**Headline:** ‘POOR Magazine’ Started With a Mother and Daughter Experiencing Homelessness and Grew Into a Movement

**Teaser:** A mother and daughter in and out of homelessness founded a grassroots magazine in 1996, by and for people experiencing poverty. It grew into a media, education, and art advocacy project for people in poverty around the world.

By April M. Short

**Author Bio:** [April M. Short](https://observatory.wiki/April_M._Short) is an editor, journalist, and documentary editor and producer. She is a co-founder of the [Observatory](https://observatory.wiki/Main_Page), where she is the [Local Peace Economy](https://observatory.wiki/Local_Peace_Economy) editor, and she is a writing fellow at the [Independent Media Institute](https://independentmediainstitute.org/local-peace-economy/). Previously, she was a managing editor at AlterNet as well as an award-winning senior staff writer for [Good Times](https://www.goodtimes.sc/), a weekly newspaper in Santa Cruz, California. Her work has been published with the San Francisco Chronicle, In These Times, LA Yoga, Pressenza, the Conversation, Salon, and many other publications.

**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced by* [*Local Peace Economy*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/local-peace-economy/)*, a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

**Tags:** Community, Economy, Interview, Media, Art, Activism, Social Justice, Human Rights, Women’s Rights, Indigenous Resistance, Health Care, Food, Education, Social Benefits, North America/United States of America, North America/Mexico, Africa/South Africa, South America/Brazil, North America/Puerto Rico, Opinion

**Photographs You May Use to Accompany the Article With Captions/Credits:** <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1BbWob7eo1cnqEZLD6iT-YsqsSiLGIRdq?usp=sharing> (captions and credits can be found in the [document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BPFRqAggE3wsRFjyAQXxHwxCN4gwiTRReJMxu3NvTjA/edit?usp=sharing) in this folder)

**[Article Body]**

“I’m a poverty scholar, that houseless mama, that houseless daughter—all those people you don’t wanna see, never wanna be—look away from me. Whatcha gonna do, arrest me? I’m in your city.”

This is part of the slam bio “PovertySkola” [Tiny (Lisa) Gray-Garcia](https://www.lisatinygraygarcia.com/) shares when we speak on the phone. The poet, writer, and poverty scholar, who prefers to be called “Tiny,” is also a formerly unhoused, incarcerated woman and the co-founder of an expansive media, art, and education project by and for people in poverty: [POOR Magazine (aka Prensa POBRE/Poor News Network](http://poormagazine.org/)).

[POOR Magazine](https://www.poormagazine.org/) is a “poor… [and] Indigenous people-led” media project based in the unceded Huchiun-Ohlone land of Oakland, California. Tiny and her mother started the media project in 1996 while experiencing serious poverty and housing instability. As the [website’s](https://www.poormagazine.org/about) “HERstory” section puts it, the magazine was started “by an Indigenous, landless mother and daughter who struggled with extreme poverty, incarceration, and criminalization in the U.S.”

Tiny explains that those involved with the project—which started with about six people and has since grown to more than 100—are “at one” with the things it represents, as a poor and Indigenous people-led effort.

“None of us are employees at POOR Magazine, and we intentionally call ourselves a movement,” Tiny says. “We don’t even call ourselves an organization.”

Beginning when Tiny was 11 years old, she and her mother moved in and out of experiencing homelessness, and were constantly experiencing the impacts of poverty—something millions of people in the U.S. can relate to. According to [United States Census Bureau data](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-277.html) from 2022, 37.9 million people were in poverty in the U.S. in 2021. And according to a 2023 [report](https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/) by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the number of homeless individuals “reached record highs in the history of data collection” in 2022, and unsheltered rates were trending upward.

“Ma and I started the movement [of POOR Magazine] out of our struggle,” Tiny says.

She notes that the grassroots project does keep its 501(c)(3) nonprofit paperwork up to date “by any means necessary” because over the years, it has otherwise proven difficult to maintain funding. As Tiny puts it, without the nonprofit paperwork, “folks who are wealth-hoarders are often afraid to donate to us and radically redistribute wealth because they think… that we’re going to run away to Mexico on their donation, or something. It’s really an embodiment of the suspicion that arises around the issue of poverty, which we are always resisting, fighting, and telling truth to.”

