

2011 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

No. of participating countries: 140

No. of entries: 6,931 (Children's category: 2,535 / Youth category: 4,396)

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *Plant for Planet*
Aurona Sarker (Age 14, Bangladesh)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *Pride in Profession*
Dan Erwin C. Bagaporo
(Age 20, The Philippines)

2nd Prize

Children's category (2 entrants)

- *When I grow up...*
Ummul Baneen Sheikh (Age 10, Pakistan)
- *Who Understands Him Best?*
Ai Ohyama (Age 11, Japan)

Youth category (2 entrants)

- *A Real Life Nightmare That Woke Up My Consciousness*
Cristina Caraus (Age 18, Moldova)
- *Mt Story of Inspiration*
Behjat Sahar Junaud (Age 22, Pakistan)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- Yumiko Tan
(Age 10, Japan<Living in Ghana>)
- Miho Hiroyama (Age 12, Japan)
- Hina Mizuki (Age 12, Japan)
- Leshan Loonena (Age 13, Kenya)
- Raymond Cho
(Age 14, Korea<Living in Japan>)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- Noriko Tsushimoto (Age 16, Japan)
- Palvannanathan (Age 16, Singapore)
- Riki Yamaguchi (Age 17, Japan)
- Harun Iseric
(Age 18, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Nkachukwu Nnebemchukwu Fredrick
(Age 24, Nigeria)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (25 entrants)

- Chisako Okamoto (Age 8, Japan)
- Yuma Maeda
(Age 9, Japan<Living in Pakistan>)
- Ishita Srivastava (Age 11, India)
- Annie Yang (Age 12, China<Living in U.S.A.>)

Youth category (24 entrants)

- Akane Sasaki (Age 15, Japan)
- Ai Satoh (Age 15, Japan)
- Abror Dadaxonov (Age 17, Uzbekistan)
- Alejandra Retana Betancourt
(Age 17, México)

- Anna Moshkina (Age 12, Russia)
- Ji Won Heo
(Age 12, Korea<Living in the Philippines>)
- Akira Tsurumi (Age 12, Japan)
- Faustina Chianugo Odili (Age 12, Nigeria)
- Marika Andoh (Age 13, Japan)
- Mai Ichikawa (Age 13, Japan)
- Mao Iwamoto (Age 13, Japan)
- Kanako Kobayashi (Age 13, Japan)
- Haruko Koyama (Age 13, Japan)
- Minori Suzuki (Age 13, Japan)
- Ayesha Butt (Age 14, Pakistan)
- Alicia Lai (Age 14,USA)
- Masaya Ishida (Age 14, Japan)
- Rinako Uenishi (Age 14, Japan)
- Kainat Afsar (Age 14, Pakistan)
- Saiya Dumarán (Age 14, The Philippines)
- Shaniah Louison (Age 14, Grenada)
- Jun Woo Jang (Age 14, The Philippines)
- Saya Takamoto (Age 14, Japan)
- Hikaru Fukuhara (Age 14, Japan)
- Htet Thiri Aung (Age 14, Singapore)
- Mitsutoshi Ohyabu (Age 17, Japan)
- Gala Patenkovic (Age 17, Serbia)
- Lin Chih-Ying (Age 17, Taiwan of China)
- Rintaro Noguchi (Age 17, Japan)
- Rie Oikawa (Age 18, Japan)
- Kenechi Gbuchie (Age 19, Nigeria)
- Suman Mandal (Age 19, India)
- Dina Nashaat Mohammed (Age 19, Egypt)
- Shraddha Pandey (Age 20, India)
- Nurbakyt Zhakipova (Age 20, Kazakhstan)
- Joyal Thomas (Age 21, India)
- Tran Nguyen Hoang Thi Tho
(Age 21, Vietnam)
- Ability Kakama (Age 22, Tanzania)
- Rina Ariyanthi Dewi (Age 23, Indonesia)
- Karla Gabriela Hernández Aguilar
(Age 24, México)
- Krishnadas Nanath (Age 24, India)
- Subhash Ghimire (Age 24, Nepal)
- Ssozi Javie (Age 24, Uganda)
- Elizabeth Njoki Waithaka (Age 25, Kenya)
- Zuhur Yasin Ibrahim (Age 25, Somalia)

