

## Bottom of the Food Chain

Growing up as a kid, we struggled through the toughest times, even being the only child. I grew up in an impoverished, shanty apartment in Dallas, living with my parents, and grandma. I couldn't tell you how atrocious the living conditions were. The ceilings were filled with rats and mice, walls covered with black spots, and when you turn on the kitchen light, you'll see a swarm of cockroaches on the floor just scattered, leaving behind some dark pellets. My parents were hairstylists, but did not make much income. My grandma stayed home and took care of me.

Being at home, there wasn't much entertainment. We had an cheap antenna you could buy at Radio Shack that only received a dozen channels. Sometimes, you couldn't even watch TV because there was no signal. I didn't have normal toys either, like G.I. Joe or Transformers. I only had a collection of McDonalds happy meal toys to play with. I remember at one point, my grandma had a heart attack. We didn't have health insurance so the medical bill was expensive. So I tried to sell my toy collection to kids at the park to help pay the bill. I only managed to make 78 cents. Times were hard, but I knew I was fortunate enough to have a roof over my head.

At the time, being a naive, immature kid, I had no sense of social class whatsoever. The school had a dress code policy, so you couldn't point out who was affluent or poverty-stricken. It wasn't until high school that I realized what social class level we were on; working, lower class. We eventually moved to a one-story house a couple of years later.

Walking into my first day of highschool, I didn't know what to expect. After watching some shows about high school, I was expecting a random bully tossing your body against the locker threatening to beat you up if you didn't give him your lunch money. I was pretty nervous. Wearing clothes from GoodWill, I was very self-conscious about the way I looked and how others thought about me. My sense of social class began to develop as soon as I witnessed a

group of kids, acting stuck-up and superior to a foreign exchange student, trying to make new friends. One guy wore expensive Air Jordan basketball shoes, a bright red shirt with a gleaming Versace logo. I sadly glanced down to my badly bleached red t-shirt and worn-out black Nikes I've been wearing since middle school. Unfortunately, I became a victim of "fitting in". I stared at snotty kids and wondered, "Why can't I have nice clothes like these people?"

I made the decision to get a part-time job at a Lakeview car wash. I knew I wasn't going to get paid much, but it was enough to get me some better clothes. I never had work experience, but I wasn't nervous or anything. I mean washing cars should be effortless. I was dead wrong. My first day of work, it was about 100 degrees outside. My job was to dry cars and clean rims, tires and interior. I never experienced anything as bad as this before. I was sweating harder than a marathon runner. I didn't realize how much labor and effort you had to put into washing cars. Cleaning rims and tires were repetitive and obnoxiously boring. Seeing my other co-workers, mostly Hispanic, made me realize I didn't have it as bad as them. I talked to some of the workers as I was cleaning cars. Some of these men and women were either in their late 30s or early 40s. These people worked so hard for 7 years to make so little. They had no choice but to work here because most of them were illegal. It didn't make sense to me. I thought, "Why couldn't everyone just get paid the same?" I learned that money makes the world go around and not everyone gets to have an opportunity at being successful. I've worked at the car wash for 40 hours a week and helped pay for the electric bill. After 7 months of being in the hot sun, which caused a crucial farmers tan, and washing countless amounts of cars, I quit working there and started working at QuikTrip still today. My parents were fortunate enough to expand their business and buy another hair stylist shop. Even though you might not have the nicest cars or the

latest phones or even a luxurious home, appreciate the little things you do have and love the life god has given you.