

Angelika's Journal
2023 Study Notes

About the Author & Our Eyes Were Opened, Inc.

Beth Lindsay Templeton, Founder and CEO of Our Eyes Were Opened, Inc. is a community activist, innovator, minister, consultant, teacher, and writer. She has worked for more than thirty years in poverty issues. She has two married sons and four grandchildren.

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Our Eyes Were Opened, Inc. is a ministry for “the haves.” Through more than 30 years of working with the “have nots,” Beth noticed that people who wanted to help may have made a bad situation worse, gotten angry at the people they were trying to help, or simply not known what to do. Through workshops and seminars, her books, poverty tours, speeches, sermons, and the Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation that she facilitates, Beth helps open people’s eyes so they can reach out with wisdom and compassion.

For more information, check out oureyeswereopened.org.

Other Books by Beth Lindsay Templeton

Loving Our Neighbor: A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty

Understanding Poverty in the Classroom: Changing Perceptions for Student Success

Conversations on the Porch: Ancient Voices—Contemporary Wisdom

A Coat Named Mr. Spot

More Conversations on the Porch

Refrigerator Prayers for Ordinary People

The Christmas Strawberry

Uncharted Journey

The Sacred Year

George’s War: Then and Now

Grace-Full Love by the Week

Scripture Scents: Essential Oils in the Bible

Help, God!: An Interim Pastor’s Conversations with God

CHAPTER ONE

Moving...Again

STUDY NOTES

Finding the journal in a pile of garbage on the side of the road indicates that people were most likely evicted from their home. When a landlord evicts a family, everything in the house is thrown onto the side of the road. A family may lose all their personal belongings: clothes, kitchen gadgets and dishes, special toys, and anything else that the family has not been able to remove. Once items are placed on the side of the road, they are available for people to go through for what they might find for their own use or to sell. People will tear up mattresses to get the box springs for scrap metal vendors. By the time the garbage is collected by the sanitation department, everything of any worth has been taken.

Eviction is a legal process requiring court orders and adequate notice to a family. Unfortunately, some landlords will evict without giving the family due process. Sometimes a family will simply vacate the premises in the middle of the night to avoid interaction with the landlord. When that happens, many of their household goods are dumped outside by the landlord to prepare the housing unit for its next occupants.

Finding a new place to call home can be a very costly thing to do. Not only does the family need to be able to make the monthly rent payments, they often have to pay a security deposit equal to one or two months' rent and deposits for utilities. If the family has outstanding bills for power, water, or gas, they will have to take care of the back payments, add a large security deposit (large because of missing payments), and may have to pay a reconnect fee that will also be higher if they defaulted on a payment.

Moving in with a family member may not be a possibility. The family's network of friends and relatives may live as precariously as those who just lost their home. A neighbor's house may already be full with people who are "doubled up," living together because only one of them has a home. All the rest simply moved in. Occasionally the lease agreement does not allow extra people to move into the housing unit. If the landlord discovers the additional resident(s), the entire household can be evicted because of lease violations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been late with a rent payment? What did you do? Were you able to ask family members or friends for help? Did you decide to move in with friends or family? How well did that work out?
2. Do you remember the costs of deposits for the last place you rented? Did you have difficulty coming up with the extra cash?
3. Have you ever moved and needed to greatly reduce the number of items you could take with you? If so, how did you decide what to keep and what to take? Did you use a storage unit? If so, how much did it cost?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Find out what the fair market rent is in your area. Check out <http://nlihc.org/oor>, the site of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Out of Reach can give you information about the Fair Market Rent (FMR) in your area.
- Once you find out the FMR for your area, figure out what the income must be for a family to pay no more than thirty percent for housing (rent and utilities.) Find out what jobs in your area actually pay that wage.
- Learn about groups in your area who address the need for quality, safe housing for people. Habitat for Humanity is one such organization. Other nonprofit housing developers and organizations known as Community Development Corporations (CDC) are in a number of areas. Nonprofit developers build homes for rent, purchase, and/or for people who need housing with some support services (mentally ill, for example.)
- Invite a housing advocate speaker to your group.

CHAPTER TWO

Yet Another School

STUDY NOTES

Frequent moving of children from school to school can cause all kinds of problems. A child may feel very disconnected, with a sense of no roots. The child may distrust what life has to offer. He/she may have difficulty making friends or may reach out too aggressively or too eagerly to others. The child may be timid or scared or, at the other extreme, haughty and belligerent. Focusing on a single task may be very difficult or may cause quick frustration. The child may simply feel out of control and unsafe. The primary emotion for children whose lives are unstable is fear.