Best School Award (2 schools)

- Ichikawa Junior & Senior High School, Chiba (Japan)
- Miyagi Prefectural Hakuou Senior High School (Japan)

School Incentive Award (11 schools)

- Universidad Escuela Superior Politecnica del Litoral (Ecuador)
- Kyoto Gakuen Junior High School (Japan)
- Showa Women's University Senior High School (Japan)
- Chiben Gakuen Senior High School (Japan)
- Tokiwamatsu Gakuen Junior High School (Japan)
- Asahigaoka Elementary School of Himi City (Japan)
- Omori 6th Junior High School (Japan)
- Kojimachi Gakuen Girls' Junior High School (Japan)
- Saint Mary's International School (Japan)
- Doshisha Junior High School (Japan)
- Nihon University Mishima Senior High School (Japan)

Plant for Planet (Original)

Aurona Sarker
(Age 14, Bangladesh)
Holy Cross Girls' High School, Dhaka

It was a bright autumn afternoon. A flock of birds were chirping; the sun was glowing like a disk of gold. But neither the sound nor the sight was affecting me. I was standing numb beside my window with a blank look, watching the best companion of my childhood falling over with every strike of a cruel axe.

There was a "Krishnachura" tree beside my house. I grew up seeing this tree, which was also growing every year. It could be seen from my bed, so when I used to wake up in the morning, the first thing that I saw was the tree. I used to start my day with the sight of its beautiful green leaves. When I went to bed at night, it was dark all around. Still I looked at least once through the window to see it. I loved to stare at it, even in the deep darkness, because I knew the tree was there.

I saw its high branches were kissing the ground. In front of my eyes, it fell on its face. I was just a mute spectator, as the tree belonged to some other people. The lovely tree was cut over within an hour, creating an eternal emptiness. It just wasn't an emptiness of that place; it was also the absence of a life from earth. I looked inside my room, where my little sister was sleeping peacefully in her cradle. Just like her, the tree had its life, its existence as a living creature even an hour before. Being stunned with what had happened, a thought struck me for the first time. I felt an intense pain, not only for the Krishnachura tree with which I was emotionally attached. I drowned in deep thought about the reckless nature of human beings. A big question arose in my mind. If we only concentrate on consuming for today and don't think about tomorrow, won't it be the beginning of our extinction? It's true that by exploiting the environment we are getting some benefits right now. However, fulfilling these selfish



motives will lead to the destruction of whole planet someday. Does the creation that took millions of years to build our planet deserve this kind of conclusion?

These thoughts brought a noticeable change to my view point. Earlier when I used to read or think about the problem, I only consoled myself saying that I have no hand in creating the problem and I also haven't enough capability to do something for it. But after that incident, I began to think differently, because for the first time I felt the problem. I started doing little things, taking small steps. I had the feeling that as a daughter of mother earth, it is my responsibility to do whatever I can to save my mother. I began my doings by planting small trees and plants on our roof and garden. I started giving plants to my friends as birthday present instead of video games. I shared my thoughts with everyone around me. I told them that the pleasure of nurturing a plant and bringing it up is a joy forever. Gradually they also started to think and feel in the same way. We did all the small things that we could. We arranged an inter-class art competition in our school with the help of our drawing teacher. And the theme of the competition was "Your Dream Garden".

Those little steps began to bring a meaningful change to our surrounding environment as we worked all together. Day by day, our neighborhood children and our other classmates also became inspired to see us. We sat together often and discussed what we can do for the environment. We decided not to keep the tap open while brushing teeth. One of us used to eat a lot of junk foods, only for pleasure. She said that she won't do that anymore. We all started to go to school by school bus or other public transport. We tried to save electricity as much as we can by switching the light, fan, computer off when not being used.

I had lost my one friend in the hand of some cruel people, but I transformed that pain into a promise. I promised to save my planet in whatever way I can. Earlier my favorite color was blue, but now it is green. I dream of a green planet which will be free of pollution, where birds and animals will live freely. Green plants all over the world, I say to myself, "Plant for Planet!"