**What’s Missing From This Magazine Rack?**

While in and out of stable housing, faced with worsening gentrification, and following years of the trauma and difficulty caused by a cycle of poverty (including homelessness, abuse, violence, forced separation from each other, and jail time due to parking and vehicle citation debts), Tiny and her mother, Dee, gathered a community around the creation of a glossy print magazine called POOR Magazine. Its pages would represent the experiences of people living in poverty—something that was not happening in existing publications—and would uplift poverty scholarship.

“As I stood in front of some bookstore, I saw things like Golf Magazine, Vogue, and Guns and Ammo, all these ridiculous magazines,” Tiny says. “Some of them were beautiful, too—but there was nothing about poverty there, and intentionally so. Nothing. That’s part of where the idea of POOR Magazine came from. We were like: ‘What’s missing from this magazine rack?’”

The first issue of the magazine in 1996, “Homefulness,” focused on issues of housing, and living unhoused. Its contents came together through free pop-up writing workshops that were skill shares between people experiencing housing insecurity and poverty. The workshops took place on street corners, in housing shelters, in parks, and in other public spaces.

For the first issue, “we started doing what we call ‘extreme outreach’ in communities where we knew dwelled other poor people—communities in places like welfare offices, Social Security offices, on the street, and in shelters and community centers,” Tiny says.

This “extreme outreach” is how the founding members of POOR Magazine came to meet.

“We started to create the beginnings of a poor people-led movement and brought together the work that would be the contents for our first issue,” Tiny says—the Homefulness issue.

She says volume one came together “after many moons of sitting with relatives and community in the same position as us,” talking through how they wanted to express themselves and represent themselves, and sharing techniques for writing, art making, and poetry in the workshops they held.

“We were doing journalism and writing workshops in the community, on the streets, and in the welfare offices to create the content,” she notes. Tiny says that she and her collaborators were discussing how to frame issues, and they decided to focus on *solutions* to issues, starting with the inaugural volume’s theme of housing.

“I just like to mess with the colonial language,” she says. “So after a year of these workshops when we had all the content together, I’m just sitting there looking at the word ‘homelessness,’ and I realize: all these [solutions] create homefulness.”

**POOR**

Tiny says the decision to use the word “poor” in the title of the magazine was an act of liberation.

“The idea was to intentionally stand up inside of a word that’s used as an insult: To take back an insult, essentially. To take back a slur. To take back a space that with one fell swoop silences and erases people,” she says. “[The word ‘poor’] oftentimes causes people to cringe, and kind of get mad or upset because the shame of being a person in poverty is so intense in the U.S. The story is that if you’re poor you have failed, period.”

She notes that in most societies today there is no cultural structure for living humbly.

“There may be vows of poverty that nuns and priests… take, but in the community, to not make money means that somehow you are less than,” she says. “So, it’s a really intense decision [to call it POOR Magazine], and oftentimes poor people have problems with it more than anybody else. They’ll say, ‘I don’t want to be called that.’… And then on the other hand, a lot of us are finding it very freeing.”

Tiny says naming the magazine POOR was like telling the world, “So what? Go ahead and call me poor. I’m done with the shackles of your shame.”

“We do a lot of teaching around dealing with that shame mindset and resisting it, and lifting up the reasons for it, and the causation, and the lie behind it,” she says. “In so many ways, that frees up both privileged people and poor people. We are all told lies in crapitalism [sic]. People who hoard wealth and money are told lies. That’s not a human way to live.”

At one point, POOR Magazine became the acronym “Protest, Organize, Observe, and Report,” but Tiny says it never really stuck.

“My mom was like, no, it’s still going to be called ‘poor,’ and people are just going to have to deal with how it affects them, and let’s work together through that.”

From the beginning, it was important to Tiny and her mom that the magazine be a glossy, full-length, print magazine—not a pamphlet or a zine. They wanted the magazine to be aesthetically beautiful—and the writing to be beautiful, Tiny says.

“My mom was an amazing editor; she was very serious and a great reader,” Tiny says. “‘People don’t look at our work,’ is what she used to say. ‘People don’t look at us, so let’s make it [the magazine] beautiful.’ A lot of time was spent on that.”

On the cover of the first issue was artwork created and donated by artist [Evri Kwong](https://lannan.org/bios/evri-kwong), who also contributed a $2,000 painting to be sold at a fundraising event organized to support POOR Magazine’s launch and specifically offset the cost of printing.