Children may be either behind or ahead in their classes, making them feel stupid or bored. They may not understand the rules of the school, especially the unwritten rules such as “No one uses that bathroom because only nerds go there.” They may not understand how the cafeteria operates in their new school. Students may have had to leave a teacher they really liked and begin all over again. They may decide that trying to relate or succeed is simply not worth the effort.

Teachers may be frustrated because they cannot get the new student's records to see what level the child is functioning on. An overworked teacher may see a new child in an already structured classroom as more of a distraction than an opportunity. One adult who had changed schools a lot as a kid later said that she wished her variety of new teachers would have reached out to her in all her schools. She reasoned that the kids who were already established in the class knew what to do. She didn't and really yearned for the teacher's special guidance.

The new school may not offer the same services as the previous school. Angelika and her brother lost the “luxury” of having a visiting community nurse. Their new home added to her brother's asthma because of mold, toxins, or bugs. Losing the fragile link with the health system certainly is challenging for the family.

In her new school, Angelika and her brother faced another dilemma. They no longer had any afterschool care. They were on their own. It is not uncommon for even young children to have to manage by themselves for hours. They have to prepare their own meals and have no one to help with homework or ask how their day was. By the time their mother comes home, she is so tired that she cannot be the interactive mother she would like to be.

Angelika's clothes smelled of kerosene. Some building codes say that IF there is a heat source, it must work. The codes do not require a furnace or other heating unit. When a family is without heat, either because of lack of power or lack of a heating unit, they may use a kerosene heater or a fireplace, both of which can be health hazards. Additionally, kerosene fumes permeate everything. Families who heat with wood may break down packing pallets to burn. Unfortunately, many of the pallets are made out of pine which is high in creosote which can cause chimney fires.

Having clean clothes can be a problem for families with limited resources. When they have to use the laundromat to wash and dry clothes, the effort may simply be too much for a parent who is struggling to keep a roof over her children's heads and food on the table. Using a laundromat requires pulling all the dirty clothes together, getting them to the laundromat (is there a car?), having a lot of change and detergent, staying there the entire time so no one steals the clothes, and then getting everything back home again. This chore may take very low priority when faced with day to day existence.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Were your own parents transferred frequently for their job(s) when you were a child? If so, how did that affect you?
2. Have you ever used a laundromat? If so, what was that experience like?
3. Do schools in your area have protocols to help students who transfer to the school in the middle of the year feel comfortable and ready to learn?
4. What kinds of afterschool programs are available in your community? Is there a cost? If so, what is it? Is it affordable for someone making \$10 or less an hour?
5. If you are a teacher, do you recognize some of the issues that Angelika writes about? If so, please share with the group and discuss ways that you and your teaching peers help these students.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage schools to have protocols to welcome and orient all new students.
- If you know of a parish nurse program, investigate if the nurse(s) can work with school students who may be at risk.
- Develop quality after-school programs or provide scholarships for existing programs.
- Advocate for safe and affordable heating and cooling units for all houses.
- Help weatherize homes when appropriate. Create wood yards with split wood that comes from fallen trees or those in your neighborhood that must be taken down. Give the wood away.
- Wash your family's clothes in a laundromat for a week or even a month.

CHAPTER THREE

Just the Basics...Please?

STUDY NOTES

The issue about Angelika's shoes is based on a true story. I was astounded when my friend told me that as a child she had not realized that her shoes were "quacking" until her teacher asked if she could help. I had trouble understanding that she was not aware of the state of her shoes but that was her reality. The teacher in the journal handled the situation in an admirable way. She did not make an issue of the shoes in front of other students.

When the teacher took Angelika shopping for shoes, she provided a real treat. The fact that Angelika did not know what size shoes she wore suggests that her shoes may have been purchased at a thrift store or yard sale. She may have gotten whatever shoes she could find in a donation box. Or she may have worn hand-me-down shoes. Learning to "make do" is an essential skill when resources are limited.

School staffs who are not attuned to the needs of their students may inadvertently underscore the lack some of their students struggle with. Requiring a back board for a science project or three dollars for a school party may not seem like a huge request unless the family is already struggling just to get by. When the family has several children who need "just" three dollars, they are faced with the decision of giving the children the money so they can fit in OR eating or getting medicines. Children who live in poverty are regularly faced with being unable to participate in school events because of the cost, lack of transportation when school buses are not involved, or inability to get to stores to purchase required supplies. Afters-school sports require uniforms and equipment as well as traveling fees. Music and arts programs use instruments and art supplies that may be difficult for a family to provide. The children cannot ask their neighbors or extended family for help because they may be in the same situation.

Title One schools qualify for extra federal resources because they serve a population where the majority of students live in poverty. The school works to provide an enriched environment in order to address the needs of its population. Unfortunately a school may have a majority of its students living in poverty and not qualify for Title One because there are other schools in its district with even higher percentages. Children who attend a school where poverty is relatively low may be more at risk of being asked to provide things their family does not have. Their classmates' parents take for granted that everyone can get the basics and even luxuries.

