

Adversity in Chris Gardner's *The Pursuit of Happiness*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to prove that optimism maintaining a sense of hopefulness, pursuing happiness, confidence and positivity as an ascending power to climb the mountain called adversity. This statement is going to be discussed in different aspects with the reference of Chris Gardner's life story. It explores the positive thought a man must have to lead a happy life. This study found Chris Gardner's life as an example for the people who had the spirit to lead a successful life with the optimistic mentality. This study selected and analyses the major aspects that lead a man to be an optimist. How Gardner stands out in terms of his unique approach towards adversity has been identified here. Finally this study tries to convey inspirational thought to the readers who are in lack of confidence and pessimist in nature.

KEYWORDS: racial issues, homelessness, unemployment, optimism, adversity

Adversity states the unfavorable or opposing one's interest. It is closely associated with human life. Adversity has been considered as worst time of one's life time but whether we like it or not, adversity is part of one's life. In the universe adversity is one among the thing that will never show partiality to the people. Everyone will get the golden opportunity to experience adversity in their life time. It is depend on the individual whether is to stuck with adversity and end up their life or take it as a challenge and overcome it with courage and never giving up attitude. Robert Frost states the adversity in the poem "The Road Not Taken":

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
took the one less traveled by, and that
has made all the difference. (18-20)

The above lines explain once in a wood the narrator was encounter with two different roads in front of him and he was in a dilemma to select. One appears smooth that indicates many people have passed the road but the other appears with grass, thorn and rock that indicates only less has used this road. At last the narrator has chosen the one which is less travelled by people. Similarly in the memoir *The Pursuit of Happiness* the protagonist ,Christopher Gardner though he was raised from a ghetto he married a wealthy women and got the opportunity to settle his life without any effort but he gradually find it as something stupid so he given up that life and chosen the other path of hardship. Christopher Gardner chose the unusual way that made him to experience an extended end of adversity.

Adversity generally two types as mention as physical and mental or emotional. Either physical or mental adversity will surely show up in one's life and we should have

the tendency to accept it as an unavoidable aspect in life. As Have lock Ellis wrote: “Pain and death are part of life. To reject them is to reject life itself” (4). Problems in our life is tiny or large it will exist throughout our whole life. It does not depends on our smartness, sharpness, cleverness or lucky but we will encounter struggles, challenges, difficulties and at that time we will feel heart wrenching moments in fact we all have to thank adversity because it will teach us how to deal with the same and prepare us to face forthcoming struggles . Through the challenges, difficulties and struggles that we successfully confront every day strengthen ourselves and that leads us to conquer future obstacles. If we are positively responding the adversity, we will have the ability to construct the tremendous qualities within ourselves such as strength, courage, perseverance.

Human beings have the tendency of unfairness of life when we caught up in a situation, due to that we will fail to recognize the wisdom and growth that accompany adversity. Adversity is unavoidable it cannot be ignored one has to succeed. There are three possible ways to overcome adversity. First, one should have the mentality of accepting adversity as something inevitable in life and is a part of life. In terms of world there are floods, tsunamis, wars and many kinds of calamities. Even within our family and friends there we have to face death, pain, loss. Hence we must prepare our mind to accept the terrible situations in our life. Second, a warrior prepares himself physically and mentally before head on to the battle field. He knows that dread full things would happen but he already gains the strength and weapon to fight against the opponent. Likewise one has to be prepared before the adversity hits. If we are prepared for the worst, the worst will lose its power. Third, as a human being we cannot live alone, each and every human needs other humans’ relationships and attachments. All human beings survive with the support of others. Hence we should have to build the support of family and friends.

In *The Pursuit of Happiness* Gardner’s survival of adversity shows the great lesson of life. Gardner undergoes number of problems during his childhood. He faced domestic violence, sexual harassment, racism, unemployment, hunger and homelessness. Born as a poor in the poverty stricken area of the north side of Milwaukee, America, at the time of his childhood days, he was humiliated and beaten by his stepfather, Freddie Triplett an illiterate, bell gent, abusive and complete drunk. Since Gardner did not know his father except his father’s name. Often was abused as “big eared mother fucker” (TPH35) and treated so badly by him.