“Real talk, creating a glossy magazine is not cheap; it’s ridiculously expensive, even though we had done everything ourselves,” Tiny notes.

Funding for the first issue largely came from artists who had trust funds, and/or from the resources of those who had generational wealth and supported the cause.

“They held an art show where they were selling some of their beautiful art, and all the proceeds from this art show would go to the funding of the magazine,” Tiny says. “That was that first form of radical redistribution, honestly. Mom and me were always adamant about, ‘If you have more than you need to survive and keep your family healthy and alive, consider radically redistributing to people who have none. And consider radically redistributing so that people have art and beauty and culture, not just a meal. Not just a sleeping bag and a tent.’ To their credit, these beautiful artists agreed, and thought that was amazing, and [gave their artwork to support us].”

One of the aims of POOR Magazine has always been to educate people about the radical redistribution of resources, through skill sharing between “people with nothing” and teaching people with excess resources about redistributing their resources in a way that is equitable.

In an [interview with Anti-Racism Daily](https://the-ard.com/2022/12/01/poor-people-led-movement-on-radical-redistribution/) in 2022, Tiny spoke to what she means by radical redistribution:

“We very clearly make the distinction between radical redistributing and ‘donating,’ because donating comes from a savior mentality of charity. Charity is created out of a notion of saviorism. It puts the decision-making power of how much to give on the person giving. The charity-industrial complex means control of money that wasn’t yours: we all know it was [extracted](https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-slavery-gave-capitalism-its-start) from Mama Earth, [First Peoples](https://www.history.com/news/native-americans-genocide-united-states), [and from](https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2022/11/16/history-land-slavery-indigenous) [Black](https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/capitalism-and-slavery/), [Brown](https://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/media/details/origins-new-latino-underclass), and [working-class bodies](https://inthesetimes.com/article/essential-workers-covid-pandemic-union-labor-strike). And yet you, the hoarder, get to decide what to do with it, and we continue to be a class-stratified society. How do poor people get control of their own solutions?”

When the first issue of the magazine was printed, Tiny says she broke down in the street.

“The feeling was almost unspeakable; it still is,” she says. “Things were going to change from that moment on, I knew it. It wouldn’t be fast and it wouldn’t be at all immediate, but for the first time in our life, we had really created something that would be a way to have people hear us and see us as a community, as poor folks. So we sort of just went from there.”

In 1997, the collective that made up POOR Magazine decided to create volume two around health care: “H-E-L-Lthcare.”

“It was about the many different ways in which we struggle with wellness, healing, and health care as poor people,” she says. For this issue, the magazine received its first-ever grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission. Each issue took a year to produce, and in 1998 came the work issue.

“That was the blossoming of a superhero,” Tiny says. “We started creating El Mosquito—panhandler by day, superhero by night, who speaks 37 lost Indigenous languages, and helps evicted families get their houses back. Those are his superpowers, among other things. That entire issue was based on an in-depth study of work itself. Work, poor people, labor, anti-labor, Indigenous labor, incarcerated labor—and sort of underground labor: the labor of mothers.”

Out of that issue came a concept called [WeSearch](https://www.poormagazine.org/post/wesearch-findings-on-the-eviction-moratorium), or people-led research.

“It’s not a data-driven form of investigation; it’s community-driven,” Tiny explains. “It values the knowledge of our life experience as part of the search. So, we search together.” (For example, a [WeSearch project](https://www.poormagazine.org/post/wesearch-findings-on-the-eviction-moratorium) released through POOR Magazine’s youth media project, Youth Poverty Skola, in August 2023 delves into the eviction moratorium in Alameda County.)

Following the first few issues, there were subsequent issues annually, funded through grants and gifts of what Tiny calls radical redistribution. Funding the project has taken decades of labor and determination and has not been easy. Tiny recalls finding herself in the welfare office during the Clinton administration years of what she calls “[welfare deform](https://socialistworker.org/2016/08/22/how-clinton-and-the-democrats-killed-welfare),” (which still [gravely impacts](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/07/clinton-era-welfare-reforms-american-poor-bernie-sanders) the poorest people in the U.S.,) and being told by a case manager that she would be lucky to get janitorial work, and that she had no shot at writing for a living. This was after she’d been writing for news publications, and had successfully founded the magazine and published its first issue.

“But then, above… [the case manager’s] head was this pink flyer that said RFP—request for proposals,” Tiny says. When the case manager left the room, Tiny “liberated” the paper from where it was pinned and used the paper to teach herself to write grant proposals.

