

The Basureros (Rubbish) Kids
(An Inspiring True-to-Life Story)
-Author Unknown-

Ever since I was diagnosed with having a possible heart enlargement, I have followed a strict regimen of physical exercises. I jog during week days and take a long ride biking to the mountains every Sunday.

But this Sunday turned out to be a special Sunday for me. While I was on my way to the mountains of Busay (Cebu) hoping to strengthen my heart by this exercise, I personally encountered a heart-breaking scene that changed me.

I had already passed by the Marco Polo Plaza (formerly Cebu Plaza Hotel) when I decided to stop to buy bananas at a small carindreria located along the road. I haven't taken any solid food that morning so I wanted some fruits to have the needed energy to get to my destination - the mountain top.

I was almost done eating with a second banana when I noticed two children across the street busily searching the garbage area. "***Basureros***" I said to myself and quickly turned my attention away from them to sip a small amount of water. I couldn't care less for these children, to make it straight, I do not like them and I do not trust them at all.

You see, several times I had been a victim to these children who are pretending to be ***basureros*** looking for empty bottles and cans when in fact the 'palangganas', kalderos', and 'hinayhays' are their favorites.

I remember one afternoon while I was watching a TV program when the screen suddenly became blurred. I checked outside and saw two young ***basureros*** running away with my newly installed antenna!

Hatred may be too strong a word to describe my feeling towards these ***basureros***, but I honestly just do not like them. Until I met these three children.

I was about to embark on my bike again when I heard one of the two children, a girl of about 7 or 8 years of age, saying aloud to the other, a boy of about 12 years, "Kuya si Dodong kunin mo kasi tumitingin sa mga kumain, nakakahiya."

Only then did I notice a small boy standing near me biting slightly his fingers. He's a few inches shorter compared to my own 5-year old son (I came to know later that he's also 5 years old).

Though he did not ask for food from anyone in the carinderia, the way he was looking at the customers who were eating was enough to convince me that he was intensely craving for food.

The older boy then quickly crossed the street and gently pulled out the little one who politely obeyed.

As I watched the two crossing back the street to the garbage area, I heard the tintera saying "Kawawa naman yang mga batang yan mababait pa naman."

I learned further from the carinderia owner that the children were from a good family. Both parents were working before and that their father had a stroke 3 years ago and became partially paralyzed while their mother died of heart attack as their father was still confined at the hospital.

The parents were still in their early forties when the catastrophe happened and the children became *basureros* since then to meet their daily needs and the cost of their father's medication.

Deeply moved by what I heard, I went to a nearby bakery and bought 20 pesos worth of bread and gave it to the children who initially refused, including the little boy. "Sige lang po, salamat na lang, bibili na lang po kami mamaya kung makabenta na kami," the young girl said to me.

I explained that they needed to go home because it was starting to rain. "Nasanay na po kami," the girl answered further.

Again, I explained that the rain could make them sick and if they get sick there'll be no one to take care of their father. Upon mention of their father, they nodded and accepted the bread but I noticed that the older boy did not eat.

When I asked him if he does not like the kind of bread I bought for them, he smiled and as he was about to explain, the little girl, who is the more talkative of them, interrupted "Linggo po kasi ngayon, pag sabado at linggo hapon lang po siya kumakain, kami lang po ang kumakain ng agahan pero di na po kami kakain pagdating ng hapon si kuya lang po. Pero pag lunes hanggang biyernes, kasi may pasok, si kuya lang po ang nag-aagahan, kami naman hapunan lang. Pero kung marami kaming benta, kami pong lahat (kumakain)," she continued. "Bakit hindi nyona lang hati-hatiin ang pagkain kahit kakauntipara makakain kayong lahat?" I countered.

The young girl reasoned out that their father wanted her older brother to come to school with a full stomach so he can easily catch up on the teacher's lessons. "Pag nagkatrabaho na si kuya, hihinto na kami sa pamamasura, first honor kasi siya," the little boy added proudly.

Maybe I was caught by surprise or I was just overly emotional that my tears begun to fall. I then quickly turned my back from them to hide my tears and pretended to pick up my bike from the carinderia where I left it. I don't know how many seconds or minutes I spent just to compose myself pretending again this time that I was mending my bike.

Finally, I get on to my bike and approached the three children to bid them goodbye and they in turn cast their grateful smiles at me. I then took a good look at all of them specially to the small boy and pat his head with a pinch in my heart.

Although I believe that their positive look at life could someday change their present situation, there is one thing that they could never change anymore, that is, their being motherless.

That little boy can no longer taste the sweet embrace, caring, and most of all, the love of his mother forever. Nobody can fill the empty gap created by that sudden and untimely death of their mother.

Every big event that will happen to their lives will only remind them of their loss and make them wish for their mother's presence.

I reached into my pocket and handed to them my last 100 peso bill which I was reserving for our department's bowling tournament. This time they refused strongly but I jokingly said to the girl, "Suntukin kita pag hindi mo tinanggap yan."

She smiled as she extended her hand to take the money. "Salamat po, makakabili na kami ng gamot ni papa," she uttered.

I then turned to the small boy and though he's a few feet away from me, I still noticed that while his right hand was holding the half-filled sack, his left hand was holding a toy --a worn out toy car.

I waved my hand and said bye bye to him as I drove towards the mountains again. Did he just find the toy in the garbage area or was the toy originally his - before the misfortune struck? I did not bother to ask.

But one thing is crystal clear to me, that in spite of the boy's abnormal life, he has not given up his childhood completely. I can sense it by the way he held and stared at his toy.

My meeting with those young *basureros* made me poorer by 100 pesos but it changed me and made me richer in lessons of life.

In them, I learned that life can change suddenly and just anyone may be caught completely unprepared. In them, I've learned that even the darkest side of life, cannot change the beauty of one's heart.

Those three children, who can infrequently partake of three meals a day, were still able to hold on to what they believe was right. What a contrast to many of us who are quick to point to our misfortunes to justify acts of impropriety.

In them, I've learned to hope for deliverance even when things seem to go the other way.

Lastly, I know that God cares for them. That while He may have allowed them to suffer such a terrible life, which our finite minds cannot comprehend, His boundless love will surely see them through. And in God's own time I know they will prevail.

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