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## Poor Families Rely on Trash For Food, Clothing — Survival

Special Report by Geraldine Hemmings



As the garbage truck rolls into "Riverton" dump, scores of men, women and children who had been picking on the mountains of trash raise their heads to see what might be coming in for gleaning.

Will it be discards of a local restaurant or grocery store? Perhaps it's trash from one of Jamaica's resort hotels or some old clothing from homes in the city.

From every corner of the sprawling dump, people begin to shuffle out to meet the truck. The heat of the day is oppressive and the air burns with the bittersweet smell of rotting food and gray-brown dust. Other than the truck crew and the rag-tag residents of Riverton, the only life here is flies, vermin and the pigs brought here to feed. I almost feel as if God is providing me with a foreshadowing of Hell.

*"These people have been invisible to the outside world for too long."*

Using makeshift hooks of heavy wire, the Riverton people begin raking through the truck's load. A woman yells and the crowd is soon at her side. Thirty feet away, I can smell the rancid chicken she has uncovered. She holds up a piece and her friends examine it. No matter that the flies have already converged on the meat. This is food. This is a meal for families who might otherwise eat nothing tonight.

As horrified as I am by the scene, I remain there to speak to the people of Riverton, Jamaica. If I leave, their stories and plight may never reach people who

could provide them with help. These people have been invisible to the outside world for too long. Their voices must be heard. Maybe by sharing their experiences with Christians in America, light can be brought into this darkness — Christ's mercy can be extended to these people in desperate need...

**CLAUDETTE BAKER** gathers the discarded chicken for her three young children — ages 5, 7 and 9. "I come to the dump for food and when I don't find anything we usually go hungry," she says. "Yesterday, all I got was two biscuits and a piece of cheese. But today, we will have chicken."

Robert, Claudette's youngest child, has brain damage. "I hustle bottles and other things so he can see a doctor." Her other two are "school aged," she admits, but they rarely get to school. She only has one complete set of clothes for school and no soap for washing. "I'd hoped they could go to school so they could come out as something."

**PAULINE DOUGLAS** is another Riverton mother who lives with the daily misery of failing her family. "I buried a son a month ago and my youngest is in the hospital," she says with a haunting pain in her eyes. "I don't want to come to the dump, but I have to. I pick up clothes and wash them. I get sick every time I come here. The dust gets in my lungs. But I don't have any choice. I don't have any other way to keep things going."

**GEORGE ROBERTS**, age 73, lives in the rusted out shell of a van in the dump. "When it's cold at night, the wind blows in and I do what I can to set my mind on not feeling it," he says. "I also fight the hunger. I didn't eat today — probably won't." Asked if life is hard, he nods slowly. "My hope is that I know I'll soon be dead," he says matter-of-factly.

**STEVEN THOMAS** is only 11 years old, but he knows the dump well. "I'm here from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. while my mother works in the market. I look for things for the family and for food when I can find it. I've got two brothers and two sisters and everything we have is from the dump," he says.

**ELAINE SAMUELS'** three youngest children are 8, 3 and 8-months. "I can't

manage them," she admits, looking away in embarrassment. "I can't afford to send them to school or feed them. I come here to try to make it, but I don't know how much longer I can keep going."

**DAWN MARIE FOREST** also gleans the dump for her children. If she finds an old dress, cleans and repairs it, it can

I leave Jamaica feeling hope. Yes, I have seen a glimpse of Hell, but I have also learned what Christ-like compassion can do. Riverton still exists, but Food For The Poor's outreach proves that it can be changed — one life at a time.

I commit myself to being part of that change. Will you?



George Roberts

fetch \$10 Jamaican dollars (equivalent to about one U.S. quarter). "I got to hustle the waste or my children won't go to school," she says.

Fortunately, in the midst of this darkness, I also discover a ray of light — a spark of hope. Nearby, stands a row of lovely new cottages in a rainbow of pastel colors. Food For The Poor has also seen the despair in Riverton dump and is bringing hope to the area's residents by providing housing, food and clothing, educational opportunities and self-help projects.

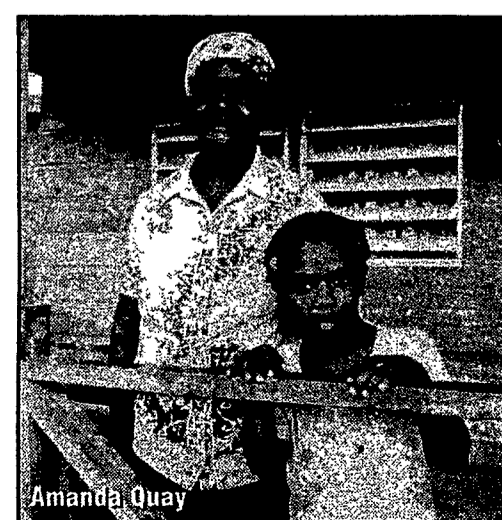
While visiting the areas under development by Food For The Poor I meet little Amanda Quay, age 8. She explains how her old home was so decrepit that her grandmother fell through the floorboards, injuring her leg. With joy on her face, Amanda leads me to a small but tidy new home built for her family by Food For The Poor. Sitting on the porch, the little girl's 73-year-old grandmother is happily rocking her baby sister to sleep. It's wonderful to see a family rescued from Riverton misery.

"Life was very hard for us then, but it's different for us now," she says. "We have this little home, we eat regularly and my daughter can send the children to school. God has really blessed us."

Yes, there is hope for Riverton's poor, as the Lord works through Food For The Poor — and the thousands of American Christians who support that ministry's work. These poor families can be lifted up. They can regain their dignity.



Claudette Baker



Amanda Quay

### HOW TO HELP:

Food For The Poor needs your help to bring Christ's mercy to the poor in Riverton and similar dump "cities" in the Caribbean and Latin America. The needs are urgent, so please make a contribution to this important outreach today.

Use the brochure insert from the newspaper or send your tax-deductible gift to: Food For The Poor, Dept. 25583, 530 SW 12th Avenue, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442. Large or small, every gift makes a difference!