The websites of many school districts have information about the percentages of poverty in their schools. Look for the free and reduced lunch numbers to discover the relative wealth of the families in a school.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you know how children's basic needs have been addressed in area schools? Was the help gracious or shameful?
2. When you were growing up, did your family struggle to provide for basic needs? Will you share any examples?
3. Do you know which schools in your area serve high poverty populations? Which school has the highest percentage and which has the lowest?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Work with the appropriate groups in a school to provide in a gracious and caring way the basic resources students may need. Partners may be the PTA, a business, a foundation, or a generous benefactor.
- Think creatively to provide all children in a school the opportunities that children with relatively wealthy families enjoy.
- Learn more about *high poverty-high performing* schools. You can use internet search engines to learn about these remarkable schools.
- If you have school age children, purchase extra school supplies to give to the teacher for students who do not have what they need. If you do not have school age children, work with a program that provides school supplies OR create such a program for your community.
- Keep students' situations confidential.
- Invite a school social worker or other administrative person to talk about poverty in the schools in your area.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rent is Only One Cost of Housing

STUDY NOTES

A study released in 2007 by David Chenoweth of Chenoweth and Associates, Inc. titled “The Economic Cost of Substandard Housing Conditions Among North Carolina Children” uncovered the high health costs related to substandard housing. The study examined the impact of environmental risk factors on the health of North Carolina children living in substandard housing.

Chenoweth and colleagues studied incidences of birth defects, unintentional injuries, lead poisoning, and cancer, as well as neural behavioral conditions such as autism and cerebral palsy, and respiratory illnesses such as asthma and acute bronchitis. They found that the “conservative estimate of total costs due to substandard housing-attributable illnesses, injuries, diseases, and disabilities among North Carolina children is nearly \$95 million dollars” (page 4).

Substandard housing is part of a destructive loop. Financial strain on the family affects the characteristics of the neighborhood they can afford which also affects the housing characteristics. Financial strain and the characteristics of the neighborhood and housing affect the parents’ well-being. All of these things then affect the child’s well-being (physical health, cognitive development, and social/emotional health.)

It may be easy to blame the landlord for poor housing conditions. Certainly there are landlords who do not maintain their properties properly. On the other hand, some landlords try to keep their property cared for but have challenges in meeting their obligations. The house may be very old and cannot be brought into alignment with current building codes without spending a lot of money...which raises the rent. A landlord may desire to tear a house down and rebuild but the density codes require that two houses must be torn down to build the one, resulting in the loss of one housing unit. A landlord may have replaced kitchen appliances numerous times only for them to be stolen yet again. Eventually the landlord gives up. When everyone in a housing complex is not diligent in putting food and garbage away and maintaining cleanliness, bugs become a problem for all.

Even when a family finds housing, they may have difficulty getting furniture for it. Sometimes household members will pick up tables, chairs, or mattresses left on the side of the road. They may want to purchase furniture at a thrift store but even that may be too expensive. They may use whatever anyone will give them or create bureaus out of boxes, mattresses out of blankets or sleeping bags, and baby cribs out of drawers.

Families can feel powerless when they let the landlord know of potential problems in the house. The landlord may or may not provide needed repairs. The family suspects that if they complain too much their rent may be increased. If the entire neighborhood is neglected, people may just give up and accept the conditions, whatever they may be. After a while, trying to improve one’s situation may become a useless endeavor because whatever one does is never enough, never works, or no one cares anyway.

Gentrification is another issue in low-income neighborhoods. A blighted house may be torn down and replaced with a new home that is significantly more costly than the previous home. The former tenant cannot afford to rent or purchase the new home. Additionally as the neighborhood “improves”, the property taxes for all homes rise, thereby making long term residents unable to remain in their homes. Gentrification is a good news/bad news issue. Yes, the neighborhood has better houses BUT a lot of people lose their homes and cannot find other housing they can afford.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Where are the substandard neighborhoods in your community?
2. What kind of housing or neighborhood did you grow up in? Have you ever experienced some of the challenges that Angelika's family dealt with?
3. What is the city or county department that addresses housing issues in your community?
4. Does anyone in the group work with people who suffer from the challenges of living in substandard housing? If so, please share some stories or examples of what people have dealt with.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Discover an organization in your community that offers poverty tours of blighted neighborhoods in your area. If none exist, create a tour yourself. Note: *Loving Our Neighbor: A Thoughtful Approach to Helping People in Poverty*, available at Amazon and other book vendors, describes in detail how to develop a poverty tour.
- Look in tax records to discover who owns some of the blighted homes in your community. Are you surprised by the names you find there?
- Become a volunteer, donor, or advocate for nonprofit housing developers in your community. Invite someone from such an organization to speak to your group.
- Explore the option of providing furniture vouchers through a thrift store and an appropriate helping organization.
- Go to a thrift store and calculate the cost of furniture for your living room or bedroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

School Is Out. Now What?

