

REAL. LIFE. Voices



Every year Rosey Comfort takes her advanced creative writing class from Westview High School to the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit. After experiencing the exhibit as a group, the students separate and go back to a place that particularly touched them, and they immerse themselves in that place, taking in the faces, the voices, the sounds, the textures, and the smells. Then they reach into themselves and do what many of us cannot do—they find the words to voice to their feelings, thoughts, and insights. They write about their sadness, their anger, their shock, their guilt—and their resolve to do something about what they have experienced.

In the following pages you will read a few of the 47 entries the class compiled into a book with photos and other graphics.

A great deal of unrestrained emotion must be mustered in order for me to cry openly in front of friends and strangers. Yet, I was so moved by the images I saw in the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit at Medical Teams International that there was no holding back such a powerful reaction. To be honest, I had expected to be somewhat moved by the exhibit. I always experience some sort of emotional response to these kinds of things. I did not, however, expect such a strong sensation of sorrow to overcome me as much as it did. For several minutes, there was nothing I could do. Nothing I could say. Nothing I could write. I could only sit—head bowed, back bent—and let the tears come.

What can I say?

What do I say?

These children have heard so many false promises.

I can only tell them the truth:

That I love them in a way I can't explain.

That I will pray for their healing and eventual reward.

For the struggle and grief to end. For their salvation.

Would they believe me if I told them that

I wept for them?

That the tears were hot with the passionate grief

That overwhelmed me?

The card says "do not forget us."

I won't. How could I even entertain the thought?

I promise myself that I will never forget them.

But what can I say?

How is it possible for men to be so heartless?

This is a man's war!

So why are *children* fighting it?

Why is there any fighting at all?

But what can I say?

What can I say that the children have not already heard?

Oh children,

Children!

What can I say?

Callie Gil

After walking once through the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit, it came time for me to choose a place, any place, to settle and write. Somewhere that had affected me, unraveled hidden emotion, uncovered some dormant inspiration. All the way through, there were heartbreaking exhibits, made too real by a rush of sounds, smells, and sights. Any of these places I could've chosen, and I found myself sitting, frozen in front of a wall that said, "Every 3.6 seconds, a child dies from a preventable illness."

Somehow, the sight of the steadily blinking light enthralled me, and this is the place I chose to write. As I sat in front of the light, yellow flaring and fading on my paper, I realized that each blink of the light was tied to a human heart.

A human heart that had stopped beating.

Lights

The moment seems poised
as though on a needle point,
sharp and diamond-like, as the
breath freezes in my chest, waiting.
Waiting in a suspended moment,
waiting for another heart to stop.

I press my ears to the silence,
hearing the thickly muffled beat
of my heart hot on my skin,
as regular as the ticking of a clock
ticking off the closed eyes,
and releasing grips.

The light flares and fades
on dispassionate faces,
all keeping count steadily,
knowing that *their* count will stop
when they round the corner.
Because the light won't follow them.

Many stare into the light,
hoping to be blinded,
concentrating instead on the imprint
it leaves on their eyelids,
breathing a sigh of relief
that at least 3.6 is better than 3.

Watching someone stop breathing.
Another, another.
Soon, all the air will be pulled
from my lungs, and I won't
be able to count the accusing eyes anymore.
At least they will lose count, too.

A cold that has nothing to do with
temperature
drew hair to stand against yellow skin,
and in the sharp-edged glare,
I can see death reflected in their eyes.
And as the light ticks off another,
I wonder if God is counting too.

The light fades to darkness
I imagine the moon tilt away,
the world falling open like an unfurling
flower,
until the surface of my eyes
reflect yellow
and death like mirrors.

And it's still blinking 1200 seconds later
And now I'm back, frantically catching up
On the deaths I've missed.
How many heartbeats passed
while I was in hiding?

Anna Borges

Why the Hopeless Need Hope

Few things touch me as much as this experience. After walking through the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit, I have a new respect for what Medical Teams International does for those who have lost hope. Because hope is the most important feeling. Without hope, all is lost, and you give up. That is hope must be given to those who have given up. They need to know someone is looking out for them; they need to know someone cares, even if it's just one person.