Domestic violence takes a major part in Gardner’s life at the hours of adversity. During 1980s and 90s domestic violence in United States of America reached its extreme level where women becomes the prey for the violence of men and the children who witnesses the violence, when they become adult they also practice the same. Thus violence exists in their life. Gardner’s mother Betty Jean Gardner Triplett, victim of the domestic violence, she has been beaten up by Triplett. Often he chases and threatens her at gun point; drag her through the public streets even once he made an attempt to murder her. Gardner’s mother and siblings always had a fear of living because of Triplett. One of the chapters in the text titled as No Daddy Blues reflects their terrified condition:

It was fear of what Freddie might do what he’d already done Big-time Fear. Fear that I’d come home to find my mother murdered. Fear that my sisters and I would be murders. Fear that the next time Freddie came home drunk, pulled out his shotgun, and woke all of us at the end of the barrel,

shouting, 'Everybody get the fuck outta my goddamned house!' He'd make good on his promise to kill us all. (TPH35)

Triplett's unpredictable features made Gardner to define him as rain (unpredictable). Gardner opines that: "Every time he came back, apologetic contrive, he'd go off, but at some point everybody know he would" (TPH38). Apart from the drastic violence caused by Triplett he was sexually abused by a stranger at his early teens. He also faces with the issues of racism that embraces him in many ways. These embracements resulted in opening a firm and enter a completely new market by him, the market maintained by the Black people "[black institution, black banks, black insurance companies, black entrepreneurs and executives and black foundations]" (TPH289).

Gardner's mother and his uncle confront this problem at their childhood when they were heading to school, White children rode on horseback, the whites look down on them and pointing on by calling them "Niggers" (TPH19) and spat on them. Gardner encountered this complex throughout his hardship and he started to create a new world for him. In 1968 he awakened, a period that made him to realize the consciousness of color; when he started to attend a white school on the east of Milwaukee soon he realized the reality and worst conditions of Black people in America. Gardner observes that: "what is felt like to have his color as his identity, to be looked down on to be regarded as less than top feel shame, or to be invisible, a non- entity other than a dark skinned black boy" (TPH88).

Gardner as a Black struggled in many ways to find a job. He attempted to get job in stock markets. Racism creates lot of failure in his self-career he was rejected in from job institutions yet at last he got the job though he makes some successful connections with others. But he do not invite customers to the office because of his blackness, in fact people do not trust black-salesman. While he works on the base he sees that the people do not make a difference between white and black men. But when he leaves the base and talks with the people who are living there, he feels that he is being ill-treated with the concept of racism, and wants to help the people somehow.

Unemployment becomes another issue which pulled him into adversity. As a Black-American he is intelligent enough to work in a prestigious companies but he was rejected due to his skin color. Normally in America the employment gap between Black-Americans and whites remains high. Since he failed to claim his degree after schoolings he involved in multiple jobs. First, he worked as a dishwasher at Nino's steakhouse. Then he joined in a new job, handling bedpans and cleaning up pee and poop after old people. Then he decides to go to the Navy, the department he longed to work for but instead of going there he got some other option in USA. So that he decides to go to Orlando for boot camp. Then he worked in the proctology. In the proctology, Chris takes care of everybody and becomes more independent worker. Then he switched to the medical field, when he meets Doctor Elis, he gets a new job offer from him in San Francisco as a research assistant and he accepts it, that inspired him to choose medical field but his marriage with Sherry on June, 18, 1977 made him to drop the plan.

Gardner's unsteady employment causes problem that affected him alone. When the days passes problems started with family especially when his first son Christopher Jr born. He gets into trouble with his second wife Jackie, who insulted him by calling him a bad father. Just because he didn't have a well paid job he was chased out of house and was not allowed to see his son anymore. At the next moment he starts to working for

Wan Waters and Rogers where the sales manager Patrick does not like Gardner and often humiliates him in front of customers. Delivering samples to San Francisco general hospital is the climax in his life.

