

A Poor Girl's Heart

By: Michelle M

My real estate career began when I took my first real estate class at Lakeland. Even though I would be done with these classes in a few months, it felt like a huge undertaking at this stage in my life. I was 35 years old and hadn't seen the inside of a classroom (except for visiting my children's classrooms) since I was 18. I was 6 months pregnant with my fifth child and had accidentally, yet perfectly, planned to give birth while school would be out for Christmas break. I was working 40 hours a week at a machine shop supply store since 1998. Between the kids and work, going to bed at 9:30 was a necessity so the thought of being in school until 10:00 at night didn't thrill me to say the least but, I had to do this.

I wanted a way out of the poverty I had been born into and continued into when I got pregnant at age 18 and dropped out of college. My eleven year marriage was about dead. My husband was living with a girl ten years younger than me and help from him was not an option. Between the girl, drugs, and jail, there wasn't much time for him to babysit for me while I went to school.

I looked at the classes as a mountain I needed to climb and that financial stability lie on the other side. My Mom and my sisters babysat for me when classes began. I walked into class the first day nervous, yet excited. I looked around at the other people there in class and most of them looked to be around my age or a little older. There were more women than men. Everyone was dressed casually, like they had just gotten off of work too. We went around the room to introduce ourselves and tell why we were there. Some were there out of curiosity. Some were there to gain knowledge of the laws and procedures to get into real estate investment. The majority were there to become a realtor.

The teacher gave an amazing statistic. He said that only 10% of the people in the room of about forty would actually make it as a realtor. This astounded me but I knew I would be in that 10%. I felt so good going to these classes. Each day I felt more and more important. I was taking charge of my life and making steps to change what I didn't like about it...being poor. As my knowledge grew, my confidence grew. I always did love knowing all the answers all through school. This continued into these classes but I wasn't as anxious to raise my hand to give an answer as I used to be. I was happy just to come into class and absorb all I could but not be heard. I met a few ladies that I sat by regularly but mostly I kept to myself.

I went through the first semester rather uncomfortably, mostly from being pregnant and not really fitting into those skinny person desks. I gave birth three weeks after the fall semester ended and went back to class in January when my new son was three weeks old. In the mean time my husband had come

back home because the girl dumped him, and I was working on how to live in a house with a man who had done so much wrong and not spend every minute reminding him of it.

As class resumed, I was half way up the mountain and ready to get this over with. This was really hard. My husband was there now to watch the kids so I could get my homework and studying done a little easier but, it was still the hardest thing I'd ever done. I made it through the laws and procedures, appraisal and practice with three B's and one C. I wasn't too happy with the C but, I was done.

I needed to come up with the money to take the exam now. This took a lot longer than I had hoped. When I finally got to take the exam several months later, I only passed half of the test. I regrouped and studied some more and passed on my second try. I couldn't have been more thrilled. Now my future could begin.

Before I started the classes, I had contacted several real estate companies. The first real person I could get on the phone who answered my questions was the manager of a local real estate company named Nancy. So when I was ready to start, she was the person I went to first to try to get a job. I went on the interview in my best church outfit; a long red velour top and a black skirt and heels. It wasn't very business-like but it was all I had. I walked into the building and was greeted by two nicely dressed receptionists who lead me into a beautifully decorated conference room. This room was nicer than my living room! The receptionist asked me if I wanted something to drink and brought me a diet Coke...in a glass. I only had plastic cups at home. My kids break glass. I was impressed. Nancy came in in a beautiful suit, full make-up, nails freshly manicured, gold necklace, bracelets, and rings. She was the picture of success, elegance, and class. This was what I wanted for myself. I believe I impressed her with my sense of drive and enthusiasm so, she hired me.

My first day was a great sampling of what my future held. All of the other people in the office looked like a million bucks-old, young, man, woman, receptionist, realtor, secretary. All of them... and then there was me. I felt so out of place. Everyone was very nice to me. No one made me feel like they were better than me but, that's how I felt. I was in another world. I was far from the dirty, greasy parts I sold to stinky, sweaty machinists out of a warehouse. All of that was replaced by BMWs, Mercedes, leather briefcases, suits, gold jewelry, and fake nails. Every woman there had fake nails. I never had fake nails in my life. I didn't even have a cell phone. I was the only one in the building without a cell phone. I decided I liked their lifestyle a lot better than mine and as I was able to, I got my nails done, I got a cell phone and I traded my 1986 hair style for a modern one. Slowly but surely I started to look like a realtor,

I could only work there part time because I couldn't afford to quit my other job yet. I loved the looks on the faces of my old co-workers when I'd come in after doing the real estate. I knew I was changing...on the outside. All of their heads would turn. I loved it. I loved the new me. I loved going to see all of these gorgeous houses, riding in these fancy cars with the other realtors when we were out touring all the homes, the lunches, the meetings, all of it. This was the way of life I wanted for me and my kids. But no matter how much I tried to fit in, there was something inside of me that didn't feel quite right. I felt like I'd spent a little money to try to look more like my new, much richer, co-workers but, could I really fit in? It was like they all knew I was poor. I couldn't hide it.

I'm sure they didn't all start out the way they were now. They may have been poor before and drove junky cars. I took a long look at myself in the mirror that day. Was it possible to have the heart of a poor girl? Could I be poor on the inside even if I didn't look poor on the outside? Maybe if I ever do become rich I'll find out if I truly can be rich on the outside and the inside.

I ended up leaving real estate in 2006. I'd sold a few houses and made a little money but could never put enough time into it to be successful. I had to keep my other job and the real estate company required for me to be full time. Hopefully my newest challenge, getting an associates degree in business in an accelerated degree program, will bring me a much better paying job-maybe make me "rich". But I believe I will always have a poor girl's heart. It's simpler that way.