

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Stephanie Land is the instant bestselling author of *MAID: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, and many other outlets. Her writing focuses on social and economic justice.

- Goodreads

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were your opinions about poverty and the poor before you read *MAID*? What were the sources of the information that influenced these opinions?
2. What is class prejudice? What ideas make up the “wall of stigmas” that Land is faced with? What explains the psychology of antagonism toward the poor?
3. Why had each of Land’s parents “moved on”? What explains the emotional abandonment of their daughter and granddaughter? How did this lack of support affect Land?
4. In what ways does cleaning people’s houses seem like “a last resort” to Land? What are the effects of feeling “invisible” at a job?
5. What are the particular challenges for Mia? What’s most important for children affected by poverty?
6. What state and federal programs are helpful to Hand and Mia? What are the challenges of accepting such assistance?
7. What explains Travis’ “lack of desire to wander, or wonder, or learn”? What else might prevent people from wanting to understand themselves and the world more?

8. When plagued by deep grief or other emotional pain, Land gave it her attention because “the pain didn’t like to be ignored. It needed to be loved.” What does this mean? What are other healthy responses to grief or loss?
9. Moving into the small studio apartment, Land struggles to get rid of things “equally useless and priceless.” What is the power or importance of material things? In what ways is a family’s history carried in things or not?
10. After being overwhelmed while cleaning The Clown House, Land calls Pam, who, after listening, reminds her to “trust your strength.” What are Land’s particular strengths? How does she stay hopeful and motivated?
11. Consider the various different houses Land cleans: The Porn House, Henry’s House, The Chef’s House, The Sad House, etc. What does each reveal about those who live there? In what ways is each house challenging for Land?
12. After the frightening car accident involving Mia, Land argues to her father that she needed “to be able to tell people.” Why is this? What does Land need from others?
13. What about Missoula, Montana calls to Land? In what ways is it different from the Pacific Northwest where Land has grown up? What determines how different geographical places feel?
14. Analogous to how she cleans, Land approaches the trying challenges of poverty with “shortsightedness.” What is this? What is a healthy balance between daily focus and future planning or even dreaming?
15. In what particular ways is her client Henry valuable for Land?
16. What different kinds of writing does Land do? How is writing important to her? Of what additional value is posting her writing to a blog?
17. Over time, what does Land learn about life from cleaning and having intimate knowledge of people’s houses?
18. Land is constantly working to make “a home” for Mia and herself. What defines a place as a home?
19. Considering the epigraph from Maya Angelou, what is involved in “making a life”? What role should “making a living” play in that?

- <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/maid-hard-work-low-pay-and-a-mothers-will-to-survive/guide>

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### **Publisher’s Weekly**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* In her heartfelt and powerful debut memoir, Land describes the struggles she faced as a young single mother living in poverty. “My daughter learned to walk in a homeless shelter,” she writes, before chronicling her difficult circumstances. Land got pregnant at 28, then left an abusive relationship and went on to raise her daughter, Mia, while working as a part-time house cleaner in Skagit Valley, Wash.

Later, using public assistance, Land moved to a moldy studio apartment and got her daughter into daycare. While housecleaning, Land imagines the lives of the clients, whom she knows intimately through their habits and possessions (their apparent unhappiness despite financial comfort fosters compassion as well as gratitude for her own modest space), and experiences the humiliating stigma of being poor in America ("You're welcome!" a stranger snarls at the checkout as she pays with food stamps). Even while working, Land continued to follow her dream of becoming a writer. She began a journal and took online classes, and eventually attended the University of Montana in Missoula. Land's love for her daughter ("We were each other's moon and sun") shines brightly through the pages of this beautiful, uplifting story of resilience and survival. Agent: Jeff Kleinman, Folio Literary. (Jan.) --Staff (Reviewed 10/22/2018) (Publishers Weekly, vol 265, issue 43, p).

