

**The 1st place of The 3rd NCTA Essay
Contest 2003**

To Whom Much Is Given, Much Is Required

By

Salim J. Oden

NCTA Essay Contest

Suddenly the alarm clock pierces the quietness of the morning light. It is 7:00 a.m. and time to get ready for another work day. After rolling out of a queen size bed and placing your feet on the warm fuzzy carpet, you stroll through your bedroom decorated with paintings, pictures of your loved ones, and candles to your brightly colored bathroom. You turn on the shower waiting for the water to heat up to just the right temperature before you get in. As the warm water runs over your skin, the aromas of the sweet-smelling shampoo and soaps that lines your shower wall fill the air. After the refreshing shower is over and you have thoroughly dried off with a clean towel you begin to ponder over which outfit you will wear that day. Mumbling about how you don't like any of your clothes and how you can't wait to go shopping you enter through the door of your walk in closet and proceed to sift through your seemingly endless piles of clothes. You eventually decide on which shirt and pants you should wear and are in the process of picking out the perfect shoes to accentuate your choice while you put on your jewelry and belt accessories. Walking through the living room to your kitchen you notice how the rays of the sun gently dance across the place mats on the kitchen table. You make your way to the food pantry that is full of cereal, crackers, pop tarts, soups, and various other snacks and foods. You quickly scarf down a bowl of cereal and a glass of orange juice. While sitting at your kitchen table you begin to consider the events and happenings of the day that are yet to come.

Meanwhile in another world, although geographically in not such a distant place, a young boy is awoken by the hustle and bustle of the people moving about in the streets. This little boy however is not awoken by a set alarm clock nor is he rolling out of a queen-sized bed and placing his feet on warm fuzzy carpet but rather he is rolling off of a hard cold bench that he has

been able to call his bed for the past few weeks. He places his bare feet on the cold pavement as he wipes the sleep from his eyes. He has no watch and no way to tell time so although he is not exactly sure how long he had slept, he is grateful that he was able to get at least a few hours of relatively undisturbed sleep. I say relatively because of the elderly homeless man who would occasionally pass by the sleeping boy attempting to wake him so that he himself may sleep on the bench. The little boy wonders why the old man would have wanted to sleep on that uncomfortable bench as he places one hand on his lower back while using the other hand to rub his sore neck. He was unable to sleep on the soft pillow that you were able to lay your head upon last night and he was unable to sleep soundly on a firm mattress under sheets and a fluffy downed comforter. This young boy attempted to wedge his body between a space in the bars on the bench and curled up in a ball in hopes to keep as warm as he possibly could on such a windy February night. Upon opening his eyes the pain begins, the pains of chronic and persistent hunger. It takes less than a second for reality to hit. The hunger pains of not haven' eaten much more than a couple of bites of food in the past few days are a constant nuisance that begins as soon as soon as the little boy opens his eyes. This child however cannot walk through his living room to his kitchen and open his food pantry. He on the other hand has to simply try to ignore the hunger pains as he makes his way through the busy city streets worrying about where his next meal is going to come from. Passing by a street shop he is able to catch a glimpse of himself and is overcome by embarrassment. It has been so long since he has been able to wash his hair and to clean himself up. His feet are matted and covered in black dirt that has hidden the color of his skin. And the boy notices the hole in his shirt that is becoming larger. He longs to wear the shirts that he sees in the display of the corner store window but nevertheless is grateful for the one shirt that he does have on his back. Because at least he has a shirt to wear. The little

boy longs for a shower, hot or cold water is not important to him but just a place to take a shower and for him to be able to clean up would be an incredible blessing.

The boy's thoughts now turn to his brothers and sisters. He has not slept at home lately because his roach-infested mat on the floor has been too much for him to take. His mother has also decided, for this week at least, to show her face more around the house and her drug addiction makes it almost impossible for the boy to stand to look at her as she is coming down off of a high or as her body convulses as a result of the withdrawal symptoms she is experiencing. The young child's thoughts are interrupted when he finally reaches the neighborhood dumpster. He decides that this will be his best bet for feeding his family today and as he approaches the trash the awful smells begin to overwhelm him. He takes a long deep breath of the clean air before he climbs in the dumpster to begin rummaging for his day's food supply.