Pride in Profession (Original)

Dan Erwin C. Bagaporo
(Age 20, The Philippines)
University of Santo Tomas

Being a nursing student in the Philippines is very hard. You have to deal with the thought that after graduation, you will be among thousands of others who will be competing for limited employment slots. Many nursing graduates end up un- or underemployed. Sadly, this has led to stigmatization. Every time people ask me what my course is and I answer Nursing, they would shake their heads.



Many are already starting to poke fun at my profession. One time, I heard my friends joke around saying, "You train for 4 years and what? Wash bed pans afterward?" I have to admit that this stigma got to me. I saw myself as someone insignificant. I came to school uninspired and did not bother exerting much effort in school work. "After all, you're just a nursing student," they told me.

It was not until the summer of my third year that I found inspiration in the most unusual place. Last April, some of my friends invited me over to help them with their thesis. My friends' study was about geriatric loneliness. They asked me to help them with distributing questionnaires to people living in a retirement home. We traveled a long way to this secluded compound surrounded with tall fences. It was very peaceful and quiet, but not well-maintained. The corridors had a pungent smell and the comfort rooms were in a deplorable condition. The facilitators were doing their best to maintain the facility, but were clearly understaffed and lacked funding.

During the interviews, I got to know stories of people inside. Most of them were either rescued from the streets or were abandoned by their families. I remember one particular interview with an old woman. She told me that a few years ago, she was homeless and was "taken" from

the streets by authorities, separating her from her family, who were not with her at the time. She was then brought to the retirement home. Because of this, she never saw her family again. She then went on, describing her state and experiences. It turned out that she had been suffering from hypertension and arthritis for some time now, but can hardly manage it because there is no consistent medical supervision or advice. She even asked me if there was a way I could reunite her with her family.

To be honest, I did not know how to react. I wanted to help reunite her with her family, but it was just not possible, given the limited resources. So I just remained silent and listened to her. After a while, I gave her health teachings regarding home management of hypertension and pain, like eating raw garlic and putting warm compress on affected areas. That was all I could do, I guess, being just a nursing student. We then continued our conversation. I sensed that her mood was growing lighter, because we were already exchanging a few laughs. Before the interview ended, she asked me again for my name and course. "Dan, and I'm taking up Nursing", I said. That was the time she said the words that I still keep in my heart up to this day: "Thank you, Dan. I'll pray for you. I'll pray that you finish your course." After this, I tried to listen and give as many health teachings as I could to the other people I interviewed. It was during this day that I realized the importance of who I am and what I was doing. I was not just simply doing interviews; I was actually caring.

Nurses are trained to care and I realized that listening and health teachings are an expression of caring. I began to see my profession in a new light. I realized that the most important question to be answered is not "how will you fare after you graduate?" Rather, it is "how many people can you help at the end of the day?" This experience has taught me that you do not need impressive degrees or huge sums of money to make a difference in a person's life. All you need is a listening ear, empathy and basic practical knowledge.

After that summer, I began to exert more effort in school work and in joining organizations. I became active in our Red Cross unit and started joining medical missions. I even plan to specialize in Research and Geriatrics upon graduation. One day I also plan to go back to that retirement home, make another study or at least, do something to make the lives of the people there better. I want to pay them back, because their stories gave me the strength and determination to write my own. No, I am not just a nursing student. I am a nursing student. And no one will ever take the pride in that statement away from me again.

When I Grow Up...

(Original)

Ummul Baneen Sheikh

(Age 10, Pakistan & Canada)

Beaconhouse School System Liberty Junior, Lahore

I was always thinking about what to become when I grow up. My parents said to become a doctor and all my friends wanted to become a pilot. But I did not like what all my friends wanted to be. I didn't know what to do until one day I finally decided.

I had heard a lot about cleaning the house and not throwing garbage on the roads. My mother told me always to not waste water and turn off extra switches to save electricity. I always did not listen to what my mother said and did everything I wanted.

One day my school took our class to a very far off place in the north of Pakistan. It was a village where many people lived. It was a very crowded area. I saw many houses everywhere. But they were not like my house. They were so small with dirtiness and had a very bad smell. I saw that boys and girls of my age lived in those houses with no electricity and no water and no gas to cook for.

