

December 24, 2007

Merry Christmas!

Over the past few years I have become very interested in global poverty. Before I began learning about global poverty, I would have guessed that wealth distribution around the world would have followed a relatively normal bell curve. That is, a very small portion of the population were impoverished (5-10%), a very small portion were very wealthy (5-10%), and the rest fell somewhere in between. I also assumed that I was a part of that group that fell somewhere in between.

Unfortunately, I have learned that I was wrong, terribly wrong. Among the many things I have read, I have learned that approximately 50% of the world's population lives beneath the international poverty line. You might be wondering what the international poverty line is set at and why it is set so high as to result in 50% of the world's population living beneath it. Well, it's not high. The international poverty line is set at \$2/day; these are inflation-adjusted dollars, meaning that the \$2/day that someone in Africa is living off of is the same \$2/day someone in China is living off of and is the same \$2/day you or I would otherwise live off of here in the US. (\$1/day is considered "extreme poverty" which approximately 30% of the world's population lives under)

Here is a glimpse at what living on \$2/day is like.

I wake up early in the morning after sleeping on the earth's ground. The first thing I do is check to make sure the ten children I care for now did not die in their sleep. The reason I might have ten children to care for is because nearby parents have died due to curable diseases such as malaria, but medicine is unfortunately not available in my village. The reason why I wake up so early is because I have to walk 6 miles round trip to the nearest water supply. If I do not fetch water for myself or my ten children, we will die—if not today, then tomorrow. Part of the tragedy here is that the only water supply I can get to is toxic, so I know (or don't know) that each day our health is deteriorating ... but I have no choice.

On my way back to my village I find a small pile of uncooked rice on the ground. I pick it up, dirt, small bugs and all, and bring it back with me. As desperate as this sounds, this may be my only source of food ... to split between myself and my ten children ... for the entire day. Upon my return, I have only three goals for the day: (1) tend to the two terribly ill children I have without any of the comforts of a developed country, (2) locate food for eleven people for the day which might entail sending some of my older children on a 8 mile round trip walk to where a U.N. convoy is delivering food, and (3) dealing with any other illness or disaster that may come up during the day. At the end of the day, if I am still alive ... and if my ten children are still alive ... then it has been a successful day. I just have to get up tomorrow and do it all over again.

I sleep in a comfortable bed every night. I actually have a couple beds in my house. I don't feel the cold air on my cheeks or the spatter of rain on my face at night because I

have a roof over my head. I sleep well because my belly is always full. I am terribly fortunate to have had the opportunity to become educated so that I can go to work, build things and get paid for it so that I can buy food, pay my mortgage, own a car, take Cooper to the doctor for 1-week, 2-week, 1-month, 3-month, 6-month, 1-year check ups, buy Cooper clothes and toys, and much, much more. I sit down every night with my healthy pregnant wife and son and eat a hot dinner and discuss things like, "what should we do this weekend for fun," "this chicken pot pie has too much pepper in it," "how much money did we contribute to our retirement this month," "did you hear what Britney Spears did?" At the end of the day, we judge our success on many different things depending on who we are. But I guarantee that none of us judge the success of our day by whether or not we will simply *live* to see another early morning 6 mile walk to fetch toxic water. To 50% of the world, this represents the best case scenario. To you and me, this would be the worst case scenario.

When people ask me what I need ... I tell them I don't need anything. I have everything I have ever wanted; a loving family, health, food, shelter, security, education, employment and friends. I have a hard time coming home at night to all that I have, knowing that there are clearly too many people in this world that have to fight for their survival each and every day.

There are many, many things that have occurred during our world's recent history that have inadvertently caused this extraordinary rift. Unlike other tragedies such as the holocaust, I do not believe this rift was anyone's fault or wrongdoing. As a citizen of not just the United States, but of our planet earth, I feel obligated to help others in need. I am not content with all that I have knowing that there are so many others who have so little.

In the many hours I spent thinking about leaving Home Depot and what I was going to do next so that I could spend more time with my family yet still provide for them, I thought long and hard about going back into the non-profit, where I began my career, to help fulfill this need I have to help others. Ultimately I chose not to, but only for selfish reasons. Working in non-profit would be a "burden" on my family in that it would result in more work and less money. For the time being, the best way I can find to help those in need is to give some of what I have.

I have chosen to make contributions to UNICEF as Christmas presents this year. I have made a \$100 contribution to UNICEF in your honor and Reebok will match this bringing the total to \$200. I hope you understand and enjoy the meaning behind this gift.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.