STUDY NOTES

For many families, the summer months are a time to take a vacation, live a more relaxed schedule, and be with extended family and friends for special celebrations. Parents look forward to the summer break as much as their children do. Not so for families who struggle daily to get by. With no school, there is no breakfast or lunch program. Working parents have to figure out what to do with their children. They cannot afford expensive day camps or summer programs. Every cent they earn goes for rent, food, transportation, and health care. There simply is no money, not even \$15 per week per child, to provide any supervision or learning opportunities. Children may be left alone, they may be hungry, and they certainly have little positive mental stimulation to keep up their learning progress.

Not having the nutritional meals provided by the school can actually increase obesity. Children must find food for themselves when no parent is available at home. This often means eating highly processed foods that are high in calories and low in nutrition. If children must stay in the home while the parent is at work, they likely watch a lot of television, play a lot of video games and get no exercise which also adds to the tendency toward obesity.

The National Summer Learning Association (www.summerlearning.org) has documented research that shows that low-income children lose about two months of grade level equivalency in math and reading during the summer break. Their classmates from higher incomes have opportunities to continue learning during the summer through family trips, library and museum visits, and interaction with parents and other adults who are themselves educated.

Vacation Bible Schools become very important because they are free and provide spiritual and physical care for the children. They usually have food, too. Mission groups from churches may plan backyard camps for children who live in blighted neighborhoods. These opportunities can be very positive in creating a sense of care and compassion in the youth who offer the camp. However, the effects for the neighborhood kids can be mixed. They may really enjoy their new friends and the fun things they do. On the other hand, the relationship is fleeting. Once again poor children may feel abandoned or used.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How have children's summer activities changed since you were a child?
2. What kinds of things do your children or grandchildren do in the summer? How likely is it that lower-income children can do these same things?
3. What kinds of summer activities does your community provide through community centers, parks and recreation departments, and youth programs? Do you know the costs of these?
4. Imagine being poor. What would your topic be for your back-to-school essay, "What I Did This Summer?"
5. Does your congregation have a Vacation Bible School? Do neighborhood children attend?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Include area low-income children in your congregation's summer programs.
- Provide scholarships for camps, museum visits, or summer child care programs.
- Provide meals or healthy snacks for children who are dependent on school nutrition programs.
- Research the feasibility of year round educational programs and then advocate for them, if appropriate.
- Provide appropriate clothing and gear for low-income children to participate in summer sports.
Volunteer to be a coach.

CHAPTER SIX

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

STUDY NOTES

Lead paint is very dangerous. Newer homes do not have lead based paint in them. Older homes may have the paint in many areas. Many homes that are available to low income families are older. Lead paint has a slightly sweet taste making it very appealing to children under three who tend to put things in their mouths. Lead can cause developmental delays, lowered IQ scores, speech and language delays, reading skills deficits, and a host of other problems.

When lead paint is discovered in a house, the house must be vacated for the landlord to have professionals abate the issue. This results in a family losing their rental home. Families may not know about the dangers of lead paint, and even when they do, they prefer to ignore the dangers so that they are not forced to move.

Angelika told of playing in an area that was a toxic dump. Abandoned or neglected neighborhoods are prime locations for dumping construction debris, toxic chemicals, and garbage because people who live there have little power to do anything to stop the behavior. They may prefer to ignore the issue because of fear. OR they have reported the problem numerous times and gotten no results, so they finally stop trying.

Sometimes large corporations are the problem makers and they are able to deny their actions or hide behind regulations or legalities rather than pay to take care of the dangers and possible deaths they caused.

Mold, too, can be an issue in older homes. Once again, mold removal requires professional intervention which the landlord may not want to do because of the cost. The reality is that it may be cheaper to tear the house down than to remediate it. The tenant may want the mold removed but not at the cost of losing his/her home. However, when a child's asthma becomes life threatening, intervention is essential. Who will do it?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you or your family ever had to deal with lead paint, mold, asbestos, or other toxins? If so, what was the situation like?
2. Do you know who in your community handles abatement? How much does it cost?
3. What could you do to help families who lose their homes due to the housing unit's toxic problems?
4. Has your community faced NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) when discussing where to locate a garbage dump or housing for low-income people? If so, did you participate in the process? Which side were you on?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Learn more about household toxins with a quick internet search.
- Consider paying deposits for families forced to move because their housing unit is contaminated.
- Advocate for landlords to check all their properties for potential toxic hazards and to remediate them, especially when the unit is vacant, between tenants.
- Help educate people in the community about the hazards of lead and other household poisons.
- Talk with a pediatrician or other health care professional who works with low-income children in your area. What is the prevalence of children's exposure to toxins in your community? What effects do they see?
- Invite a housing codes inspector to speak to your group about building codes and the prevalence of toxic substances in the housing stock in your community.