I was walking from street to street when I suddenly ran into a small boy who was crying. I asked him what was wrong. He at first did not answer but then he cried out loud that he was hungry and had no food to eat. I gave him my home made sandwich and so we became friends.

He took me all around the village. The child's name was Ali. He used to help his father to collect the garbage from all of the places. He did not have proper clothes. He was poor and did not go to any school. I saw many of the children of my age in that village who did not go to school. There was one school but over fifty children were in one class.

Ali took me to his house where I saw his family in a very small house with no electricity and food. I felt very sad for Ali and his family. I thanked God for everything and realized that I was living a very good life.

I saw the broken bicycles and houses. All of the waste was going into a dirty river where men and boys were taking a shower. I was very shocked by looking at the people of the village.

I went to my teacher and talked to her about what I saw. I felt the inspiration in me to do something for this world. I came to know that there are many villages which are poor in the world and I felt very bad. Thinking about Ali and his friends I started to cry. My teacher told me that we should always take care of things like water, electricity, food and the helpful things around us so that everyone gets their fair share in such stuff.

I finally decided to grow up and become the president to help these people of Pakistan. I learned my lesson and this trip inspired me to save for the poor and help them. I took my parents and my neighbors to that village and we all donated as much of our things as we could to the people. I also wrote a letter to the president to help the people in villages with bad homes and no food. I hope he gets it. I also brought Ali with me to my house and he started going to my school with me. I always feel very good when I look at him.

I think all children should help the poor and thank God for all the good things he has given them.

This was my story of inspiration. This story helped me to become a better person. I will make this world a better place by helping the poor and making all rich and poor people friends together. I love this earth and the people on it so I will work to do everything for it.

Who Understands Him Best?

(Original in Japanese)

Ai Ohyama

(Age 11, Japan)

Tamazato Kita Elementary School, Omitama, Ibaraki

"Who Understands Him Best?"

These words of my father's changed me.

At the nearby supermarket where my mother and I often go shopping together, there was a disabled man working. He twisted his legs in strange ways when he walked. I think he would have been tall if his spine were stretched long, but because he was always stooped with rounded shoulders, he appeared very small. I wasn't sure if I felt sorry for him or just felt badly, but for some reason, I tried to keep him out of view. If I caught sight of him, I would purposely take a roundabout route, use a different entrance, or otherwise try to avoid meeting him. When I happened to run into him, I hurriedly left that area.

One time, I was waiting in the car while my mother was shopping. I was casually looking out my window, when he popped into view. Since there was nothing to do, I watched him absentmindedly. He was busily working, holding a broom in one hand and looking for trash in the parking lot. As usual, he called out, "Irasshaimase! (Welcome!)" to each new customer, bowing his head briefly. As I watched him, I somehow felt pity for him.

Why is he doing this job? He should just quit. Why is the store manager making a disabled person work? Another person could probably work faster and do more. I wonder if they're forcing him to do it. On my own, I imagined all kinds of things. At dinner, when I was telling my older sister about what happened that day, my father spoke up.

"Who do you think understands that man best? Another person might be able to do the job faster, but then the disabled man would have no place to work, even though he wants to. I think the store manager hired that man because he understands him very well."

I was shocked. The person I had thought was being mean to the disabled man was really the one who understood him best. Having made my own assumptions, I had quickly created a biased view. When I realized this, I was able to see everything differently. When I looked around carefully, everything from the store to the parking lot was clean and tidy. This was due to the disabled man's work. And, I noticed that when he said, "Irasshaimase!" bowed his head, and lifted it up again, he had a smile on his face. The customers were smiling, too. I felt very ashamed that I had been viewing him differently.

Interactions between people can differ just by the way we look at things. I should have realized sooner that I could end up with a disability myself some day, and that having a disability is nothing special. There are many disabled people in our society. In order to create a society that is pleasant for everyone, I think it is very important for all of us to be considerate and helpful toward each other, and to have an understanding of public welfare and the readiness to take an active part in it.

