

What Can I Do?

Kelleigh Elizabeth Helm

The story of the working poor is the story of life on the margins. Where a single event on an ordinary day can bring a life crashing down. A car breaking down or an illness can take someone from barely scraping by to living in a car or a homeless shelter. More important than a change in location is the change from being able to support a family, to having children ask for food that you can't afford.

What is the real cost of cheap corn flakes at that big box store? Many are working 20 hours a week at minimum wage with no health insurance. The misery is certainly not confined within the borders of the United States. Ask the families of people working in the factory in Bangladesh, who died to produce Walmart's "Always Low Prices." These people live and die to provide cheaper consumer goods for an ever greedier American public. The poor pay the price; the rich get more for less.

When someone's life is ruined by a need for healthcare they can't afford, if they are lucky, they end up at my office. If they are less lucky they end up working 40 hours a week at

the Chelsea House Shelter for room, board, and seven minute showers. Or, more likely, they become homeless. When I meet people they are at the lowest point of their lives. I cannot heal years of abuse or congestive heart failure, but I can do something.

What I can do is make calls to doctor's offices. I can fill out paper work. I can cross T's and dot I's. I can navigate the papers and deadlines and legal jargon. I can listen and tell you that I see the same tears of frustration from everyone—men, women, young and old—that you are not alone, that maybe the only thing to do today is cry. But tomorrow, we will work together to make things better.

What I can do is navigate the social security system, a

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Pieces of Iota

Thomas Edmondson Whigham, Jr.

system seemingly designed to be inaccessible to those who need its services most. I can use my privilege to help those without it. It doesn't make life fair. It doesn't change the fact that I can have a \$40,000 surgery for \$140. Worse is that I can get the treatment at all, something not available to most of my clients. Even worse is knowing that they are alone. People end up on the streets because they don't have people to lean on, people that are there to provide a home for those with broken lives.

The story of the working poor continues. It lives on in millions of lives and is passed down through countless generations. How can I make life fair? How many people do I have to help get social security disability before I even the score?

I will never make life fair. But I can try.

■ **Kelleigh Elizabeth Helm (Simpson)** is a third year law student at the FSU College of Law. She participated in the Medical Legal Partnership for 2 years and hopes to work on solutions to global poverty issues.

In a systematic way the erosion of the barriers between her emotional composure and self-assurance and the callous disregard the rest of the world conveyed and the sense that the world felt if it bothered for feelings at all a barely hidden contempt or hatred was more than enough to through the lengths of time eliminate all notions of shared humanity. And it was enough to break her.

■ **Thomas E. Whigham, Jr.** is a bespectacled fugitive from the deadlines of adulthood hidden in a Guatemalan slim fit suit made entirely from wool. A young wolf in sheep's clothes, he remains inspired by the vast humanism of others and hopes to honor those who came before.



Central Park from Above
Trung Tran