



A Voice out of Poverty: The Power to Achieve through Adversity

Jillian Haslam

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Jillian Haslam's compelling memoir *A Voice out of Poverty* recounts the penury of her Calcutta childhood and her subsequent determination to become a force for social change.

The daughter of a British father and English-Armenian mother, Haslam grew up during the 1970s. Her parents struggled to keep their children fed, and the family was often homeless. Also at a young age, Haslam witnessed the death of her twin siblings due to malnutrition. Without money for a burial plot, Haslam's father placed the tiny bodies in a wooden tea chest and disposed of them himself. Disheartened and depressed, he "barely spoke for weeks."

When another baby in the family appeared to be dying, Haslam became desperate. Because her mother was unable to nurse the child, Haslam begged a shopkeeper for milk. He refused at first, but the ten-year-old was relentless: the vendor ladled out some "liquid gold" to save her sister's life.

Beyond Calcutta's endemic poverty, Haslam endured discriminatory harassment due to her Christian faith and Anglo-Armenian heritage. Called "white rats," Haslam and her multiracial siblings were regarded as "intriguing curiosities" or "targets for ridicule, belittlement, and abuse." Financial duress further overwhelmed and separated Haslam's family.

But there were happier moments, too. While sewing together fabric scraps to make clothing or bedding, Haslam's resourceful mother told the biblical story of Joseph's coat of many colors. And her father insisted that his children respect knowledge, noting that "the best school in the world is at the feet of an elder."

Now an award-winning activist, Haslam draws strength from the memories of her parents' love, the work of Calcutta's Mother Teresa, and her own determination. *A Voice out of Poverty* is a vivid, harrowing, and inspiring account of survival, triumph, and a career in charitable outreach.

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