Recently, when I was at the supermarket, I got up the courage to say "Hello" to the disabled man. He looked surprised, then gave a big smile and returned my greeting. It was a simple greeting that took only a few seconds, but it made me feel very happy. I want to do whatever I can to become a person who is naturally able to help others, and to create a wonderful society in which everyone is kind and supportive of each other.

A Real Life Nightmare That Woke Up My Consciousness

(Original)

Cristina Carauș

(Age 18, Moldova)

Theoretical Lyceum "C. Stere", Soroca

My story of inspiration started on a sorrowful October day of 2010, when the news about my aunt's husband decease woke me up. He was only twenty-eight years old when an unpredictable heart attack took him away from us.

It was a grueling period in our family. He was the only child in his family and his decease morally destroyed his parents. But besides that, he was the father of two children, and when he died, my aunt remained alone, raising one six years old boy and one year old girl by herself. The funeral was a real nightmare. Lots of relatives, acquaintances, friends and family gathered together to see the dead young father for the last time and to support my aunt and our family throughout this undeniable and burdensome period of time. Everyone had this lamentable look in their eyes and this shadowed mourning attire. The dolefulness and depression were in the air. This was a real nightmare, but I didn't even assume at that time that it was going to wake up my consciousness and inspire me to make good changes in the world. Through that chaos and pain there was a moment when I felt like the whole world stopped around me—. I looked around and realized that all that pain was only the top of the iceberg. I understood that the funeral will be over; this huge crowd of people will go back to their homes, talking about my aunt's tragedy and about how sympathetic and sorry for her they are. But a small time will pass, and they will forget. My aunt won't though! This suffering will always remain a hardwearing and imperishable footprint on her life. She became a widow at the age of thirty with two small children to raise and educate and no money to support them. She was morally dissipated, physically exhausted and financially broken, because she was on maternity leave and her husband was the only source of income.

A person has to be very strong and courageous to rehabilitate after such an afflictive quagmire. Her courage was the wish of seeing her children living a decent life, but her main support was

us—her family. She moved into my grandmother's house so she'd have some help with raising her children and babysitting. My mother and her other sister helped her financially and of course morally; her parents in law are contributing a lot through different sources as well. With the help of her family's relief and support, my aunt's life condition started to ameliorate and refine. Her situation at this moment is stable and she is apt to go ahead on her life path with her head lift high and heart open.

I remember the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "When it is dark enough, you can see the stars," and this is absolutely true in my situation as well. This circumstance in our family put me in front of some onerous questions and the answers to them became my milestone in doing positive changes in the world. I was thinking: "What if my aunt didn't have us—her family? What if she didn't have any exterior support?" But there are women in the world who are in similar critical situations or even some worse ones and they are alone, without any kind of adherence. "What do they do? How do they overcome these vicious gaps in their lives? Who helps them? Who supports them? And—does anyone at all?" When these questions were born in my mind, my consciousness woke up. I felt like a divine vibe percolated each cell of my body and mind. I decided to find the solution; I decided to be a part of the solution myself.

When I turned eighteen, I started to collect all the necessary information and paperwork in order to open my own NGO—and so I did. The NGO is now officially opened and its aim is to help women who experience perplexed situations in their lives. It's going to be the support point for each woman who needs us. They can get psychological help, participate in personal development and motivational trainings and seminars, communicate with those who are in similar situations and understand them the best and feel that they are not alone and there are people who care and who they can rely on. Besides that, I got affiliated with some international youth groups and networks who care about women's problems, human rights and other social issues as well, and I hope that together with them and with all the youth in the world, we will accomplish many positive world-changing goals and will make the world better—more abundant, marvelous and peaceful.

My Story of Inspiration (Original)

Behjat Sahar Junaid
(Age 22, Pakistan)

I walked on land that was supposed to be a stream. I stood with people who were supposed to be 'animals'. Well, I myself wasn't really supposed to be there at all, for Machchar Colony, an unrecognized community, is a cradle of crime in Karachi. Swarms of languid plastic bags blew in the densely fetid air, the man-made earth bloomed each time I moved with the stream stirring threateningly under my feet. Tattered straw huts dotted the sides of this path, from which curious faces popped out to stare at my unceremonious slog with heels. I finally reached the school where I had volunteered to assist.

