

# Shameela

By Maya

“Poverty is the worst form of violence.” – Mahatma Gandhi. I learned that at school, because I’m the only child able to go. My mother always has these eyes. These eyes, of sadness. I’m 5 years old and my name is Shameela. My mother lived in Burma but then came here to Mae Sot, Thailand and I was born. She left because one day, my mother said, “The military regime in Burma was too harsh to raise a family there. So your 3 older siblings, you, and I came here.”

“But now I’m not a citizen.” I replied angrily.

“Citizenship does not define who you are, Shameela,” My mother replied with a sad face, “You are who you are and don’t ever change because people don’t accept you.”

I never believed her. I’m not a citizen of Burma because I wasn’t born there but I’m not a citizen of Thailand because my mother fled the country. I have no real nationality. I don’t belong anywhere.

Every day, after school, I go home. At least, what I can call a home. We live in a village near the swamps in Mae Sot, Thailand. We share an old toilet with 100 other people in our village. I have three older siblings. Our one room “home”, which is a small shack, has these metal sheets (with holes in them), patched up together to make the walls and roof over our heads. It also has an

old tile floor that looks as if wooden strings were weaving into each other. We all sleep on our quilted tile floor or on the damp, wooden beams in the ceiling. It's not very nice but it's better than the streets. I'm not a citizen of Burma because I wasn't born there but I'm not a citizen of Thailand because my mother fled the country. I have no real nationality. I don't belong anywhere. I want to help my family but because I'm 5, I'm not old enough to work, so I do small jobs to help them. One day, I want to be a nurse, so I can help other people and be happy.

Today, my teacher was teaching us writing. "Class! Everyone has a story. Write an essay about yours." I kept thinking about what to write, but I mostly thought about where to begin my story. I began to write until my hand became sore. I was done before the bell rang and I turned in my papers. My teacher read my story. The look on his face changed from happy to the face my mother looks at me with. A sad, pitiful look. After hours of writing, school was over. I walked down the light brown gravel road with plants of all shades of green overgrowing the sides of it.

A week later, my teacher gave me a letter after school. "Shameela, the story that you wrote about your life was given to people in America. They liked your story and wanted to tell you something, but don't open it until you get home." The teacher said to me in a stern yet happy way. I agreed with a silent head nod and grabbed the letter quickly. The address said it came from New York City, New York in the USA! I ran home feeling anxious about the contents

inside. The letter was a bright white envelope and a plastic cover over the address of the senders. I began to rip the sealed flap open. I started to read the mysterious letter:

*“Dear parents of Shameela,*

*We have read your daughter’s story that she submitted to her teacher. We felt very touched and empathetic to the story. The UNICEF organization helps children like your child. We would like to meet with you to discuss a donation to your family for \$2000 US dollars. Many people read your daughters essay and were also touched and donated specifically to your child. Please respond. We would be honored to meet you!*

*Sincerely,*

*The UNICEF Foundation”*

This is the best day of my life! \$2000 US dollars! My eyes are still filled with tears. Tears of joy. When my mother came home I ran into her arms,” Why are you so happy?” My mother asked me with a smile. I silently gave her the letter and my mother’s eyes began to fill with tears also. She covered her mouth, smiled, and hugged me. It wasn’t just the money that made me smile, it was the people who cared enough to help me. And for that, I am grateful.