

Any Child

I go to work the long way, traveling through one of those neighborhoods regarded by others as a place you never want to be. It's part of the inner city of Miami; a location known to law enforcement officials as "The Triangle." It's described as an area heavy in drugs and frequented with violence. The residents of this small community meet every day with the possibility of danger; mere survival is an endless struggle.

The average citizen from other parts of the big city witnesses the happenings of The Triangle on the nightly news. Most don't even know where it is, have never traveled there, and so have become immune to the events they see sensationalized on television. Others are simply apathetic as they relax in their humble homes, safe inside a cocoon. They cannot begin to understand being without even the bare necessities or what it does to a person's very soul to struggle for everything they need.

On any morning, at this busy corner leading to anywhere but here, your senses take your attention to the abandoned buildings, torn apart by vandalism or fire, or defaced by gang graffiti. It's unsettling to think that some people actually call these decaying buildings home.

The streets and vacant lots are heavily littered and the few representatives of landscape are untended and overgrown with weeds. The life of the community begins to unfold as the warehouses and small businesses start to open in this low-rent area. Local entrepreneurs roll up their security doors and unlock the burglar bars on their windows to begin their day of commerce.

Each of the four corners of this intersection is reserved for a different ethnic group. Some of these men have held their spot since the night before, sitting on cars drinking or otherwise indulging in a false sense of ego. The younger crowd might be playing cards or a

game of dice, while a group of older gentlemen are intent on a game of checkers. Some of the men seem to just be standing guard and their presence at this time of day can add to the sense of foreboding to others who are on their way to the working world.

Passing through the heart of The Triangle, I am blessed to see a breathtaking sunrise on most days. Each day seems to bring one more beautiful than the day before and is never taken for granted. It is a spiritual experience for me – a rebirth and a sense that God is shining down on all of us. I can't help but wonder if people on the other side of town know they're sharing the same glorious morning with folks on this side of town.

When my route to work was made simpler by circumstances in my life, I found myself looking for excuses to return to the old path, for everyday, at precisely the same time I arrived at that corner, I saw another vision that uplifted me. In an otherwise dismal spot of the earth, each day I saw hope in the eyes of a little boy.

As I am on my way to work, he is on his way to school, with his small hand in the hand of his loving grandmother. She walks him part of the way to school, leaving him at that intersection. Grandmother looks like you might imagine any grandmother to look: hair not quite ready for the day, and often dressed in a housedress and slippers. The little one chatters away as they walk, she looking down at him with an image of quiet pride. Well hidden from him, but obvious to others is a trace of worry on her sweet face, and a weariness in her walk.

The little one is obviously loved a great deal by his grandmother. He is healthy and well-scrubbed and looks like a shiny new penny in his blue plaid school uniform with the shirt tucked in and his hair neatly groomed. What is most striking about him, though, is his stature. Although he is relatively small, he walks with a self-assurance that towers above most other people. As he makes his way to school, it seems as if his feet don't touch the ground. It's almost

like there's an invisible barrier between him and the ground that is otherwise walked upon by persons of lesser pride.

I envision this little one growing up and holding on to that beautiful, innocent sense of self and becoming a leader in his community. I dream of this one small child becoming the one who will change all that surrounds him and make this neighborhood a safe and peaceful place for the children yet to come. Sometimes I see him making speeches at his graduation, and other times I see him behind another podium making speeches to a much larger audience. I have such high hopes for this child that I don't even know, simply because I see in him a goodness that is rare and pure.

Grandmother lets go of his hand at one side of the street and watches him as he crosses to the other side. When he gets to the middle, he stops, spins around, and gives her a wave and a smile. She watches him as he crosses the rest of the way, then releases a weary sigh and seems to say a little prayer for him. He finishes his trip to school alone but is surrounded by a glow that surely comes from the protective love of his dear grandmother.

This could be any child in any city on any day, but this one very special child touches my heart every day. He is the sunrise and the hope for his community. I pray that my dreams for him will come true and that he will always have the spirit that I see in him today.