The sad thing is that most people don't know what is happening; they go about their lives, not knowing how lucky they are, not knowing how little is needed to help. As much as one dollar can pay for AIDS treatment that can save a life. Just instead of buying that one soda you can help save a life. Hope is life, and life is hope. Hope must be given to preserve those with none.

Problems like this can't be put into words; you have to see and to act to truly understand what is happening to those poor people, who have lost all their life-preserving hope.

If you think this was an easy thing to do, then you don't know what I had to do to write this. This exhibit hit me very hard. I wasn't even able to write after I walked through the exhibit for the first time. So I went to sit outside in the cold, just to let my mind catch up with what had happened, what I had seen, what I had heard, and what I had smelled. It just seemed to show me how awful some of the world is, and no matter how bad my life gets, it never even comes close to what they have to deal with everyday.

I was actually so moved by this exhibit that I got a ten-dollar bill I was going to use for something to eat, and I went and donated it to the cause. This is when I started to cry. You see, there was this lady working at the desk that took my money, she was all right. But then another lady walked by, who was one of the volunteers. She started giving me more facts as I filled out the form telling what I did. The facts just pushed me over the edge, and as soon as I was out of sight, I cried.

After I donated my money, I went back to the exhibit and back into the debriefing room with the rest of the classes. When Ms. Comfort asked for volunteers to read, I was the first to raise my hand, it really moved me that much.

Which is why I am writing this now. We as a species need to protect those who can't protect themselves. Even if you can only donate a very little amount, you can still help. It's worth not getting that soda to help that one person get a second chance.

But you really have to see this kind of thing before you can imagine what I am really talking about and once you do, you will know why help is so desperately needed.

CJ Hyde

The REAL. LIFE. Exhibit touched me in a powerful way. . . . It shows me that I have gone through nothing, compared to other people. All the time, I want more things, better things, newer things. How selfish is that? Why, when so many people need things more than we do, we continue to live our lives constantly wanting more?

Can You Hear Them?

The pain, the hurt, the agony,
The sorrow, the neglect,
The suffering the torture,
All true, all real,
In these lives,
No mother, no father,
No one to love them,
Unable to survive on their own,
With no home or family,
How will they be happy?
What are they supposed to do?
Where will they go?
Living in the streets,
Or at a dump,
Maybe a dirty orphanage,
They have nothing,
They need everything,
They need love and support,
They need to have fun,
Just a simple smile
Just a joyful laugh,
Just some hope,
The children are calling out,
They need or love,
They need our help
Can you hear them?
No, you cannot,
Because you do not try,
Listen to the sound,
Try to hear their voices,
They can be happy again,
They will be loved,
They will survive,
If you...?

Larissa Giuliano

Tears Start Their Journey in My Heart

Nothing but words,
Nothing but images,
As I walk through the gallery of tragedy.
I feel it begin once again.
I feel myself emotionless.
This repetition has become routine.
I have witnessed the catastrophes too often in galleries such as this.
I have memorized the facts, the numbers.
No longer do they strike me as powerfully as they had the first time.
No more do they live in my memory for longer than a single earth's rotation.
I should not think in this manner.
I know this.
What a tragedy in itself, that I have become numb to the suffering.

The innocent faces, now so familiar, stare,
Silently pleading for help,
Asking me to reach out and listen to them,
To help them,
To save them,
To feel their pain.
They are willing to share their story.
Yet, deep in the back of my mind, I know that I will inevitably forget them.
They are nothing but words,
Nothing but images

But as I walk through the gallery of tragedy, the innocent faces come to life.
How could I have ignored them?
Emotions gather.
Compassion is initiated.
The tears start their journey in my heart.
The heavy compression in my chest forces a storm up my throat.
Image after image, the storm rages and builds.
They are not mere images anymore.
My face becomes tender from this congestion, until the dam cannot hold the rising tide of sadness any longer.
It bursts.
The river pours out of my eyes and rains down onto my brand new sweater.
I look down at myself, and hate my sweater.
I turn back to the suffering children.
I will make sure this time,
That they are not nothing but words, not nothing but images

I promised them.

