

Cover Art

Artist's Statement: In the Face of Hunger

The sunrise bathed the Peruvian rainforest in a yellow glow that revealed a thick jungle of emerald, fern, and forest greens around the schoolyard where our U.S. Air Force medical team was unloading boxes of vitamins and deworming medicines from our military cargo truck. Soon the sounds of children laughing directed our gaze to the entrance gate where four shirtless boys were hanging on the wire fence as they spurred two scrawny dogs wrestling in the dirt over a bone. Behind the boys, a long line of mothers wearing flip-flops and holding babies, barefoot toddlers wearing tattered t-shirts, and fathers shaded under sombreros stood on a dirt road that extended past the bend that cut through the rainforest. Thousands of villagers waiting for our care—an overwhelming number compared with the 12 children I might see back home in my pediatric clinic during an afternoon. After a week of conducting continual all-day clinics in the jungle, we packed up to head home to California.

On the plane ride home I thought about the last six days. Will the 10-year-old girl with the purple hat and black ponytail ever make it to Lima to get her antiseizure medicine? What about the thin-ribbed boy, carried in by his father, who winced in pain when I examined his knees? Will the little bag of ibuprofen I gave to him really help? Will the small plastic bags filled with vitamins actually prevent the harsh effects of chronic malnutrition in any of the children we saw? No, they won't.

Home, I stepped into my kitchen and filled a glass with clean drinking water straight from the tap. I opened the



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refrigerator door and stared at the gallon of pulp-free orange juice; the carton of skim milk fortified with protein; the package of boneless, skinned chicken breasts; and the crisper filled with red bell peppers, broccoli, and a ready-to-eat, prewashed leafy green salad. *We are so fortunate*, I thought. As a pediatric resident I grappled with the tension I felt between my privileged upbringing and the knowledge that millions of children oppressed by poverty and starvation were just a plane ride away from my apartment. Then I realized I not only had a responsibility to help children where I live, but wherever children in need live as well.

Now, as a neonatologist, I paint to promote awareness of daunting problems that contribute to global suffering and death. I see the frightened eyes of a dehydrated baby, suffering from viral gastroenteritis, who later died in

the Mongolian countryside. I see the open sores covering the malnourished Zambian baby girl who lies listless on a stool-stained blanket as her teary-eyed mother begs me to save her dying daughter. I see barefoot, muddy Ugandan toddlers climbing a trash hill in a Kampala slum as they search for lunch. These images haunt me and drive my passion to paint with the hope that somehow my compositions on canvas will help inspire a viewer to help save these vulnerable children.

My painting focuses on the plight of the Sub-Saharan African people, since this region is devastated by a cruel hunger that inflicts suffering through chronic undernourishment. This hunger is a vile dictator, one that preys on a little orphan girl covered in lice and with ulcers quilting the soiled skin that drapes her thin bones. While dramatic socioeconomic differences exist between the United States and the Sub-Saharan region, the words “American” and “African” both have “I can” in them. I believe I can make this world a better place for the poor and hungry people on our planet. I believe that as Americans we can protect the children around the globe from the cruel hunger that torments them daily. I believe we have a chance to spread our freedom, a basic freedom from hunger and disease, and fill the empty dreams of our earth's oppressed children.

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