

The Forgotten Children...

by Muhammad Ali Zia

The park bench he was lying on was cold enough to serve as a refrigerator. He was wearing an English Cricket kit displaying the number 11 which was barely readable due to a rip in the back of his shirt. His cheeks were extremely pink but the pink was not the shade usually associated with good health, it was the pink of Death. He was rolled into a fetal position; his small hands nestled instinctively between his legs trying to find warmth that his body was unable to provide. He wrapped the jute bag which served as his personal heating system around himself and tried to breath but at -5 Celsius even that can become a hard task. He wanted to cry but tears refused to come. He felt like the cold was eating into his bones. In order to forget the cold he decided to envision the meal he had in the morning, Stale tandoori bread dipped in water and a rotten tomato which he stole from a vegetable vendor. Suddenly he realized that tomorrow was Friday which meant Mewa Pulao at Masjid Mahabbat Khan. A veritable feast for the street people! But all this thought of food was making him dizzy, his head started spinning and his fingers became numb. Slowly but surely he was being lured by that all mighty conqueror which is commonly known as sleep. He was asleep within five minutes.

The Body of Tarik aged 8 was discovered the next day in Cantonment Park. He was an orphan who collected junk at day and slept at park benches during the night and amid the never ending suicide bomb blasts his death only merited for a six line mention in the inside pages of a local daily favored only by *naan baai's* and yours truly. According to the initial report of the coroner's office, Tarik died due to Hypothermia or "exposure to extreme cold" somewhere between 9 pm and 12 am on the night of 1st February. After reading the news item the first question that leapt into my mind was "what were you doing at that specific time?" I was watching a movie with the room heater working at full throttle and I

am sure most of you were indulging in some same mind numbingly petty activity.

While the recreated description of Tarik's last moments alive is a figment of my imagination but his death is real. So real in fact that it becomes painful when ever I attempt to wear warm clothing. But pain should not stop me from getting to the real issues at hand, which are the plight of homeless children and the collective attitude of disregard adopted by our society.

Put yourself in Tarik's shoes for a moment; visualize yourself as an 8 year old kid who lives on the street and who has no one to care for and look after. Whose only aim in life is to live from one day to another, whose soul career interest is staying alive. A kid who is not bothered with maintaining a high GPA or with meeting his parents expectations; a kid who just wants to have one decent meal in a day and a warm place to sleep at night. The phrase "survival of the fittest" can only be understood in all its entirety by a kid who lives on the streets.

Wasn't it scary? Fighting for life for one's very existence? Yes, it was! Can the situation for these kids be improved? Yes, it most certainly can be! Can we the students do something to help? Yes we can, we can do loads of stuff to help these children and improve their standard of living.

We can donate money to charitable organizations that help and rehabilitate street children and it doesn't even have to be a hefty amount. By putting aside only Rs. 15 a day for a month we can feed a street kid for a week. We can donate our time and volunteer for only two to three hours every week for a charitable organization such as "Save the children" or any NGO that helps such kids. We can take any such kid to our home and offer him/her a decent meal.

The list of things we can do to help street children is endless but the bottom line is this that WE have to help them and WE have to help them NOW! No one deserves to die like this. So the next time when you are itching to buy the new ipod or a new cell phone, Just Remember The Forgotten Children!

