

Growing Up with Not Enough

Tekesha Dones

I grew up in New York City. It was rough living. Sometimes there was food and sometimes not. It depended on my mother, whether she was too drunk to cook or too drunk to shop for food.

Surviving on Cornflakes, Candy, and Combos

I remember one time when I was maybe ten years old, my brother and I were hungry. He cooked some rotten meat with butter, and I ate some cornflakes with peanut butter. Basically, my brother and I took care of ourselves. Sometimes my mother would go to the store and buy rice and beans, potato chips, candy, and combos (crackers with cheddar cheese inside). I would take the combos and candy and hide them under my bed.

A Job at McDonald's Makes Things Worse

When I was 19, I was going to the Easter Seals school, and I was homeless. I met a lady who suggested that I live in her building. She was the one who taught me how to cook the basics. I got a job at McDonald's and I gained about forty pounds. Eventually I stopped working there because I wasn't making enough money to pay my bills, and my medical insurance was being cut off. It turns out it was better for me to be on public assistance than it was to have a job that didn't pay enough. After that I moved many times.

Feeding My Daughter

By the time I became pregnant with my daughter, I was homeless again and had no food. When my baby was born, she was underweight and she failed to thrive. She almost died. The doctors wanted to put feeding tubes in her, but my mother finally jumped in and helped me. It was about time! My mother forced my daughter to eat, so tubes weren't needed. My daughter continued to gain weight little by little.

Getting Help

When my daughter was about three years old, we moved into a place next to a very educated man who knew everything about food. He became my role model. I really admired him. He taught me how to eat right and not be afraid to try new things.

When I started at Read to Succeed, one of the teachers, Gail, talked to me about good nutrition, gave me tips about eating, and gave me good recipes. I admired her too.

A couple of years ago my daughter and I started going to soup kitchens for lunch with people from my AA meetings. We went there to eat and hang out. I would leave some chicken marinating at home for our supper. At night I would cook the chicken for my daughter and me.

I Have Come a Long Way!

Now I go to supermarkets and read the labels. I cook healthy food like broccoli and other vegetables. I bake chicken without the skin. I make mashed potatoes or baked potatoes. I make spaghetti sauce with my own secret recipe. I have more energy. I am no longer sluggish. I get sick less often. I have come a long way from being that child eating cornflakes and peanut butter.

Tekesha Dones is a student at Read to Succeed in Hartford, CT. She is a single parent of her 13-year-old daughter Janae. Tekesha hopes to become a CNA in the future.

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE about what it's like working at a fast food restaurant? See p. 29.

LOOKING FOR FACTS about hunger in the U.S.? See the box on p. 37; then take the quiz on p. 36.