The entrance was a big oval hole blasted in a wall, curtained with a hole-riddled cloth. The building consisted of 10 rooms, a small courtyard and a back garden. As I walked from class to class I realized something missing—there was no teacher. The children were playing noisily around; the desks were being used for passionate graffiti craft work or as obstacles in the obstacle-races. The older boys listlessly ambled about in the courtyard, smoking keenly. It seemed that they were clinging to the last vestiges of their fast evaporating childhood, by visiting school before they would have to make their way into the criminal world.

Finally I found a teacher in the last room. She was chatting animatedly on her cell-phone, so I waited. When she finished, I told her about myself and that I wanted to help her teach to gain work-experience. She looked at me quizzically, suspecting me of ulterior motives. After interrogating me more, and satisfied that my motives, whatever they were, would not involve her, she gave me the approval and went back to her happy chirrup.

I was uncertain from where to start. I had brought my box of paper, pencils, erasers and crayons, so I grouped all the kids together and handed out paper and pencils. I drew a circle on the blackboard and asked them to copy it. But I was disappointed to see they didn't know how to hold a pencil. They were gripping it hard like a knife. Maybe that's how they learned to hold

thin pointed objects. I took each child's hand and taught him how to draw. After some painstaking efforts we learned to draw basic shapes.

It was always said that children of this colony by nature were capable only of violence, so I was pleasantly surprised to see how receptive they were. Despite the flat disapproval from my family and friends, I continued to trek through the sewage-soaked paths to the school, and everyday taught them something new. They learned fast and soon I was getting beautifully drawn pictures, with well-thought combination of colours. A couple of pictures were particularly memorable. They portrayed the Machchar Colony as quite a fascinating place to be in. Instead of lakes of sewage water, there were acres of rich green land where flowers grew. Instead of those grim suspicious expressions, people wore smiles on their faces while their children swam and fished in clean streams. The other picture had more young women like me with lipstick and heels teaching eager-faced children, while one sang a hopeful song through clumsy drawings of shops and roads in the colony. With a pang I realized that this was how the boys dreamed their home to be. They could spot the potential in their colony and imbued me with refreshed hopes for this otherwise dismal pre-doomed place.

Children learn whatever is placed before them. If they were given guns, they would automatically learn to use them expertly. Although, not initially planned I now decided to give them alphabets. Soon they mastered the English Language. When I presented them with numbers, they learned to manipulate them and became little Math genies. As I now see them jabbering fluently in English and calculating decimals, I can't help feeling proud by the fact that their intellectual prowess is equally as good as the private-schooled children's.

Nobody's fate is predetermined. We make our own destinies by the opportunities provided to us. If a certain sector of our society is weak, it is not because they are inherently incompetent. We too play a part in their ruin. What this Machchar Colony taught me was that people have potential for everything; they become masters of whatever you give them. Show them unfairness, and they will become the champions of sin. Give them the reins of trade, and they will re-write the rules of successful business. Enlighten them with health awareness, and they will be an example of hygiene. Give them the tools of Education, and they will produce the greatest intellectual feats of mankind.

And before everything however, all they need is just a chance—a chance to prove themselves.

A Bridge Between Japan and Ghana

(Original in Japanese)

Yumiko Tan

(Age 10, Japan <Living in Ghana>)

Ghana Japanese Children's School, Accra

"Was your grandmother in Japan all right?"

One after another, friends I saw at school asked me this question. The Great Tohoku Earthquake struck the Japanese islands on March 11, 2011. Many people lost their lives, their family members, their friends, and their loved ones in the earthquake.

Because my grandmother lives in Hokkaido, she did not have any damage. However, my aunt who lives in Ibaragi had to spend days without electricity. I could not believe that people in Japan were living without electricity.

What can we do when we are far away in Ghana, Africa? As Japanese people living in Ghana, we thought hard about this. We decided to start collecting donations inside Accra's biggest shopping mall. My younger brothers and I made our own donation boxes.

When the day came, I headed to the place where we were fund-raising, feeling nervous. Every day, I see people on the street asking us for "Money, please." I wondered anxiously: Will people really give us money?