CHAPTER SEVEN

When's Dinner?

STUDY NOTES

Food security is defined as having no problems or anxiety about consistently accessing adequate food. Very low food security, also known as food insecurity, is defined as experiencing times during the year when the eating patterns of household members were disrupted and food intake was reduced due to lack of money or other resources for food.

Good nutrition is especially important during a child's formative years. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, ([usda.gov](https://www.usda.gov)), 16.7 million children under 18 in the United States live in households without consistent nutritious food. The USDA's website can give you current information about food insecurity and about how many children under 18 in the United States live in households without consistent nutritious food. Without good nutrition, children are more likely to be hospitalized, have higher risk for chronic illnesses, and are more likely to have oral conditions and delayed development with learning difficulties.

The food stamp program, now known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) serves families with a gross income of no more than 130% of the federal poverty guideline. (See aspe.hhs.gov for the most current data.) In 2022, the federal poverty guideline for a family of four was \$27,750 so household income can be no more than \$36,075. As it turns out, 80% of recipients of SNAP have a child, senior, or disabled person in the household. You can check out the website of Feeding America to find out more about hunger in America and the SNAP program. The amount of food stamps per person equals to less than \$4.00 per person per meal.

When people shop at the grocery store with food stamps, they occasionally purchase things that we might question, things such as steaks or potato chips. When the electronic benefit card (EBT) assets are available, for a brief time, the family is just like everyone else. They can buy what they believe other people eat. Their food stamp allotment may have run out during the third week of the month and so for a week or more, they've been limited with what food they can purchase.

Those of us with resources believe that people on food stamps should be better shoppers and budget more appropriately with their food stamps. However, being able to stretch \$4.00 per person per meal day in and day out is quite a challenge, especially when it takes time to plan the menus and to prepare food. Additionally, one has to know how to cook, have a working stove, and have adequate cooking utensils. Even the concept of buying in bulk may be a problem for someone with inadequate refrigeration or storage. Having "extras" may mean that other people who live in the household help themselves resulting in the children still being left out.

Many poor neighborhoods are located in areas known as food deserts, areas where fresh, nutritious, and affordable foods are not available. Being able to get to a store where nutritious and reasonably priced food *is* available is difficult, especially when one has no transportation. Stores in lower-income neighborhoods often stock canned goods, snacks, and beverages. They rarely have fresh foods.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time when you worried about food, possibly when you were in college. Have you ever lived on noodles?
2. Have you ever judged what someone purchased at the grocery store with food stamps?
3. Does your area have a community food garden program?
4. What kinds of soup kitchens and food pantries are available in your community? What days of the week and times of day are they available?
5. Would you say that hunger is a hidden issue in your community?
6. Where are the food deserts in your community?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Improve access of low-income families to healthful food supplies through community gardens, food trucks that sell locally grown produce, and feeding programs.
- Help create and maintain a community garden.
- Learn where and when people can eat for free. Post this in appropriate areas.
- Educate yourself about why hunger exists in such a wealthy country. What can you do about some of the root causes of hunger?
- What is the food insecurity in your own state?
- Join Bread for the World, a Christian lobby group in Washington that addresses hunger. See their website for more information. www.bread.org.
 - Advocate for nutritious meals wherever children are fed.
 - Try living on \$4.00 per person per meal for a month. Share your experience.
 - Try going without food for a weekend and/or eat at a soup kitchen and interact with other diners. Share your experience.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Opening Up the World

STUDY NOTES

It is not uncommon for people who have transportation issues to never venture far from their neighborhood. Being able to go to a shopping area that is just ten miles away may be as difficult as going to another country. Indeed, for some people, as with Angelika, traveling beyond the neighborhood may be just as exciting and just as scary as traveling to Australia.

When asked about his weekend plans, a homeless man, a regular at a downtown homeless day shelter, said that he was very excited because he was going out of town. He smiled from ear to ear because he was traveling to a small town just fifteen miles from the city center. You may not think of this as going out of town but for him, it was a big adventure!

When Angelika visited a grocery super-center, she was amazed at the variety of items available in the store. The stores where her family could shop would often be small with only one or two selections of cereal and each box may cost at least fifty percent more than the same box in the big store. Grocery stores locate their businesses where there are a lot of shoppers with the appropriate demographic for their customer base. This means that poor people don't have the same selections and price points that people with more resources have.