“It was an insane process that was extremely terrifying,” she recalls. “I created a 90-page grant with an Excel sheet. I don’t even know how I did it because I was dyslexic and this was like calculus, but anyway, I did it because I had to. Desperation is a great motivator.”

She wrote a grant proposing the first-ever Welfare-to-Work program in journalism in the U.S.—and it was approved.

“It was only $18,000, which I know is this chunk of money, but it’s not much in the world of grants,” Tiny says. “It doesn’t really do very much. But for us, oh my God.”

She shares that the grant allowed POOR Magazine to lease an office space, and provide housing and stability to the project’s contributors. Over the years, the magazine project has expanded into a network of offshoot efforts that make up a poor people’s movement in the Bay Area and beyond—from an affordable housing project (called [Homefulness](https://www.poormagazine.org/homefulness), like the magazine’s first issue), to political consciousness [education and free schools](https://www.poormagazine.org/education), radio shows, hip-hop and other music projects, poetry workshops, theater productions, gardens and food justice efforts, a free library, youth projects, healing ceremonies, and other creative expressions.

**Landless People’s Movements**

These projects seek to uplift communities in the Bay Area and also serve as inspirations for communities around the world, who often invite Tiny and POOR Magazine to speak and share insights about the work they do. As the [website](https://www.poormagazine.org/about) puts it, POOR Magazine is dedicated at its core to providing “revolutionary media access, art, education, and advocacy to silenced youth, adults, and elders in poverty across Mama Earth.”

“This is a global project; I would be remiss if I didn’t say that,” Tiny says. “The vision of Homefulness, in addition to being a poor mama and daughter-led vision, is modeled after other landless people’s movements.”

She says these include landless people’s movements like the [Zapatistas](https://www.thoughtco.com/zapatistas-4707696) in Chiapas, Mexico; [Abahlali baseMjondolo](https://abahlali.org/a-short-history-of-abahlali-basemjondolo-the-durban-shack-dwellers-movement/), a shack dwellers’ movement in South Africa; [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* or the Landless Workers’ Movement](https://www.mstbrazil.org/content/what-mst) in Brazil; and [MOVE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MOVE_%28Philadelphia_organization%29), founded by John Africa in Philadelphia.

“These are movements that were launched specifically by Indigenous, houseless, and poor people in self-determination,” Tiny says. “And that’s what Homefulness is.”

Tiny notes that one of the projects branching off of POOR Magazine is called the [Stolen Land/Hoarded Resources UnTours](https://www.facebook.com/events/847614252559158/) that visits different locations “to share the medicine of radical redistribution.”

“Specifically, we go to wealth-hoarding neighborhoods,” she says, noting that they’ve visited places like Philadelphia’s Main Line, New York City’s Park Avenue, and other wealthy neighborhoods. She says the group now has an invitation to bring the UnTour to South Africa.

“Now, post-apartheid, the struggle in South Africa is around poverty and violent classism—albeit there remains settler-colonial terror, it’s undergirded by racism and white supremacy,” Tiny says. “They want us to go there and share the medicine [of UnTour], and share [Homefulness](https://www.poormagazine.org/po-peoples-solutions) there as well.”

**Criminalized for Being Poor**

Tiny shares that in approximately 1995, when she was 18 years old, she and her mother were living in the Bay Area, and a series of pivotal events happened that eventually led to the start of POOR Magazine.

First, Tiny was arrested by the UC Berkeley police for the citations that she and her mother accumulated as a result of sleeping outside and in cars.

“As you may or may not know, it’s illegal to be houseless in the U.S., and it’s criminalized by multiple laws on the books, which have been carried over from settler-colonial Europeans—who are essentially occupiers who came here,” she says. “We teach these things [in our education programs]… but these laws all undergird the system that we live in, in the U.S.—and they essentially make it a crime to be poor.”

She says they were initially harassed and arrested because of racial and classist profiling.

“The police were profiling me and my mom,” she says. “We were in another hooptie—a broke down car—and we were toddling along with our belongings to sell,” she says. “They pulled us over… and I ended up in jail. All of these fines had accumulated, and I ended up doing three months in Santa Rita [Alameda] County jail for the act of being houseless.”

She says at the time the experience was “devastating,” especially because she was her mom’s sole caretaker, and now Dee was left alone, outside, without resources.