We lined up at the entrance to a shop, and in a loud voice, we asked people passing by, "Help Japan!"

"Oh, yes, we need to help Japan." To my surprise, people passing by stopped for us, and my five-year-old brother's box in particular collected quite a lot of money.

The people of Ghana really will help Japan! My worries disappeared, and I felt truly happy. I had always thought that Japan had to help Ghana. But through this experience, I realized that people in Ghana also wanted to help Japan in a time of need. "You should bring your grandmother to Ghana," said my school teacher, who was worried for me. And a friend asked me, "If I want to send money to Japan, who should I give it to?"

The sad scenes following the earthquake in Japan were shown on TV every day. My heart ached, and my friends who watched TV were genuinely worried for Japan.

In Ghana is a medical research institute named for (Japanese scientist) Hideyo Noguchi. The institute sent Ghanaian chocolate to children in Japan who were affected by the earthquake. Ghanaian chocolate is very tasty, so I'm sure it made them very happy. It was not merely chocolate, but chocolate infused with care and encouragement.

What I learned from this experience is that the world is one. Even between Africa and Asia, which are so far away, news spreads easily. Usually, Japan is the one helping Ghana, but I realized that when Japan is in trouble, people in Ghana want very much to help.

This is what I want to tell people in Japan. There are many people in Ghana who want to donate money to Japan, even though they cannot afford lunch for themselves. While we were collecting money for Japan, the lady who cleans our school happened to pass by. She carefully took out one cedi (about US \$0.65) wrapped inside her handkerchief and placed it in the donation box. The people of Ghana are truly kind.

The desire to help people in need is shared by every human being. As long as people have this desire, the world will surely become a peaceful one, without war. This is what I came to feel through this experience.

Coexistence with Nature (Original in Japanese)

Miho Hiroyama

(Age 12, Japan)

Fuji Sacred Heart Junior High School, Shizuoka

I experienced a change in perspective when I watched a television program called “The Story of Studio Ghibli.” The discussion of Minamata disease during the program completely turned my ideas around.

I had learned about Minamata disease in fifth grade social studies class. When I saw pictures of people with Minamata disease, it made me want to look away. It was hard to believe that Minamata disease was a reality in Japan, and more so that it happened when our grandparents were young.

Minamata disease is one of the four major pollution-related illnesses, and it occurs when organic mercury builds up in the body, affecting the brain and the central nervous system. The body becomes numb and immobile, and the mouth incapable of opening. Many people suffered from Minamata disease, including infants, children, and adults, both men and women. The cause of the disease was the wastewater from the Chisso factory in Minamata contaminating the fish and other creatures living in the sea and on the ocean floor, which were then eaten. In addition to human beings falling ill, Minamata Bay was also contaminated. Because of this, people could no longer fish in the bay. I remember clearly pictures of the many thousands of fish pulled from the sea, and left at the port without being handled.

That was about all I knew of Minamata disease, but there was more to the story.

Several years later, large numbers of fish could be seen in the waters of Minamata Bay, which had been called the “sea of death.” Many rock oysters were found on the rocks. And surprisingly, a new bacterium was discovered in the sea mud. This bacterium had acquired the ability to purify mercury. In other words, it had transformed itself in order to purify the sea.

I felt like I was awakened. Until then, my sense was that human beings were at the center of life on earth, and that everything was determined by human beings. Even though I used expressions like “the blessings of nature,” I had not given thought to respecting and revering nature’s wonders. Perhaps I was thinking that, instead of human beings existing in nature, nature was part of human beings’ existence.

But when I learned this fact about Minamata disease, I had the sense that human beings are helped by nature, and that nature is picking up after the actions of human beings. I felt that human beings are a small part of nature, and that we must not think ourselves superior. I also felt that we must live with greater respect for nature, experiencing its wonders.

I like the work of Studio Ghibli, which gave me the opportunity to know about this. Their animation depicts human beings as contrasting with nature, but despite this confrontation, they also seem to show people making small efforts to coexist with nature. I think Ghibli’s animation fascinates a great many people, from children to adults, not only in Japan but throughout the world, because even if they come from different cultures, they sense this relationship between human beings and nature, even if they are not consciously aware of it. And, I think it is because they are touched by the messages carried in the work. I think this is why, no matter how many times I watch the animations of Studio Ghibli, I always discover something new, and I am always deeply moved.

