

Document 3 **Opinion: Being Hungry in America Is Hard Work.
Food Banks Need Your Help**

The first thing you learn when you rely on the food bank to feed your family is that you can't rely on the food bank to feed your family. Not entirely, anyway. The truth is, many families struggle with hunger despite regular visits to their local food pantry.

According to the most recent report from the US Department of Agriculture, 11.8 percent of Americans are food insecure. I've experienced this first hand. I was a food bank customer myself – a single working mother whose paychecks barely covered rent, daycare, utilities and gas, let alone food.

My local food pantry was in the basement of a church. There was a wide parking lot to the side, but I always parked my car around the corner, where I'd be less likely to be spotted. I was already ashamed to be seen chugging along in a car with a smoking tailpipe and paying for fuel with stacks of change at the gas station. I couldn't bear to have anyone know that I couldn't afford to feed my son.

The volunteers at the food bank were silver-haired and kind. On my first visit, I was fresh from my receptionist job, sharply dressed in a skirt suit handed down from my mother. I was worried I wouldn't look needy enough, so I'd tucked my pay stubs into my purse just in case. It wasn't necessary. I told the volunteers I needed help and they believed me. I didn't need to prove I was hungry. It was a time in my life when I rarely received respect from anyone, but I received it from them. Dignity was the first gift they gave me.

A woman asked for my family size. I told her it was just me and my son and she wrote the information on an index card and tucked it away into a plastic box full of other cards. I thought about how each one of those index cards represented a person who had to walk through that door and ask for help like I did. These were real people with lives, stories and families, shrunk so small they fit inside a box the size of a human hand. It was fitting. I felt small. Poverty had shrunk me.

Tamara Gane, npr.org, June 30th, 2019