“She was left on the street, with our home being towed away, and her daughter being taken to jail,” Tiny says. “She was psychologically disabled, and she was unable to function. I was her support person, and so it was an absolute act of violence… My mom didn’t know what to do, and she was in extreme terror. She called everybody she could.”

***Milagros* From the Ashes**

Tiny calls the next pivotal thing that happened a miracle. Her mom found [Osha Neumann](https://tinyurl.com/yc3zjza9), a self-described “[attorney for the disenfranchised](https://www.berkeleyside.org/2022/02/07/osha-neumann-retires-civil-rights-lawyer-homeless-peoples-park)” at UC Berkeley. Tiny calls him a “hero.”

Neumann worked to get Tiny out of jail and to convert her fines to community service. And he invited Tiny to work with him by asking her, “What can you do?”

She says “What can you do?” was a bizarrely freeing question.“It was the first time anybody had asked me that. I was a young person, but I think I’d lived three lifetimes already… We’d already been evicted multiple times, and we had dealt with sweeps, incarceration, terror, and trauma.”

“I told him, ‘Well, I guess I can write.’”

Neumann told her, “Then, that’s what you’ll do,” and Tiny began writing about her mother’s life.

Tiny says she had always written poetry and stories but had never before considered herself a “writer.” She says when the East Bay Express published an article of hers, it was an incredible experience after being told by the world for so long that her voice didn’t matter.

“It was something magical,” she says. “That was the first *milagro*—the first miracle,” she says.

Tiny recalls that in the months following her incarceration, she and her mom realized their underground art economy was destroyed, and without art, for a time, things began to feel hopeless.

“Things were so bad that I tried to end my own life at one point,” Tiny says. “There were a lot of horrible things that happened at that time—but then, out of the ashes, my mom started sitting in on classes at San Francisco State [University] in Black studies, women’s studies, Indigenous studies—and she met all these amazing women.”

Tiny came to the classes, too, as her mom’s support person, and she says hearing these lecturers who were “talking about the positions of Indigenous people and poor people all over Mama Earth, the relationship to liberation,” for the first time provided context for the experiences she and her mom had gone through. The lectures began to “connect the dots of poor people all over the world—and specifically poor women and children like us.”

This is how Tiny says she and her mom received a political consciousness education, which she says was essential to the later development of the various projects of POOR Magazine.

“Mama and me were from Los Angeles, and we’d had no political consciousness,” she says. “It was really powerful because that helped us start to build that consciousness of community and organizing. We started to connect with other communities fighting things like welfare deform [sic], as I call it, and all these related issues.”

The third pivotal event that happened in the lead-up to POOR Magazine, Tiny says, was that she and her mother met a landlord “who wasn’t a scam lord, as I call them,” she says. “She [the landlord] saw me as a good daughter in the Indigenous sense and didn’t evict us if we couldn’t pay the rent. It was an extremely amazing thing. For the first time, we could breathe.”

She says they paid whenever they could, but if they couldn’t make rent on time, they didn’t have the burden of housing insecurity looming over them. So, she and her mom were able to think through all that had happened without having to be in constant crisis mode wondering how they would eat, or where they would sleep.

Out of the spaciousness that stable housing provided, the vision for POOR Magazine was born.

Decades after the first issue of POOR Magazine was published, the writing has moved online, and in addition to journalism, creative writing, and poetry, the project has expanded into a variety of on-the-ground projects that can be found on the drop-down menu of “[Po’ People’s Solutions](https://www.poormagazine.org/po-peoples-solutions),” on the magazine’s website.

**When Mama and Me Lived Outside**

Tiny says the hardships her mom, Dee, experienced due to poverty are inseparable from the story of POOR Magazine. Dee, a mixed-race [Afro-Boricua](https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/afro-boricua-agency-against-the-myth-of-the-whitest-of-the-antilles/) child who “was hated for her melanin, her features, and her culture,” experienced multiple layers of trauma when she was young. Dee’s mother was a domestic violence survivor who was “violently ashamed” to have given birth to Dee unmarried, and ultimately didn’t have the capacity to parent her. Dee was given up to the state and became “a victim of torture in foster homes and orphanages” in Pennsylvania. She wound up growing up on the streets of Philadelphia, and Tiny says her mother never had a true childhood due to the near-constant life-threatening encounters and extreme traumas she experienced.