E.J.

*Walking into the Real Life Exhibit, I had no idea what it was going to be about. . . .
I was speechless. Looking at the things that are going on in this world, I realized
that that something so simple could help a person in need.*

Blinking Light

So small yet powerful
The blinding light strikes your eye
Though it's just electricity
When it flashes
Chills run through your veins
I close my eyes
Faces of kids race through the mind.
What am I doing?
3.6 seconds
A life is gone
Something I could help prevent
Something that we all . . .
Can prevent
The money spent
For coffee and soda
Could be . . .
Saving a child's life.

Disaster, Conflict, and Poverty

A camp compact
Almost three thousand
Refugees finding help
Finding hope
Two bathrooms
Low food
Low water
Low medication
The light flashes again
Sleeping in bunks
Rooms filled
Sheets dirty and filthy
No parents
No family
A child suffers
I ask myself again
What am I doing?
I open my eyes
3.6 seconds
One last flash
More than glass and electrons
3.6 seconds
An innocent child dies

Colton

At the very first moment that I stepped out of the cold and into the warm safe building and sat down and watched the video, I knew it wasn't like any other field trip I had ever been on. Then after walking throughout the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit, reading the stats and seeing the videos and the faces, I was truly moved. So I want to say thank you.

If You Look Closely, You Can See

So much pain,
Not so many words to explain the pain.
So many families in need,
So many children to feed.
Throughout the struggle
How many kids are alone with no mother.
Why are we all so blind to see
Every day 2,000 infants die from HIV?
If you look closely, you can see the pain in their eyes.
The tears in their eyes,
The fear in their lives.
I reach out to you . . .
But my arm isn't long enough to touch.
I will never know the struggle. I only see the trouble.
Not knowing it's so hard to carry on
With the things around you.
Not a lot of people REALLY know what's going on in the
World today.
Those kids in Mexico don't even make it to
their fifth birthday.
You never know the pain,
You just walk away.
But you have to realize that this is everyday life,
Not just a fairy tale
But we still say "Oh, well."
And we go on and carry on with our own life.

Jordan Smith

Death of the Innocent

Jake and I used to
Have lots of fun
Playing outside all day
Sweating in the sun
That was until the LRA came
The Lord's Resistance Army
They beat and humiliated us
They raped Jake's mommy
I came home one day
To Mommy's screams and Daddy's shouts
Something was wrong it seemed
A soldier stood before them
Shining with glory in his uniform and gun in hand
But he was not good like soldiers seem to be
He was a sadistic and evil man
Daddy stepped forward
To push the man away
The man rose his gun and shot him
He didn't like things not going his way
Mommy screamed
And kneeled down to hold Daddy's body
But the soldier was not done
This was only the beginning of his party
The man set his gun down and stepped forward to Mommy
He grabbed her roughly, trapping her
Pressing body to body
Mommy screamed, kicked, and bit
But nothing worked to remove him
Why wasn't Daddy moving?
He was frozen with dead limbs
Shaking my fear away
I screamed and threw my fists at the man
He got away from Mommy and grabbed my fists
Crushing my tiny little hands
I fell to the floor, hands shattered to pieces
The man kicked my ribs, laughing cruelly
Mommy tried to reach for his gun
Inside my head I screamed "No! Don't! Mommy!"
The man saw her and kicked her frail body away
He picked up his gun and aimed it at me
Mommy screamed more, trying to plead with him
But the man just laughed harshly
He pulled the trigger
And that's where my life came to a halt
Nevermore to play in the sun
And it's all the LRA's fault
Mommy named me Gabriel, an angel of God
I died because He really needed me
But my question is why?
Why couldn't He have saved Mommy and Daddy?

Sarah Irani

I went to the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit expecting to be changed. I am affected by world affairs. I consider myself a compassionate human being. So attending something like this, I knew I would appreciate its purpose.