Now we flash back to life at the office where you have had an unusually busy day. The phones have been ringing off of the hook and clients and other appointments leave you almost no time to do even think straight. Earlier this morning you had a cup of coffee and ate a bag of pretzels to help tide you over until lunch. But now after such a hectic morning you are "starving!" Or at least that is what you tell your co-worker as you pile in the car to grab a bite to eat at a local restaurant. You order your favorite, the cheeseburger with fries and a large soda. The waitress finally brings the meal out after you have complained to your co-worker about the slow service, and once again you quickly try to finish your plate as you discuss the agenda for the business meeting coming up this afternoon at three. Not thinking twice about being thankful for the food in front of you or about those who are unable to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. But who has time with all that you have on your agenda to do this afternoon.

On the other hand, the little boy is putting all of the decent scraps of food that he can find in a brown paper bag that he found sitting on top of the dumpster. As people stroll by the little boy hides because of the overwhelming humiliation that he experiences when people take notice of him rummaging through their garbage. Some days people will even run him off screaming, "Get out of here boy! This is no place for you!" "You are right," the boy thinks, "This is not a place for anybody." But today he has been able to hide in a good spot and no one has seen him. He continues to pick through the trash until the horrid smells have overwhelmed him to the point of vomiting, so he finishes up and jumps out of the dumpster and begins on his journey home thankful that he will be able to provide at least some food for his family.

According to the United Nations malnutrition contributes to the death of 11,000 children every single day. There are 840 million chronically hungry people in the world both from developing and developed nations. Yes, that is right even in the United States there are starving children. Most Americans find the fact that there are millions of starving children within our borders hard to believe because this is contrary to the concept of America as a prosperous nation. Americans also tend to associate the suffering and affliction of starving children with war-torn Africa and the underdeveloped third world countries of South America. But the reality is that 36 million Americans, one-third of them who are under the age of 12, suffer from limited or uncertain access to food, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Around the world one child dies of hunger every eight seconds!

The purpose of the story of the young boy above was to put a human face on these statistics. Each child has a different story. Whether it is from the drug addiction and negligence of their parents and their community or whether be it the result of living in a nation torn by war and famine all of these children have one thing in common. They are innocent victims of this

harsh reality of hunger and malnutrition. The horror and misery that millions upon millions of children experience each day transcends our understanding. But the good news is that the problem is not beyond redemption. Experts say that the unprecedented wealth that many western nations are experiencing makes it now truer than ever that not one person in the entire world has to go hungry. The problem can be solved because there is enough food to go around. One might be prone to ask if there is enough food then why are all of these children dying of malnutrition every day. The answer is that there is not enough community awareness where people who with an informed understanding of these harsh realities are getting involved and giving back. We like the person in the story above tend to get so caught up in our high tech world of cable television and internet access that the reality of starving children truly does transcend our understanding. Our blessings and our prosperity are things that we need to be grateful for, but with these blessings also comes responsibility. To whom much is given much is required. And one of those responsibilities includes sharing that blessing with others who are not so fortunate. Although you cannot save the world, you can make a world of difference in the life of one starving child. This responsibility should be viewed not as a duty but rather as a privilege. The joy and satisfaction that come from the knowledge that you are helping to change the life of a child is unspeakable. If each person who has the ability will make a commitment to sponsor a starving child the world can be turned upside down. The monetary commitment is very minimal when we really examine our lives and what we spend our money on. Not going to the movies so often or eating a meal at home instead of going out to eat once a month is a small price to pay for the life of a child. And make no doubt about it; the lives of these children are in our hands. If the young boy in our story had a sponsor perhaps he would be able to worry about his homework and which super hero he wants to be during play time instead of rummaging through dumpsters

and worrying about how to prevent himself or his brothers and sisters of dying from malnutrition.

Now that you are aware of the problem, get involved and you can make a difference in the life of one starving child today!

