

The low-wage worker wanting the american dream

[Art & Culture](#), [American Dream](#)



What she truly experienced was someone stepping out of her comfort zone into a life that she was not born into. Again, though, her main idea was to find a job and be able to survive income for expenses. In reality, those working in a low-wage job are just trying to survive, and hoping by the end of the day they have broke even, even though most don't. In *Winter Coat*, Terrier Griffith, tells the story of what its like growing up poor and wanting to be different. Griffith states that " the thing about being poor is that you know what it means to be poor - and there's always someone poorer than you. (Tea 61) Griffith talks about what it was like wearing hand me downs, being in the free lunch program, and other classifications,' like standing in the free lunch line, that sometime embarrassed her. Her mother wanted her to have a future different than the one she was raising Griffith in. Because of the pressure from her mom, she realizes that " without the protection economic stability provides, this is no room for failure. She had no room to fail. " (Tea 64) She was raised to take the 'safe road. Griffith talks about the class of people, especially by what they are wearing, and explains that by comparing the different coats people wear on the train that she rides. She realizes that many people continually deal with wanting the American Dream everyday. " What about the American Dream, the theory that with hard work and perseverance people can transcend in the class in to which they are born? Want to believe in it, but I don't. Class is about more than money; its about safety and security, knowing that what you have today, you will have tomorrow.

It's about having faith and feeling safe in the knowledge that when my coat gets worn out, there will be other coats. " (Tea 65) No matter what class

people are in, I believe everyone is trying to live out their definition of the American Dream. The cost for this hope can be life hanging. In *The Just-Add-Water Kennedy's and Barbecue Bread* Violence, Polyester, starts off her story focusing on the American Dream. Polyester states, " Fewer than one percent of Americans break out of the class they are born into. " (Tea 67) She goes on to tell about her parents and their dream of class jumping, and how they devote their lives to it.

To her parents, the working class neighborhood, where they lived, was only temporary. Her parents wanted better. Even her grandparents wanted better. It was embedded into each generation that you could move higher up in class, with just the right job, the right education, and the right privileges. Her family struggled with this for years. The only purpose of the " children" was to become rich. When her father landed a job that provided more money, her parents felt that they had fulfilled their dream, the American Dream. Polyester states: " Their dream for us hadn't died.

Higher education, to my parents, was still a way for their children to jump class... No matter how hard they tried to turn us into just-add-water Kennedy's, all fifth's posturing failed, and so did college. The bottom line was that we were lower class, and there was no way we could be any different. (Tea 73) Though the stories are different, the results are the same. Just as Polyester states, very few Americans break out of the class they are born into, though many want to believe it's possible. In Rehearing's journey, she tries to become lower class, but does not succeed.

She sets rules and limits, whereas, most lower class don't have rules or limits, only their basic need is to survive. The lower class tries to make it to make it to the next month, with the hope that tomorrow they won't need as much. Their dream is that their children will do better than they did, with the hopes that one day, just maybe class can be jumped, if not by them, then maybe their children. When it comes to the relationships of the lower class, look at the relationship Polyester had with her parents. Her parents tried and pushed hard to come out of the class they were in.

They tried to fit in, to be different. It was embedded into them by their parents, that they were not worth anything unless they succeeded. This was their reward. Her parents pushed, both them selves and their children. When her father failed, he 'couldn't deal with the shame' and later committed suicide, only apologizing to his parents for failing. To him, to succeed was to be rich; to fail was to be poor. After his death, her family went their separate ways. Polyester's family was only 'together' to become rich, to jump a class. But when life showed them that they couldn't they didn't stay together.

I don't think it matters which class you are, if your family falls apart, it was together for the wrong reasons. I look at my own family situation when I read all three of these stories. Grew up in a lower class family. Both parents had to work to make ends meet. We were not the poorest of the poor, but there were times where we had to rely on the DOD pantry to eat or sign up for help at Christmas just to get presents. L, in no means, thought I would ever stay there. My parents never pushed me to be better then they were, but believe

they wanted more for my siblings and me. My parents divorced when I was young and both remarried.

I lived with my mom and step dad, where money was tight and I wore hand me downs from my cousin. My dad and his wife had a different life. Though both worked, their kids always had new clothes, and the latest video games. They had a new house, where mine flooded every time it rained. I was on the border of lower and middle class. I went on to Bible College, where I pursued a dream of working in children's ministry. To my father, it was a waste of my time, as I would make no money from it. When was done, I found myself working in a call center, at a low wage job, making just enough to make ends meet.

After I was married I became a nanny, barely making minimum Wage and having to pay my own taxes. Now we had one child. My husband and I struggled for years, as he was laid off from his job and then tried to start his own business. There were many health issues that got ignored because we didn't have health insurance. I tried selling Mary Kay Cosmetics, buying into the notion that 'I could be rich like her' if followed the dream Mary Kay laid out for us. The 'dream' ended as a business loss, and costing us more, than I had put into it at the beginning.

Reading all three of these accounts had me relating to many of the situations the authors found themselves in. Griffith accounts of being poor and wanting to be different, reminded me of when I was younger and used to tell stories of my parents being a pilot or working for the government, just so I could fit in. Though the story wasn't true, the desire to fit in was deep rooted,

and to this day I even find myself wanting to dress icier, and even more up-class, just so the world won't know I am still lower class. Who is to know that my clothes came from goodwill or a garage sale?

Polyester's parents remind me of my own father, who believes that a stay-at-home mom doesn't amount to much, and that a college degree really shows what you are worth. My father wasn't the extreme like Polyester's father, but am continually asked about how much I make, or when I will graduate. I have been promised many things, as long as I finish my degree, because to him, that is all that matters. As for Rehiring, the people she worked with in err low-wage jobs remind me of myself sometimes, I still don't think she could ever truly feel the true emotions of what it is like to be in a low class family.

Struggling to make ends meet. Would love to switch places with her and see if she could handle the stress that seems to follow when you are a low-class working family. I have dreamed of living the American Dream. To own a home, have good schools for my children to attend, to not worry about how much I spend at the grocery store, or even be concerned when or if the bills will get paid. Want a life where health insurance isn't an issue, and I'm not living paycheck to paycheck. I have to believe its possible to obtain it, to have hope.