But I did not expect to sit on the floor of a Romanian orphanage, crying over my guilty feelings for being born into such privilege and comfort.

I did not expect to find myself lying down, gazing up at a 25-foot wave, hot tears streaming down my face, my fears of water and the ocean showing their true colors.

I did not expect to be so inspired to write...

Your emaciated face
tells of a life
that exists in a world
where existence is not
ideal.
The outstretched palms
still so soft
still so naked
claw for something in the air
that maybe will help you escape
your fate.
Chained to a crib,
your soiled sheets
soaks the blood from my heart.
The naked bodies,
so virgin and pure
have yet to feel what I am so
lucky to feel in my
privileged world.
Warmth.
Life.
Love.

Kelley White

Inspired by the worlds of 300,000+ child soldiers

A son has been taken.
Although he is not dead,
 he is gone
but his body lives on.
 Guarding his post
 militant and cold
 his soul is empty.
This boy who once was a shepherd
working hard at his father's side
has a new set of rules
by which he will abide.
A son has been taken
although he is not dead
It is no longer his own thoughts
that consume his head.

Jordan Perry

(I'm exchange student from Korea, so I'm not good at writing. I just wrote about what I feel. Please understand my write.)

Before I went field trip, I actually guess that maybe place where we go will explain about disasters or poor person, but this exhibit is more amazing that what I thought. When I saw video that play in first place, I can feel that I live in really good place. Actually my father is doctor and my mother is pharmacist so I don't think hunger and sick. Next is about the disaster. When I saw pictures about worst disaster, I really surprise because all house are almost in the water and highway is fall down. I know hurricane is very powerful but I never seen that worst picture. It is really amazing. In Korea where I live, there is surrounded by mountain so typhoon isn't very effective so I never thought about our city is filled with water.

I saw that child who got guns with adult. I think that is really big problem. Because of the war, child has to kill enemy when they are play with same age. I don't like war, but I never know that adult use child to soldier.

Most effective picture for me is that the picture of child draws who live in Albanian refugee camps. They draw war and fight each other. One picture there are airplane, helicopter, tank, soldiers who have weapons. I think war makes child like that because they always saw soldiers. When I was that child, I don't know what war is and airplane is weapons

After REAL. LIFE. Exhibit I know that this is really serious problem. I'll do whatever I can.

Hang Sang Lee

Walking through the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit really touched me more than any textbook or movie would. I took in more than expected and left with more than I could imagine. It was a good experience. I felt moved by the visuals that were presented at hand. The wave moved me a lot, to think that something that big is coming down on top of these innocent people is crazy to me. I felt even more grief when I stood right under it, I could only imagine what those people went through. The blinking light moved me the most. It was so simple but yet so thought changing. It remained with me throughout the rest of the day. Thinking that the light would still be blinking even after we were long gone made my stomach turn, I felt that I had to do something to change it. I think that REAL. LIFE. Exhibit should be somewhere that everyone goes to, because everyone can learn something valuable from it.

Thoughts Racing through My Mind

As I walk through these devastating, breath-taking scenes,
I am shocked and horrified at the thought that somewhere in the world,
children are forced to kill.

I wonder why I'm chosen to stand here
being thankful that I'm alive and not ill.

but I feel so selfish thinking that there are children suffering
in a filthy warehouse
and I have the power to change that 3.6-second flashing light

I can make a difference.
I can take a stand.
I can make things right.

Ashley Hufregio

Seeing the Faces, not the Facts

I came into this experience not knowing what to expect, and I left not knowing how to react. I have always prided myself in not being an average teenager because I am very aware of current events and I do a lot of community service. But I was aware of facts, not faces. And I do a hundred selfish and wasteful things for every selfless act. My eyes have been forced open by haunting images I will not forget.

Emily Knight

Voices from Uganda

1.

“March! Fight! I’m your family now.
This is your gun. Take it. Hold it.
That is all you get. That is all you need.
We are going to another village now. You need to be prepared.
Shoot them! Go! Now!
You better listen to me, Boy. I’m warning you, Boy. Just remember...I’m your family
now.”

