



RISING AGAINST POVERTY

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Poverty is the quality or state of lacking material possessions. This is probably the world's greatest problem that gives rise to a host of other issues-war, famine and malnutrition, non-education, to name just a few. Many people use it as a common reason for not being on a par with their counterparts elsewhere in the world. However, when does poverty become justifiable, and when does it become just a "convenient excuse"? Is there really no way out for people who are poor?

John D. Rockefeller, considered the wealthiest person in history, was not born rich. His father did every trick in the book to avoid hard work, while his mother tried to keep things on an even keel in their home. Making merely \$50 in three months working as a bookkeeper, John did his best to stay in school. In 1859, he fearlessly partnered with his friend to establish an oil refinery. He eventually bought out Clark's shares. In the end, he founded Standard Oil Company and went on to become the world's first billionaire, even becoming the inspiration for Oysters Rockefeller- yes, that's the oyster dish with the rich sauce.

Born in Gloucestershire, England, the young J.K. Rowling often told fantasy stories which she herself had written to her younger sister. After separating from her husband in 1993, she was diagnosed with clinical depression. She was an unemployed single mother who lived on welfare. Currently, her net worth is pegged at around \$1.1 billion. She is a philanthropist supporting a number of causes.

Scottish American Andrew Carnegie worked variously as a factory worker, bill logger and messenger boy. Moving up the ranks, he eventually established U.S. Steel, originally a conglomeration of his own and other smaller steel companies. Spending his vast fortune to support philanthropic works and education, he is best remembered for building Carnegie Hall, the prestigious concert hall for popular and classical music.

Born to unwed teenage parents, Oprah Winfrey was reared by her destitute grandmother who taught her to read before she reached three. Moving to Milwaukee city at age six to live with her mother, Oprah still didn't have much to live on despite showing great academic prowess. She turned rebellious and ran away from home, prompting her mother to send Oprah to live with her (Oprah's) father. She became a radio host, a news anchor and a TV host. Today, she is touted to be the richest African-American woman in the 20th century.

These are real stories of real flesh-and-blood people who didn't find poverty as a serious obstacle to becoming better than they were. Rising up against a materialistic world, they have found their self-worth in a sea of troubles.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The stories here are rags-to-riches stories. What is a rags-to-riches story?
2. Is there someone you know who was able to succeed despite difficult circumstances in their lives? Tell how he/she/they succeeded.
3. In your opinion, should people use poverty as an excuse for not succeeding? Why?
4. Can poverty ever be eradicated? How?
5. Do the rich have an obligation to help the poor? How can they help?