

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<sup>1</sup> This is quoted direct from Werner, D. and Sanders, D. (1997) 'Questioning the Solution', pp 11-12. The story introduces part I the book. Permission requested. The quote is drawn from Zurbrigg (1984).

Rakku sold a bronze pot she had inherited from her mother — the last of her remaining possessions of any value — to pay for bus fare and medicine, and took her baby to the city hospital. She had to pay a bribe to the guard to let her in the hospital gate. After hours of waiting in long lines, at last her baby was seen. By then the baby was on the verge of death.

The doctor scolded Rakku for waiting so long, and for not taking better care of her baby. He referred her to a nurse, who carefully explained to her the importance of breastfeeding and something the nurse called “hygiene.” Above all, the nurse emphasized, her baby needed more and better food. Rakku listened in silence.

Meanwhile, the doctor put a needle into a vein in the baby’s ankle and connected it by a thin tube to a bottle of glucose water. By evening the baby’s shrunken body filled out a bit, and he seemed more alert. The diarrhea had stopped, and the late night nurse removed the needle from the baby’s leg. The next morning a doctor gave Rakku a prescription for medicines to buy in the pharmacy and sent them home. On the way home the baby’s diarrhea began again.

Arriving back home, Rakku had neither food, nor money, nor anything left to sell. Her baby died a short time later.

One characteristic portrayed in the story as told by Sheila Zurbrigg, but lost in our short summary, is Rakku’s deep love for her baby: the enormous courage of her struggle to save his life, and her clear perception of her baby’s basic needs. What also comes across strongly is Rakku’s powerlessness to do anything about the inescapable underlying causes of her baby’s death.