2.

“I will go get some water for you, Mom. Since I’m the strongest one.
You’re sick and weak, and I’m sore and I ache.
But I love you, Mom. So I will go get that water for you.
I will walk all those miles.
Even though it weighs a ton.”

Cody Troxel

The REAL. LIFE. Exhibit was a very different experience for me. I knew these things were happening in the world, yet nothing could have made it more real to me than this exhibit. I am a very emotional person by nature, and to be able to experience this on such an strong level was such an emotional release.

Children of Romania

I was not conceived out of the want or desire for a child.
But rather, out of duty to my nation.
My mother was unable to love me.
So she brought me here to this “dilapidated orphanage”
full of children on sodden beds.

The Big Man isn’t in charge anymore.
And he doesn’t need this army.
But now there are bunches of us, and we keep dying.

Is there any hope? Is there any love? The children are forlorn and the babies are crying.
Some are tied to cribs. Some share a bed with three other people.
We don’t even know what it is to be clean.
The flies constantly cover us.

We are each alone, yet surrounded; surrounded by the loneliness we each feel.
We strive for love and long for a touch—
The touch of an Angel to rescue us.

Kacy Garner

Relying on Me

While I am buying a candy bar,
 They are starving.
I am sheltered in my house,
 While they rely on a shack.
I cry when I don't get my way,
 They are crying of pain.
I am sick with a cold,
 They are dying of AIDS.
I pray for love,
 They are praying for a miracle.
I rely on my parents for essentials
 They're relying on me....

Jacklin Nared

Dump

I never knew how hard it is in this world.
 People dying, orphans crying.
 Even people living in dumps.
Kids waiting for the next garbage truck to come
as if it were a truck filled with yummy ice cream.
 Parents looking for food for their starving kids
like pelicans searching to feed their starving young ones.
 Their homes are made of cardboard boxes
left by the people who can afford to buy a 75" plasma TV
In fear the little boy in the video hugs his little sister
 and finds food for her at the dump.
 Children are playing on an old refrigerator
 as if it were a pony in a park.

Angela

Child

Every 3.6 seconds a kid dies,
 so every 3 seconds God cries
for the one who has lost from a preventable cause.
 As I look in their eyes, I see eyes of lost lives.
 As I struggle to be the best,
 they can't even enjoy the contest.

Terrell Wallace

I Want to Help Save a Life

I was privileged to visit the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit with my Creative Writing class from Westview High School. The exhibit taught me more than I can ever imagine. It taught me that I am one very blessed person. I have easy access to food, clean clothes, a house, clean water, and other things I don't really need. It was hard for me to hear that many families have to survive on only \$1 a day. Some, even less than \$1 a day. And I spend about \$10 for dinner at a sit-down restaurant. And that's just one meal.

Visiting the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit was probably one of the best experiences I've ever had this year. It was touching and emotional, and now I want to help solve the problem. I want to make a difference. I want to help save a life and give a young child hope and a happier life.

Carly Ogata

REAL LIFE

Without this organization and this exhibit, I really didn't know all this. Yeah, I was told it, but not learned it. I cared but was forced to care. I now know all this. The thought that the dollar I spend on a soda or drink can save a life makes me feel horrible. I could save others, but I'm too lost in my own selfish world to pay attention. I take it all for granted. I don't care for others because I hope for me. But this exhibit has shown me that life is one, is one and one can save more. That one life can save hundreds.

Kirsten Sylsberry

Staring Real Life in the Face

Yesterday I witnessed the REAL. LIFE. Exhibit for the first time. It made me realize how lucky I really am. However at the same time, I felt regret that I had not realized things like that could happen. Or maybe I did realize it, but shut it out, unwilling to stare real life in the face. Yesterday, I did it for the first time.

Kelsey Poff

Speechless

I could not write much because this exhibit has left me speechless. When I try to think of the right words to say about this exhibit . . . my mind goes blank. So I will leave you with this. Go out right now and do something right now about these people in need. Go volunteer now.

nicholas kurt



www.medicalteams.org