Bob Russel, a stock broker, offers to introduce Gardner to managers at different brokerage firm with training programme. While training he has to study for a license. Bob used to sets up interviews for him but he gets rejection. Lack of connection to the stock market is also the reason for his rejection. Later gets an offer as training programme at E. F. Hutton.

Patrick, the sales manager fires Gardner due to his inability to expand his sales territory that made him to become a penny less man for his first day there he finds out the man who offered him job and has been fired. Gardner could not find a good job. In order to survive in the world with Whites he does many odd jobs. He faces may tension at home. Finally he place his hope on a job in Bean Witter still he becomes more depressed, and engage corral with his wife, attack her eventually things gone out of control. The police came and arrested him as a wife beater. Instead of paying \$1.200 for parking tickets, he prefers to go to the prison for 10 days. After finishing his 10 days prison punishment he came to know that Jackie has taken away his belongings including his son this leads Chris deserted as a lonely person in the society of White.

Gardner portrays the worst part of adversity in a human life; homelessness is a social crisis in the United States of America. Homelessness emerged as a national issue in the 1870s. Many homeless people lived in emerging urban cities like New York City. In the 20th century, the great depression of the 1930s caused a devastating epidemic of poverty, hunger and homelessness. There were two million homeless people migrating across the United States. Causes of homelessness in the united states includes lack of affordable housing, diverse, natural disasters (hurricane, earthquake, flood) mental illness, physical disability, without family, no unearned income, poverty, gambling, unemployment and low paying jobs. Unemployment is the real cause that pushed the protagonist into the deep pit called homelessness.

Gardner at his time of training in the stockbroker's, day time he works at night he had nowhere to go nor has he got enough money to rent an apartment. Eventually he sleeps under his desk thus he managed for some days. Fortunately he passes the exam and started working like crazy. There is no place to go for him, becomes a major obstacle for Gardner during his internship. At this time he got his son Christopher Jr back but do not know where to go or stay with his child. During day time he send his child to the daycare centre named, HAPPYNESS (TPH230). He did many odd jobs to earn money and to have a better life. But he failed in all jobs and struggled to satisfy their expense for three times meal each day.

Gardner's life with his three year old son in the streets made him to worry. After his duty hours he picks his son from the day care centre and hurried towards the charity housing for homeless by carrying in one hand his suitcase in one shoulder his office bag in another shoulder a set of suit was hanging, in one hand was carrying portable bone density scanner machine and holds his son. Where ever he goes he lingered with all his belongings and in the long queue for homeless housing he used to wait for a long time by carrying his things. Sometimes he gets housing and at times when he fails to get housing him and his son, find comfort and sleep in the BART (TPH235) station restroom. This

must be the worst part of adversity in his life time. But his spirit to live in this society to overcome all the issues made him to survive in this world among Whites.

As adversity teaches man a life lessons, Gardner also learned much through his hardship. For instance his step father's attitude towards him and his real father's disappearance from his life made him to swear: "my long term plan had already been formulated starting with the solemn promise I made to myself that when I grew up and had a son of my own, he would always know who I was and I would never disappear from his life." (TPH35).

Until his middle ages he faced number of difficulties and obstacles, as the proverb states, "Failure is the stepping stone for success" with his strong hope of better life and courage to defeat all the obstacles so that he himself found a new path with the intension of leading a happy life. As Frost mentioned in his poem "The Road not Taken" usually people will choose the path which was travelled and selected by a others but only a few has the courage to choose the way which is less travelled and not selected by others. Chris Gardner took the path which was less travelled and defeat the obstacle called adversity with his determined mind.

Various people have different approach towards adversity, whether we like it or not it is impossible to ignore. Some are afraid of being overwhelmed by pain so they prefer running away from it. Some lazy heads don't bother about it and assume it as their fate and remain in poverty. Only few have the courage to take further steps to step out of it and achieve their destiny. So this studies written in favor of people who have positive approach towards adversity.

Hence throughout this study by analyzing the life of Chris Gardner it insists that if a person wants to achieve his or her goal the only possible way is to overcome the barriers as Gardner. Also the outcome of positive approach has been analyzed here, such as it teaches life lessons to man, and it strengthens him or her to face upcoming pain.

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