

Stories

MISSION SOUTH-SIDE
A Neighbor's Heart



When You Go ...

After being immersed at Eagle's Pointe Apartments for the last year and a half, something dawned on me this week. What someone NEW to GOING may see, is different from what I know and come to expect.

While nothing surprises me anymore, I realized, it may surprise new people who start coming with me or going to new apartment complexes.

Until a few years ago I admit, I had my "opinions". I drove past some of these apartments and thought what a disaster. What an eye sore.....

4 years ago my sheltered kids went from Clearwater Creek Elementary into the lowest socio-economic middle school in Olathe, Oregon Trail. The kids who live in those apartments quickly became their peers, their friends. I would hear my kids talk about Carlos, Jorge, Amy, Vanessa, Andrea, etc. They were in AP classes together, they ran track together they were even on the Science Olympiad team together. My kids would talk about their friends, great kids. These kids weren't so much different than my kids. Or were they?

Sometimes there would be a need....Mom, ____ needs some pencils, notebooks, is running in high top tennis shoes for track. My kids were becoming aware of their financial differences.

Flash forward to our first Fun Friday last year. I've met so many families. Some things shocked me at first, but now I have come to expect them, because there are not many other options for these families and I have realized they are doing the best they can.

A 2 year old boy being watched by his 9 year old sister...sometimes mom wasn't home. She was responsible for him at Fun Friday. Once we figured that out, someone adopted the little boy every fun Friday so the 9 year old could be a kid for 2 hours.

When most of these kiddos go to school they are getting free breakfast and lunch. When they are home for the summer.....mom has to buy food and feed them all summer.....If it isn't close to the first of the month, they are scrounging up whatever they can. Yes, the school provides meals for kids from June 1 – July 1, but when your mom isn't home all day, and it isn't within a 2 mile radius, you probably aren't going to be able to walk there.

Kids are out running around....by themselves....for 8 hours....no parent at home....taking care of younger kids. They have adult responsibilities and aren't afforded the luxury of being a kid themselves. The babysitting class is only available for 6th graders? HAH! They have been watching their siblings for 3 years by then.

People don't necessarily have food the first of the month because it took EVERYTHING they have to pay the rent. Food is bought on the 15th.

Most of the apartments are tiny. There are families sleeping on the floor, there are families of 5 sleeping in a 1 bedroom apartment.

Things that stress a mom out....a child is going on a swimming fieldtrip and she needs a swimming suit. That is a frivolous expense, so she may just have to call the child in sick that day.

Season changes are expensive. Kids are wearing long sleeves and jeans in the summer....

Shoes are expensive....many kids are wearing shoes that are 2 sizes too small. When you ask if they need new shoes, they are just grateful to have shoes. When you insist you want to get him new shoes because the laces are stretched out and he is walking on the heels, he reluctantly accepts, only if his sister can get a pair, too.

The kids don't have very many toys, if any. When you walk in to the apartment the first time, you are shocked, especially when you have kids and know the excess they have.

If you take books for the kids, and let them keep them, two weeks later, they may still be carrying it around and reading it. It very well may be the only book they have.

Sometimes you go into survival mode. You don't know when your next meal is coming, so if there is a meal, you may want to ask for leftovers to take back to your house.

When you are blessed with extra food, you usually share it with others.

When you are a 5th grader and you live with your dad who has very poor health and works nights, you stay home alone. You have no food, but the nice lady downstairs who has very little herself, takes it upon herself to include you in dinner EVERY night with her family. On the weekends your 5th grade teacher lets you stay at her house because she doesn't want you home alone at night, hungry, scared and bored.

When your only pair of shoes breaks at a fun Friday, you will take the pair of crocs from the garage sale pile that is two sizes too small, just so you don't get in trouble when you get home.

When someone gives you sheets to put on your new bed, you don't know what to do with them, because you have never slept in a bed, let alone with sheets.

You're in 2nd grade and it's your birthday. Your mom tells you every year that she will bring home a cake after work, but you know that every year she comes home empty handed and tells you it was too expensive to buy a cake this year. You try to understand because you know your mom is trying to work as hard as she can to provide clothes, and shoes and a roof for you. Another year comes uncelebrated.