Angelika also experienced the dilemma of classroom parties. Parents who are able want to make their child's birthday special and include all the children in a class. They bring cupcakes or snacks in order to celebrate. However, some children know their parent can never do this for them because of the cost or because their mom has to work and cannot come to school. Some teachers now suggest one party for everyone's birthday that month. Children whose birthdays are in the summer discover they can celebrate their birthday with their classmates when the January party includes June! The goodies are provided by the PTA or several parents who do this for all the children every month of the school year.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do schools in your area make field trips available to all children, regardless of their ability to pay? If so, is the financial support offered in a confidential and gracious way?
2. Are there any schools in your area that provide parents a "payment plan" so the parents can provide the opportunity to their own child rather than be dependent on what may be considered a "hand-out"?
3. What opportunities does your community offer that people who are poor may never be able to use because of cost or transportation? Libraries? Museums? Amusement parks? Theaters? Shopping areas? Public gardens? Sporting events?
4. If your community has a public bus or transportation system, do you know how much it costs to ride, what its hours of operation are, and where the routes go?
5. Have you ever traveled to a foreign country? If so, how might you relate to a poor person who goes to the beach for the first time ever?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Make sure that every child can participate in a school event regardless of cost involved.
- Work with an organization that focuses on people who are poor and offer a trip to a nearby attraction, all expenses paid.
- Shop at a grocery store located in or near a poor neighborhood. Compare the quality and cost of food there with where you usually shop.
- Dream big about where and how you could expand low-income children's horizons. Can you imagine taking children to the beach or to Washington, DC, for the first time?
- If your community has public transportation and you do not regularly use it, ride it and share the experience with the group.

CHAPTER NINE

Moving In

STUDY NOTES

The federal definition of homelessness has four broad categories. They are:

- Literally homeless (primary nighttime residence not meant for human habitation; living in a shelter, etc.)
- Imminent risk of homelessness (residence will be lost within 14 days with no subsequent place to live identified AND lacks support to find other housing.)
- Homeless under other Federal statutes (unaccompanied youth under 25; two moves during 60 days prior to homeless assistance application, etc.)
- People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

—*From files.hud exchange.info*

Doubling up is how families often try to deal with impending homelessness. Unfortunately many do not have family or friend connections; the people of their support system may have troubles of their own; or they are no longer welcomed because they have used their friends and family too often. Angelika was fortunate because she did not have to change schools yet again when Ber-ber allowed the family to move in.

Angelika developed dental problems. Knowing how to handle medical issues can be a challenge. People may not know where to go for treatment and so they go to emergency rooms. They may work during the same hours that clinics are open; therefore, they cannot leave the job for medical treatment. The clinic where they go may not deal with the medical problem the person has. For example, many free medical clinics do not have dental clinics as part of their services. People may not have insurance or resources to pay, especially when medical offices require payment before services are rendered. People may not have transportation to get to medical services. Therefore, many people do what Angelika chose to do about her tooth—ignore or endure the medical problem and hope that it goes away.

When Angelika was able to finally take care of her tooth, her options were limited. People with resources can try to save a tooth by having a root canal, a crown, or even an implant. People without resources have only one option to deal with a severely compromised tooth—extraction. This leaves a hole in the mouth and teeth begin to realign to fill the space. This can result in further problems later on.

Angelika got into trouble at school for repeating behavior that was necessary for survival in an overcrowded living situation. When there are a lot of people living under one roof, the only way to be heard may be to shout and interrupt. When that behavior translates to the classroom, teachers may misunderstand and think the child is rude or a discipline problem. The child may be labeled as a troublemaker when that's not true. Teachers can discover ways to help students develop appropriate behavior for the classroom without putting down behavior that helps a child survive outside the school.

Angelika fell asleep in class. Children who live in chaotic environments may not get enough sleep. When many people live in one house, there may be shouting or loud music going all the time. Domestic violence can be so frightening that the child cowers all night. If the child does not have a proper bed or if there are bugs or rats, sleep can be illusive.

Understanding Poverty in the Classroom (available from Amazon) tells how poverty affects children's behavior in the classroom along with suggestions for educators about how to deal with issues.