“That’s no childhood at all,” Tiny says. “My mom did like a lot of us poor people and trauma victims do, and just kept it moving. She kept on going,” Tiny says. “I know that’s called resilience. I don’t really get down with that term… I think some people don’t make it, and some people do, and that doesn’t say anything about their character. It’s more that you just keep moving on, and by any means necessary, and sometimes that doesn’t work, and there’s no special thing about any one of us.”

Tiny notes that often in her speeches—which she delivers to crowds in Oakland, and around the Bay Area, as well as to groups around the world who invite her to speak—she’ll say, “there are many things this poverty scholar could tell and teach you, but no more, no less than any poverty scholar could teach you. It’s just, they’re not all necessarily listened to.”

When Tiny was four years old, her mom left her dad due to his “violent abuse and substance use.” Afraid to go to her abuser for child support—and worried she, a poor woman of color, would potentially lose custody of her child if she did go to the state, since Tiny’s father was white and relatively wealthy—Dee “embarked on the life of a single parent by any means necessary,” Tiny says. She lived on welfare or domestic labor jobs. “Poor people’s jobs,” as Tiny puts it.

Over the course of 12 years, Dee eventually completed school, studying when she could carve out time. She got a job doing social work through a Catholic-run, state-funded convent for “wayward teens.” However, the job only lasted three years, as Dee refused to play by the rules of the state-funded program.

“She was actually practicing family restoration instead of what the anti-social work industry, as I call it, does, which is perpetuate family separation,” Tiny says. “My mom was a revolutionary, and a creative, and an artist. She was doing amazing work [at the convent]—but it wasn’t within the agenda of the state.”

Dee was fired, and from the time Tiny was 11 years old, she and her mom floated between living on the street and living a paycheck away from homelessness.

“It didn’t magically change anytime soon because that’s not what poverty does,” she says. “Poverty begets poverty in a really terrifying way, because of all the ways that the state and the systems ensnare poor people—and specifically poor mothers and children, and houseless mothers and children. It’s a very dangerous position to be in, in the U.S., or the United Snakes, as I call it.”

Over these years, Tiny says, her mother became disabled and unable to function in many ways, but she continued to create art. When Tiny was 12 years old, she started working with her mother to sell art on the street and stepped away from formal education for good.

“I say I dropped out of school in the sixth grade to enroll full-time in the school of hard knocks, so I graduated with a PhD in poverty,” she says. “And this is not to glamorize it at all. It’s very serious and horrible, but at that point, there was no choice. I had tried to go to school while houseless, and it was very complicated.”

School officials had reported Tiny for absences, and when the officers who showed up learned that she and her mother didn’t live at a physical address, they called Child Protective Services (CPS). The agency threatened to separate Tiny from her mother, so the two of them went “underground” for years, and at times lived completely off-grid.

Tiny says the idea of children living separated from their mothers because of housing insecurity and poverty is a harmful byproduct of capitalism, or what she calls “crapitalism.”

“I’m an Indigenous child, and I was raised in that way,” Tiny says. “I was told many times as a young adult and a teenager, ‘You’d be okay if you left your mom.’ And that’s an interesting thing to me… because how could I be okay if my mom wasn’t okay? My mom experienced trauma. She was very angry and she was very depressed, but I’m honored that I could care for her and be her support person, and her coworker… Many, many cultures all over the world, and specifically Indigenous cultures outside the United States, don’t perpetuate what I call this cult of independence, which is very, very, very harmful and dangerous.”

She says that separation from—or connection with—our mothers and families “is key to the barometer of sanity and success.”

“There’s a lot there, and it’s something I teach on, because it plays into the work that we do [at POOR Magazine],” she says. “The idea [in U.S. culture] is that because we have access to a roof we’re somehow better parents, and that’s not true.”

At the time Tiny left school, she and her mother were living in Los Angeles out of their car. Within six to eight months, they wound up living outside, because their registration had expired, and the car was towed away. They, like so many other families, wound up sleeping on park benches, bus benches, and shelter beds. This became what Tiny refers to as “a year of being swept,” about which she wrote in her children’s book, [*When Mama and Me Lived Outside: One Family’s Journey through Homelessness*](https://www.poorpress.net/product-page/when-mama-and-me-lived-outside-cuando-mam%C3%A1-y-yo-viv%C3%ADamos-afuera). The book was published in 2020 and has also been adapted into an animated short [film](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=639310677087463) and has since won many awards.