You're in 4th grade and a birthday kit shows up anonymously at your door. Your mom tells you because of this kit, you can invite 2 friends over for cake, and a little party for the first time EVER in your life. You don't care about presents, you just want to celebrate with cake and some friends.

You have to leave the house you are living in, doubled up with another family in the middle of the night because the boyfriend of the lady you are staying with tries to sexually molest your mom...you are 10 years old and tell me this story.

You are scared because your mom leaves to go dancing at night and leaves you in charge of your 6 month old brother, 2 year old brother and 8 year old sister, and you are 10. It's midnight and you can't get the baby to stop crying, you don't know where your mom is, you don't have a phone, so you go crying to the neighbors.

You escaped to come to this country because your son was being wooed by gangs. He was predestined to be in a gang, but you decide you want a better life for your family, and for him not to be forced to be in the gang. You come here and your son learns English, he gets involved in school, makes good grades and graduates this year. Unfortunately he was stopped when crossing the border when you brought him here. He was allowed to come until he turned 18 years old. He turns 18 and unless you can find a guardian for him, he will not be allowed in this country. You are safe here

because you are granted asylum for severe domestic violence, but he will have to go back to a life of crime.

You came to the United States, illegally, because you were a victim of domestic violence, and because of the abuse you have a brain aneurysm and two years to live. You called the police over and over, but your husband paid them off, so they never arrested him.

You came to the United States, illegally, because at the school your 3rd grader attended, beat him. He was bored in class and had 45 kids in the class. He came home every day with bruises, torn clothing, and emotional deterioration. He comes to the United States for a better education, and what? He is tested for Quest!

You know that it might be inevitable that you and your kids may be deported at anytime....You don't care, because for now, you don't worry about your safety, your kids are getting a great education, and life doubled up with 6 of you living in a two bedroom apartment is better than the alternative. You know that if you can get your kids a good education, they will be further ahead even if they go back to Mexico.

You came to the United States, illegally, and left your two girls with their grandparents. You needed to make money so your kids could afford to go to a missionary school so they could actually get an education and not be abused at school. You sent money back every week. 5 years later you find out that your dad was sexually molesting your daughter and you work 3 jobs to make enough money to send for them. You get them here and they need counseling, but they learn English in less than a year, win the Optomist Speech Contest and win \$75. You are also recognized at your 8th grade recognition with many accomplishments, 93% and above in all of your subjects.

You are NOT eligible for Medicaid, food stamps, etc., if your children were NOT born here, they are not afforded ANY financial hand out. Your kids don't go to the Doctor very often. You have to work lots of jobs to afford anything, but life is still safer and better here.

Your dad dies, and you can't go back to the funeral.

After your husband gets deported, you decide you miss him terribly and you want to go home to be with him. Unfortunately some of your kids were born here and some there, so you need visa's to go back to Mexico. You can barely afford to feed these kids, let alone pay for visas for the US Citizens.

You are a 15 year old boy, and you have been to the pool once in your life. When it is \$6 to get in to the pool every day, that is probably not an expense that is necessary.

You have to lock up your bike every night. The night you forget to, it is stolen and sold for scrap metal.

When you are a Junior or Senior in High School you will most likely not go to prom.....Dress\$\$\$ Prom Ticket\$\$ Photos\$\$ Meal\$\$\$

When you are a Teenage mom just trying to finish school and someone asks YOU what you want for Christmas, you insist on diapers, formula, and clothes for your baby.

When given the choice between Fresh Fruit or Something else, you will most likely choose fresh fruit. When an apple is about \$.57 an apple, and you can get two packages of ramen that can feed more of your family, you will probably do that.

So, when you go, don't pre-judge the situation, don't come with any expectations, and don't expect your normal to be that community's normal. Go with an open heart, an open mind, and know that what you are stressed out about, is most likely not what the people in that community are stressed about. Don't pre-judge a kid or family, find out why they may need that extra food they appear to be hoarding, find out why that kid is staying home alone, find out why they may be acting out. That kid may not know where his/her next meal will come from, their mom may be working 1

or two jobs, and not have any options for childcare other than leaving them home alone, or they may be acting out because they just want someone to give them 20 minutes to hear their story. Whatever it is, you may make the difference. To the world you may be one person, but to one person, you may be the world!

God wants us to go.... 1John 3:16-18

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.



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