### Library Journal

Writer Land's vivid and visceral yet nearly unrelenting memoir covers three dark years in the life of a single mother raising her young daughter, Mia, on the unlivable wages that come with the physically and emotionally grueling work of contract housekeeping. With family who are unable to help and a contentious relationship with Mia's abusive father, Land determines to make a life for herself and Mia on her own. Through work as a maid and occasional government assistance, she scrapes by, but at the cost of her health and dignity. Most of the chapters are named for the homes Land cleans, identified by a dominant attribute ("the porn house," "the sad house"), and signifying the unusual intimacy of a nonrelationship between householder and the person who cleans up after their domestic behavior. Unfortunately, Land's personal narrative does not extend or speak to the larger realities of poverty and single motherhood, particularly for women of color. And while Barbara Ehrenreich (Nickel and Dimed) provides an interesting foreword, it doesn't help enough to widen the book's lens. VERDICT Land has perhaps succeeded in having her story told by virtue of her eventual triumph in escaping the grind of poverty. Her journey offers an illuminating read that should inspire outrage, hope, and change. --Janet Ingraham Dwyer (Reviewed 12/01/2018) (Library Journal, vol 143, issue 20, p78).

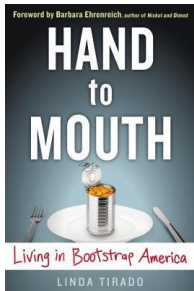
### Kirkus Reviews

*/\* Starred Review \*/* First-time author Land chronicles her years among the working poor as a single mother with only a high school diploma trying to earn a living as a minimum-wage housecleaner. The author did not grow up in poverty, but her struggles slowly evolved after her parents divorced, remarried, and essentially abandoned her; after she gave birth to a daughter fathered by a man who never stopped being abusive; and after her employment prospects narrowed to dirty jobs with absurdly low hourly pay. The relentlessly depressing, quotidian narrative maintains its power due to Land's insights into working as an invisible maid inside wealthy homes; her self-awareness as a loving but inadequate mother to her infant; and her struggles to survive domestic violence. For readers who believe individuals living below the poverty line are lazy and/or intellectually challenged, this memoir is a stark, necessary corrective. Purposefully or otherwise, the narrative also offers a powerful argument for increasing government benefits for the working poor during an era when most benefits are being slashed. Though the benefits received by Land and her daughter after mountains of paperwork never led to financial stability, they did ameliorate near starvation. The author is especially detailed and insightful on the matter of government-issued food stamps.

Some of the most memorable scenes recount the shaming Land received when using the food stamps to purchase groceries. Throughout, Land has been sustained by her fierce love for her daughter and her dreams of becoming a professional writer and escaping northwest Washington state by settling in the seemingly desirable city of Missoula, Montana. She had never visited Missoula, but she imagined it as paradise. Near the end of the book, Land finally has enough money and time to visit Missoula, and soon after the visit, the depression lifts. An important memoir that should be required reading for anyone who has never struggled with poverty. (Kirkus Reviews, November 1, 2018).

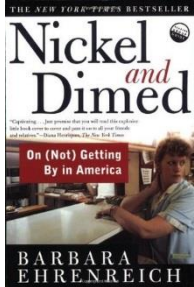
## READALIKES

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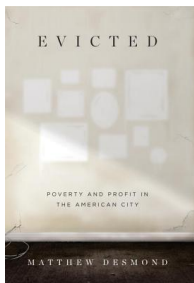
### ***Hand to Mouth* by Linda Tirado**

We in America have certain ideas of what it means to be poor. Linda Tirado takes all of these preconceived notions and smashes them to bits. She articulates not only what it is to be working poor in America (yes, you can be poor and live in a house and have a job, even two), but what poverty is truly like on all levels? Tirado discusses how she went from lower-middle class, to sometimes middle class, to poor and everything in between, and in doing so reveals why poor people don't always behave the way middle-class America thinks they should.



### ***Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich**

Nickel and Dimed is a modern classic that deftly portrays the plight of America's working-class poor. Author Barbara Ehrenreich decides to see if she can scratch out a comfortable living in blue-collar America. What she discovers is a culture of desperation, where workers often take multiple low-paying jobs just to keep a roof overhead.



### ***Evicted* by Matthew Desmond**

A Harvard sociologist examines the under-represented challenge of eviction as a formidable cause of poverty in America, revealing how millions of people are wrongly forced from their homes and reduced to cycles of extreme disadvantage that are reinforced by dysfunctional legal systems.