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Forever Young

Imagine a scene from your childhood. What image comes to your mind? Perhaps you see yourself playing in the green grass in the front yard of your house. Or maybe you see yourself at the dinner table telling funny stories about your day at school to family members. At this age, growing up in the United States, you probably have many fond memories of childhood. Maybe your mother gave you punishments or dragged you to boring doctors appointments every once in a while, but you faced each day with a childlike innocence and had fun whenever you could. Though there are kids in America who live tough lives, most Americans will say that they enjoyed their childhood. Yet children often grow up without realizing the privileges they have such as a loving family, a home, education and healthcare. In many third world countries, too many children struggle without these privileges. Cameron Herweynen shows us a scene in the life of a third world country child in a powerful image she captured from a moving vehicle of a young boy during her trip to Malawi, Africa. This simple picture of a Malawian boy running with a pure expression of happiness not only has the power to spark

a variety of emotions in the viewer, but also the ability to teach the viewer gratitude and the importance of preserving one's child like optimism.

When you take a look at this image, a smile may naturally come to your face. This is because the pure smile of a child, one of the world's most uplifting sights, is perfectly displayed in this picture. The boy is running after the vehicle as if he was playing a fun game with his friends. He is living in the moment and having fun. When we take a deeper look, the picture can give us an entirely different impression. There is a dirty, unpaved road, unlike the paved ones we grew up driving on. The child running on this dirt road is barefoot because, unlike us, he does not have the privilege of wearing shoes. We then realize that the boy is most likely living his childhood in rough conditions.

With a little background information, we learn that this picture was taken from the back of an ambulance in a village of Malawi, Africa. This is more than just an ambulance. This vehicle is traveling from village to village visiting the sick who are unable to reach a hospital. The photographer, Cameron Herweynen, worked mainly in orphan day-care centers, so we learn that the boy is probably an orphan. Growing up as young children, did we ever stop to appreciate our shoes, or the neighborhood roads that we rode our bikes on? Was going to the doctor a great privilege, or just a chore? What makes this image so powerful is not only the joy of a child or the harsh conditions of a village in Malawi, but the coexistence of the two. The power comes from the fact that, even though this sweet young boy grows up with difficult circumstances and without the privileges we may have taken for granted, his sense of optimism and childlike innocence prevail.

As one grows older, he or she may begin to have worries and stress. These feelings are considered acceptable because adults have the pressure of working at a job and taking care of their family. These are responsibilities that young children do not have. While these pressures do often come with adulthood, there is a misconception that says we should lose the feelings of happiness that we had as a child. The truth is, if we change our perspective and preserve the optimism that we had as children, as we see on the young boy's face, we can begin to look at our lives in a new light and make

the best with what we are given. Children do not stress about the present situation, but make the best out of what they have. We can understand this if we look to the children of Africa, like the Malawian boy of the photo. Many kids in Africa who grow up in poor conditions, such as the poor village seen in the picture, do not have toys to play with, so they take plants, plastic bags or whatever they can get their hands on, roll them up, and create a ball that can bring hours of fun (Carlin). While they cannot drive to a store and buy a toy, children stay positive and create their own fun, making the best of what they are given. An adult in this situation may instead, sit and dwell, sad because he or she cannot afford a soccer ball. This is displayed in the photo as we see the child make the best out of what he has by running through the street with excitement, instead of sitting around being unhappy (which may possibly be what the people in the background of the photo are doing). By making these connections, the photo teaches us the importance of focusing on what we have rather than what we do not.

It is natural to assume that as the young boy of the photo grows up, he will lose some of his happiness as he begins to realize the reality that he is growing up on the dirt roads of a poor village. Why must this be the case? We want the boy to remain optimistic as he is in the moment of the photo and we want him to have the best adult life he can. Because we have these hopes for the boy, we must see that those hopes can be applied to our lives as well. We should wake up, put on a smile like the young boy, and say to ourselves, "Yes! Today will be a great day!" Our good thoughts will help us make the best of the day to come. If we greet others in our lives with a warm "Hello," they will likely reciprocate with a warm greeting of their own and make our attitudes that much better. Just as the children who make their own soccer ball when they cannot afford better, we must stop thinking about the negatives that are happening to us and start thinking about what we can make happen with a new outlook on life.

Life can be tough and it can sometimes be difficult to stay optimistic, but when we look at the bright side, we give ourselves the encouragement to improve our situations and to be our best selves. By seeing the boy of the photo beaming with joy despite the rough conditions in his life, we can learn

to stay positive and enjoy what our lives have to offer as well. So if you are down and losing hope, remember to count your blessings, stay positive, and run through life with a smile.

Word Count: 1153

Image taken by Cameron Herweynen



<<http://www.noupe.com/photography/35-powerful-photos-that-each-tells-a-story.html>>

Works Cited

Carlin, John. "The Global Game." *Time Magazine*. 02 June 2010. Web. 11 September 2011.