

INFORMATIVE— REFLECTIVE ESSAY

What Confuses Me

Last night I watched a starving child cry.

I could see the sharp outline of his bones jutting out from beneath his taunt skin—his rib cage heaving visibly as the sobs shook his poor, fragile body. I saw his swollen belly and the way his limbs hung limply at his sides, like broken twigs. But what stayed with me were his eyes. Sunken and shadowed in their sockets, his tears seeming to glitter from the depths of some profound emotion that I could not seem to grasp or understand. I watched as they carved shiny, silver traces through the dust on his cheeks, and for a brief moment I wondered whether he could really see me.

Seconds later he was gone—replaced by the image of a dancing Coca-Cola can as the news broadcast switched over to a commercial. And I sat there, mulling over his predicament while wondering whether or not to start my Calculus homework. To me, he was nothing more than a poster child, and I had homework to do.

You ask me what confuses me in life. I'll tell you. I'm confused by the fact that I sleep in a two-story, four-bedroom house while an African family of twelve huddles in a dilapidated old shack made of sticks and mud. I'm confused by the fact that I'm five pounds overweight whereas others haven't seen a bite of food in over a week. I'm confused by the fact that the bracelet I wear around my

wrist could support a child for over a month. I'm confused by the fact that I watched that helpless little boy cry—and didn't shed a tear.

I wonder when I changed, when I became so devoid of human emotion that I could look misery in the eye and merely shrug my shoulders. Tough break, kid! Life's rough. When I think about it, I frighten myself. It seems as though there's a side of me that I didn't even know existed—one that has become so numb to the tragedies of this world that it no longer feels the tug of simple human kindness. I can rant and rave about the ill of this world until I'm blue in the face. . . I can spout out Bible verses about love and charity until my voice turns hoarse. . . But the fact remains the same: I didn't cry. That confuses me.

That night as I lay in bed, the boy's image flashed before me again in my mind. And suddenly it occurred to me: he has a name. In that single, swift instant, something inside of me seemed to give way. He was a real person, flesh and blood—living under the same sky, sleeping under the same moon. It's hard to force yourself to see something you are so willing to ignore. It's easier to spare yourself the pain than embrace the truth. But at that moment I knew that I was helpless to change the reality before me. That boy had gone to bed hungry.

But he no longer cries alone.