



The Road Out: A Teacher's Odyssey in Poor America

Deborah Hicks

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Can one teacher truly make a difference in her students' lives when everything is working against them? Can a love for literature and learning save the most vulnerable of youth from a life of poverty? *The Road Out* is a gripping account of one teacher's journey of hope and discovery with her students—girls growing up poor in a neighborhood that was once home to white Appalachian workers, and is now a ghetto. Deborah Hicks, set out to give one group of girls something she never had: a first-rate education, and a chance to live their dreams. A contemporary tragedy is brought to life as she leads us deep into the worlds of Adriana, Blair, Mariah, Elizabeth, Shannon, Jessica, and Alicia—seven girls coming of age in poverty.

This is a moving story about girls who have lost their childhoods, but who face the street's torments with courage and resiliency. "I want out," says 10-year-old Blair, a tiny but tough girl who is extremely poor and yet deeply imaginative and precocious. Hicks tries to convey to her students a sense of the power of fiction and of sisterhood to get them through the toughest years of adolescence. But by the time they're sixteen, eight years after the start of the class, the girls are experiencing the collision of their youthful dreams with the pitfalls of growing up in chaotic single-parent families amid the deteriorating cityscape. Yet even as they face disappointments and sometimes despair, these girls cling to their desire for a better future. The author's own life story—from a poorly educated girl in a small mountain town to a Harvard-educated writer, teacher, and social advocate—infuses this chronicle with a message of hope.

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