Angelika loved the holidays: Halloween and Thanksgiving. Entertainment is a bottom line value for people who live in poverty for a long time. They need a reprieve from the daily challenges of basic living. Thanksgiving in the soup kitchen was special. Usually a lot of people volunteer to help out at Thanksgiving. They want to help others and may not have family of their own in the area with whom to celebrate. They reach and give of themselves. This is wonderful. However, those who regularly work at soup kitchens wish that they did not have so many volunteers for that one day and had more people to help all the other days of the year.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Did the definitions of homelessness surprise you? If so, in what way?
2. Have you ever volunteered on a holiday? If so, what do you think of the idea that volunteering other days of the year might actually be more helpful to the organization?
3. If you've ever had to use the hospital's emergency room at night, what did you think about some of the other people who were waiting there? Did you ever consider that this may be the only medical option they have?
4. What other behaviors might be important for survival in poverty that, if not understood, might cause problems for the student at school?
- 5.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- You can go to <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html> to find out information for your state and county. Visit <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/ten-year-plan> to find out more about homelessness.
- Learn more about homelessness in your area. Invite someone who works with homeless people to talk with your group.
- Investigate the dental and medical services offered in your area. Are they affordable? Are they available at convenient times for people who cannot leave work without losing some of their pay? Are they accessible by public transportation?
- Plan a celebration for people who may eat at a soup kitchen for a time other than a regular holiday.

CHAPTER TEN

Home Sweet Shelter

STUDY NOTES

Shelters provide temporary help. Most are not designed for long term use. Temporary shelters are just that... temporary. Whenever someone stays there for more than a week or two, there may be a daily fee. These fees can be waived occasionally or the person may begin working for the organization or out in the community. Shelters have rules and regulations that can be difficult for some people to adhere to. Different shelters have different expectations. Some will not allow anyone who has been drinking or using drugs to stay. Others are not equipped to handle people with mental illness. Some will not take couples unless they are legally married. Many will not allow a boy to stay in a women's shelter with his mom if he is 7 or 10 or older. Some require attendance at worship services. Others are not well managed and may be more problematic than sleeping on the street.

Some shelters are transitional. They offer their guests the opportunity to stay long enough to get their lives back together. The shelter that Angelika and her family went to fits this category. There still may be strict rules and requirements but people have a supportive environment in order to change their lives.

Other shelters are permanent. They offer limited support services for their residents. These shelters are ideal for people with significant mental illness or addiction issues. "Housing first" shelters provide long-term solutions to people who tend to be the largest users of community services. When people with significant mental health and/or addiction issues can feel safe in a permanent home (housing first), they are more likely to deal with their illnesses. These kinds of shelters are economical when looked at over a period of years because their residents, if untreated, tend to be the biggest users of community services when one adds up the costs of emergency room visits, hospitalizations, incarcerations, and visits to community services.

There are other kinds of shelters in communities that specialize in the needs of particular people's limitations: AIDS, developmentally disabled, homeless veterans, and others.

Angelika likes the security and regimen of the shelter. What she does not like is the possibility of someone knowing that she lives in a shelter. The parent-teacher conference caused her great concern. Fortunately her teacher discovered a compassionate and confidential way to connect with Angelika's mom.

Children who live in poverty may feel the need to lie in order to keep secret the reality of their situation or to protect their parent. They may tell the teacher that they lost a note or that mom signed it but they forgot to pick it up. They may say they don't want to go on a field trip or attend a party simply because they know there is no extra money so they do not even ask at home. None of their friends or relatives has any money either. Students may never tell their teacher that they are responsible for taking care of all their siblings. They may simply make excuses for mom's lack of involvement: she's ill, she's at work, or she's on a trip.

The Christmas parties were a treat for Angelika...with some exceptions. Once again, parents may feel caught between shame of not being able to provide for their own children AND grateful that their kids can have what others have. Angelika was embarrassed when she recognized a girl from her school as one of the kids presenting Christmas music.

When you want to help someone, try to do it in a way that does not demean. When "outsiders" provide things for children that parents know they would like to be able to do, the parents may feel ashamed and embarrassed. Typical of this kind of holiday assistance is when a group "adopts" a family. Robert Lupton in his book *Toxic*

Charity tells of a time when he was at a family's home just before Christmas. A caring church group brought presents to the children. The children were, of course, thrilled to receive the treasures. But Lupton noticed that the father slipped out of the room. When the children finally realized their father was no longer there and asked where he had gone, the mother said he'd gone to the store. Lupton had seen the expression on the father's face and knew that he simply had to get out of there. Even though the parents may have been happy that their children received nice toys, knowing that they could not provide that pleasure was very painful.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever volunteered and recognized a client or program participant as someone you had been in school with? What happened? How did you feel?
2. Have you ever visited or volunteered at a shelter? If so, please share your experience.
3. What is your opinion of all the Christmas parties and presents? Is there a better way to help children at this special time of the year?
4. Have you participated in a holiday adopt-a-family program? Do you think it meant more to the helper or those who were being helped?
5. Are you a do-gooder or are you doing good?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Learn about what kinds of shelters your community has and what their requirements are.
- Contact shelters and find out what they *really* need. It may be laundry detergent —not as glamorous as a Christmas tree but a lot more useful.
- Discover if there are gaps in the continuum of shelters in your community. For example, does your community have only temporary shelters? Does it need more transitional housing? Does it need housing first shelters or places for special needs people?
- Develop grace-full ways for providing special assistance.
- Consider providing and maintaining a house for an organization that works with families as they begin to rebuild their lives. Typically families live in these “transitional” houses for six months to two years while they work with the caseworkers of the helping organization to get jobs, rebuild credit, and deal with family interactions.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The New Year

STUDY NOTES

Angelika's school has a program called lunch buddies. These adults may be sponsored by their employer to become a special friend to a child at risk. They may be community volunteers who want to help children. The child benefits by having an adult who is interested in what is going on and who can make the child feel less isolated. Angelika's lunch buddy helps fill the gap left by Ber-ber and also helps her deal with logistical issues such as what to do about purple day.