“It was very important to introduce a new protagonist, specifically to children,” Tiny says of the book, noting that in the U.S. many children experience homelessness or housing insecurity. In 2021, [data showed](https://missionlocal.org/2022/09/last-year-one-in-every-24-sf-students-was-homeless-advocates-say-the-numbers-are-going-up/) that 1 in 24 students in San Francisco alone was homeless. This number has only been increasing. And the number of homeless children in the U.S. is [widely undercounted](https://www.npr.org/2022/02/15/1073791409/homeless-youth-and-children-are-wildly-undercounted-advocates-say), as detailed in an NPR report in 2022.

“You are absolutely shamed to be a child in poverty, a child in homelessness. I saw it as an act of an emergency to do that children’s book,” Tiny says. “It’s a pandemic of poverty, and it’s very, very serious.”

Tiny says the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated problems that already existed for people living in poverty. She says in 2020, POOR Magazine transformed its existing [Sliding Scale Café](https://www.poormagazine.org/po-peoples-solutions) (a public barter market) into a groceries and food giveaway.

“Now we were no longer just supplying people with food and diapers, but we were supplying them with groceries, safety and hygiene supplies, water, and basically everything,” she says. “People stopped making money [during the pandemic], and in poor communities it hit first and worse, as it always does.”

She says they went from supporting about 100 families per week to more than 400 in 2020 and subsequent years. And she says they were able to run the program thanks to radical distributors who gave goods to support their neighbors. Local programs like the [Berkeley Food Network](https://www.berkeleyfoodnetwork.org/) and [Deep Medicine Circle](https://www.laprogressive.com/healthcare-issues/rupa-mayra) also supplied fresh organic produce.

During this time, she says, the “sacred vessel” she is calling the bank of community reparations also came into form. The “bank” puts out emergency reparations requests at least once a month to directly support poor families with immediate needs.

“We ask for help getting poor families into motels and out of homelessness, paying for cars to get fixed, support if someone comes out of the hospital, all kinds of things,” she says. “There’s no interest; there’s nothing to pay back. There’s just a need, and we put it out to our folks to help… and we radically redistribute every single dollar we get.”

**Homefulness**

“For the first time in my life, this houseless mama is housed,” Tiny says. And, this time she and her son are housed for good.

This is thanks to the [Homefulness Project](https://www.poormagazine.org/po-peoples-solutions), which is a radical redistribution housing project of POOR Magazine. The website describes it as a “sweat equity, permanent co-housing, education, arts, micro-business, and social change project for landless/houseless and formerly houseless families and individuals.”

The Homefulness Project currently houses 18 families, the 18th of which moved in on August 1, 2023, and they were welcomed in with a “Ghetto Sunrise Ceremony.” Tiny says it’s much more than a roof over people’s heads. She shares that the location of the housing is in the same place where she and her mother, Dee, used to park to sleep when they were living out of their car, and she feels Dee, who passed away in 2006, helped to guide the project to the location.

“I knew my mom was working from the other side,” she says.

In addition to housing families, the Homefulness Project building is also a headquarters of sorts for the project’s “Deecolonize Academy, PeopleSkool, Community Newsroom, Sliding Scale Café, the Uncle Al & Mama Dee Living Library, Revolutionary Radio on PNN–KEXU, and all of POOR Magazine’s Indigenous community arts and media programming,” [according](https://www.poormagazine.org/po-peoples-solutions) to the magazine’s website.

The website also describes Homefulness as follows:

“Homefulness is what poor, houseless, Indigenous, evicted, disabled, false-border-terrorized peoples from all four corners of Mama Earth, now residing on stolen and occupied Turtle Island, have dreamed, loved, and fought for. After lifetimes of being displaced, evicted, incarcerated, swept, criminalized, and traumatized, our family is actually ‘buying’ land and building permanent homes, food justice, art, and healing comeUnity for ourselves and the world. We operate in the tradition of and in solidarity with landless people’s movements across the globe. … The vision of Homefulness is a blueprint for unselling and physically and spiritually liberating Mama Earth by permanently removing land from the speculative ‘real estate’ market. It is meant to be replicated all across occupied Turtle Island and Mama Earth.”

*If you or someone you know is in crisis, please* [*call, text, or chat*](https://988lifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now/) *with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at* *988**, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741.*