

How Did My Life End Up Like This?

I am Irene Sanders. I do not know how my life ended up like this, but I am doing the best I can to provide for my family. When my family and I moved from Mexico to the United States, I thought that life would be different. I am a single mother with three little children. My oldest child is 12, and her name is Rebecca. I have two little boys who are 7 and 4, Robert and Raymond. We live in Mesa, Arizona, in a very cramped two-bedroom apartment. That is all I can afford right now. I am just thankful that we have a roof over our heads, because I am struggling to make ends meet. Working 40 hours a week, as a short-order cook at a local restaurant, is how I make a living to put food on the table for my children, and pay my bills. My pay scale is minimum wage; I only get paid \$7.50 an hour, so my take home is not very much. My monthly income is \$1200.00, but they take out \$200.00 in taxes so I am really only left with a \$1000.00. My rent is \$550.00, plus another \$70.00 for utilities. By the time my rent and utilities are paid, I am not really left with much to work with. Luckily, Rebecca and Robert are old enough to go to school, but Raymond is only 4, so I need to pay \$300.00 a month for childcare. This \$300.00 a month would really come in handy for food and other incidentals, but I am forced to put him in daycare while I am working. All the money from my salary that is left over for the entire month to feed myself, and my three growing children, is \$80.00. I also have other responsibilities, such as buying new clothes. My children are at the age where they are just growing so fast that it seems as though each week one of them needs a new pair of shoes. I am fortunate that I live close enough to walk to work. There is a bus stop close by, but I cannot afford to dip into my funds for such a luxury. I am probably the only person in the state of Arizona that does not have a house phone or better yet, a cell phone. I just cannot afford to pay for the minutes and long distance service. There is really no one for me to call anyway. The closest grocery store to where we live is 3 miles away. Going food shopping by myself is the most practical method, because I don't want to unnecessarily drain my children's energy. I don't have much money to spend on groceries, so I generally just buy beans, rice, and milk. We are very fortunate to have a community dining room about 1 mile from our house, so I take the children once a day for a hot meal. By the end of the day, I am exhausted, but I need to make sure my children fill up so their bellies do not rumble and growl when they are trying to go to sleep. I do not know how I got to this point in my life, but I believe there is a light at the end of this tunnel, and I am holding out for that miracle to come my way.

My children are my reason for going on. Without them, I do not know what I would do. Everything I do is for them. They are the bright spot in my dismal life. I feel very alone, and completely powerless at times. I do not have any adult friends that I can talk to. I am so tired all the time because I work so hard for a measly wage. Quality time, what is that? I never have time to spend with my children. By the time I get home from work, it is time to go to the dining hall for dinner. The lines are so long, and I sometimes worry that by the time it is our turn that they will not have any food left, and will have to turn us away. When we get home after eating dinner, it is bedtime. I try to read my little boy a story, but he falls asleep by the time his little head hits the pillow. I am trying to get some financial support from the government so I can provide more substantial meals at home for my children. On Monday, I had an appointment with the Department of Economic Security to discuss my food stamp application, and it was denied. I waited months just to get this appointment, and then they deny me because I do not have a telephone. They do not give any explanation, they just stamped denied, and told me to move

along. I was counting on this application to get approved so I could afford some more groceries for my family, but now what am I going to do? I cannot let my children see my distress. My daughter Rebecca is smart, and she knows more than she lets on. She is different from the other children she goes to school with. Fortunately for her though, she is a very good student, and her teacher really likes her. Rebecca will go to college one day. She would do really well, I just know it. I cannot think of that right now though, I need to think of how I can afford to buy a telephone so when I apply for food stamps again, I will not be denied.

I knew poverty was a problem, but I had no idea how bad it really was. I am so well off in my own life, and I need to realize how blessed and fortunate I am. I have more than enough food to eat. I have a beautiful home. I have money in my savings account. I have transportation, and a telephone. I do not have to worry about my electricity being shut off. I do not have to fear that I will not have enough money to pay my monthly bills. My husband and I have a fantastic summer vacation planned. The single mother with 3 small children that I was role playing has to worry about so many things, and top on that list is making enough money to feed herself, and her family. She does not have the everyday luxuries that I have, and that I take for granted sometimes. I cannot believe that a person would be denied food stamps because they cannot afford to have a telephone. What does a person need a telephone for in order to be eligible for food stamps? I do not really see the connection or what they have to do with one another?

As a future teacher, I imagine I will encounter one or more students in my classroom that will come from a poverty stricken home environment. Schooling will be a struggle for these children unfortunately for a variety of different reasons. Some students will come to school hungry because their families cannot afford to buy enough food for them to eat. I know from personal experience, when I am hungry, I cannot focus. I become irritable, cranky, and I am not fun to be around. If a student comes to school hungry, how can a teacher expect that student to be able to learn and function for the entire day? It is so important for a growing child to have a nutritious breakfast to start out their day. Food is not only a source of energy for the body, but it is also necessary for the brain to help a student concentrate, learn and remain focused.

I have seen how cruel children can be at times when someone appears to be slightly different from them, but I will not tolerate negative, rude or mean comments to occur in my classroom whatsoever. I will encourage all of my students to get along with one another, and make friends with everyone. Home life I imagine is hard enough on these children, so I will do my best to make their time in the classroom extremely positive and enjoyable. I do not want to show favorites to any of my students, but I will make myself available to help any student who appears to be struggling or lagging behind in their schoolwork. I believe that a child who comes from a poverty stricken home environment might not have the parental support that they need in order to succeed in school, so I will try to help those students out by reading with them one-on-one or by helping them with their homework packets. It might be tough for these students to purchase school supplies that each student is required to have at the beginning of the school year for their grade level, so I will have an abundance of extra school supplies in my classroom so my students do not have to do without, or feel embarrassed because they could not afford to buy them. I will be a compassionate teacher towards all of my students, and I will be very aware of the challenges that each of my students may be dealing within their lives. I want my students to

feel comfortable, safe, and excited to come to class every day. I want my students to have a classroom where they can come and be a child, and experience all the wonderful things that a child should be experiencing at this stage in their life. School is not only an educational experience for students, but it also a very social experience. I want my students to learn, laugh and enjoy being in my classroom. My classroom will be a nurturing environment for them to grow and flourish. It does not matter what their family background is, everyone goes to school for one reason, and that is to learn, and it should not matter if the student is rich or poor. Every child is entitled to an education, and as a future teacher, I have the power to make this happen.