Angelika's mother is thriving in her classes. Budgeting classes may be somewhat challenging for the presenting teacher. Occasionally people who are professional financial planners want to offer their expertise to people who live in poverty. Their intention is good. Nevertheless, their traditional approach may not work because 1) Budgeting requires long term thinking—very difficult when one is accustomed to living day by day and 2) Budgeting requires enough money to cover basic expenses. Teaching budgeting for people who are financially struggling requires the presenter to learn *what* is important to their students, *why* certain things seem so important to students (a manicure, for example), and *how* the students already juggle paying bills when there is not enough money.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever tried to teach budgeting to someone who was struggling financially? What did you learn in that process?
2. Do you know of any companies in your area that partner with schools? What do they do?
3. Had you ever considered that living in a shelter might actually be a relief to a family who is struggling?
4. Are there organizations with financial literacy training targeted for lower-income people in your community?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Encourage your workplace to engage in a partnership with a local school. Discover what can work for both the school and your company.
- Look for appropriate and applicable budgeting curriculum or develop one for people who need help with budgeting. This course may apply to youth, college students, as well as people who live in poverty.
- Look into mentoring programs in your community. Will you become a special friend to a child who needs a responsible grown-up in his/her life?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Going to Grandmama's House... Good or Bad?

STUDY NOTES

Angelika got caught in the push-pull of families. Her mother did not want to go home to live with her own mother and yet, she saw no other options. Even though her grandmother seemed to be judgmental of her mother, Angelika discovered a stable adult and home at her grandmother's house. Her grandmother may not have wanted the responsibility of Angelika and her brother but may also have appreciated the opportunity to succeed with her grandchildren when she believed she had failed with her daughter. Angelika's mother found an opportunity to relinquish some of her ongoing responsibility for her children so that she could find pleasure for herself. The push-pull of responsibility versus relaxation was an intoxicating dilemma.

Angelika's mother also left her classes at the shelter one week before graduation. Unfortunately that is not uncommon behavior. A person may get very close to succeeding and then sabotage their success because they are afraid of what may then be expected.

The children once more had to begin again...new school, new people to meet, and new expectations. Angelika chose to deal with this upheaval in a very positive way by remembering wisdom she had gleaned from other people she had met in her life.

These insights came from real people. A volunteer in a nonprofit where I worked chatted with people as they waited in the lobby to be interviewed for assistance with rent or utilities. She asked them what the most important lessons were they had learned in their lives. They offered all kinds of comments: funny, sad, religious, and heartfelt. She wrote down their words. When they asked her what she was going to do with the information, she told them that Beth wanted them for a book. They did not know who Beth was but were happy that their sharing might help someone else. Angelika is giving you some of their wisdom.

Angelika's mother found a way out when she developed a relationship with a man. She had had no opportunity for a personal life until she moved in with her mother. She decided she could escape when she had a man in her life. Whether this was a smart decision, no one knows. Angelika saw her mother become happy once again but also saw her mother leave, not knowing when she might come back for her children. Angelika's mother may have wanted to take the children when she left but "her man," although he provided treats for the children, did not want responsibility for raising "another man's kids."

When Grandmama took over, Angelika began to grow in confidence as she experienced more stability in her life. She may have been glad that she did not feel as if she had to continue taking care of Mama herself. She could focus more on being a kid.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which insight(s) from Angelika's journal resonated with you? Why?
2. Can you understand the concept of push-pull with families? Do you have examples you would like to share?
3. How might you "escape" from painful reality? Angelika chose to remember words of wisdom.
4. Do you believe that people use other people to escape their pain?
5. How do you imagine Angelika's life moving forward from this point?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Begin collecting words of wisdom for yourself. You might want to have a special place in your computer or a pretty book to write them in.
- Take one of Angelika's statements and live by it for a month or a week. If you do this, how might it change your life?
- Share your insights from this study with other people. Find ways to implement some of the ideas you learned.
- Slow down judgments when you see people who live in poverty or who are homeless. After all, you do not really know what is going on inside them.
- Thank Angelika for opening this door for us.