I still have much to learn in math, science, literature, and the arts, and I strongly wish to accumulate a great deal of knowledge. Through works like *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, film director Hayao Miyazaki of Studio Ghibli calls our attention to such questions as harmony between scientific progress and nature, and our coexistence with nature. In my own way, I would like to become an advocate for these causes.

A Quest for Earth-friendly Development

(Original in Japanese)

Hina Mizuki

(Age 12, Japan)

Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano

Spring. It is the only time of year to see my favorite butterfly, the kotsubame (*Callophrys ferrea*). The kotsubame is a plain-looking butterfly, brown in color, whose wings open only when it flies. Its habitat ranges from woodlands outside populated areas to mountainous regions. It points its wings toward the sun, and like a solar panel, it lives off the energy of the sun's light and heat. This year again, I went to a ravine area to observe kotsubame. Plants and animals that appear only once a year in the spring are known as 'spring ephemerals.' Because they only come out in the spring, I am always restless on a sunny spring day. This is the third year that I have been studying butterflies. How did I get the idea to start studying butterflies? A particular incident sparked my interest.

It was one day in science class. We were studying the sun and moon, and the teacher asked us: which revolves more quickly—the sun or the moon? I thought about the question, and came to my own conclusion. I thought the sun would turn more quickly. Amazingly, I was right. It made me very, very happy, and I came to like science. Yes, that was the experience that changed me. From our lesson on the sun and the moon, I developed an interest in science in general.

I have a dream for the future. It is to become a scientist. Now, I am focusing on the ecology of kotsubame and solar energy, making observations and doing experiments with this dream in mind. The first year, I started by broadly examining the phototaxis of butterflies. I made observations from a butterfly's point of view, and I recorded them. I quickly went to look up any questions I had, such as: What are the special characteristics of phosphorus powder, which even butterflies perceive as shiny? As a result, I learned the basic ecology of butterflies. Butterflies are very delicate creatures, and they live in an intelligent way with their allies and predators, as well as plants in nature. As I ran around in nature making observations, I

discovered things and gained knowledge, not from other writers, but through my own experiences. Based on these experiences, in the second year, I finally focused on the kotsubame, and learned about its solar panel-like structure. The idea that I came up with was that if we could use the structure of kotsubame, which tilt their wings diagonally to absorb the sun's light and heat and turn them into energy, and include it in solar panels, then their energy efficiency would increase. However, using the wings themselves would be destroying nature instead. So, I am thinking that with further research on the structure of kotsubame, we will be able to find a way to use it in the construction of solar panels.

At present, our Earth is facing more and more environmental problems, such as global warming and desertification. As thermal power generation continues, carbon dioxide (in the atmosphere) is increasing, and coal and petroleum are disappearing. Because of this, I wondered if solar panels, which generate power from the sun, an infinite resource, might save the Earth. However, household solar panels can only convert about twenty percent of the energy they absorb into electricity. I think that if solar panels could be developed with my idea of taking a hint from the wings of the kotsubame, then the amount of energy that is converted into electricity would increase, and as a result, we would put a stop to global warming and other environmental problems. It excites me to imagine how earth-friendly an environment we can create when people around the world stop depending on finite resources and start using high-efficiency solar panels for transportation, homes, industry, and other uses. It seems that it will take some time to make this a reality. However, I think it will be great if these solar panels are developed, and in the future we have a global environment in which living things can live more easily and freely. I am also grateful to my science teacher, who created the opportunity for me to have this dream, and to my other teachers who gave me advice for my research. This spring, I discovered tiny eggs produced by a kotsubame. This year, I am hoping to care for these eggs and study butterflies in greater detail.

The Drought City (Original)

Leshan Loonena

(Age 13, Kenya)

Braeside International School, Nairobi

Hi! My name is Twiga; I'm called Twiga because I am really tall for my age. I live in the county of Marsabit in Northern Kenya. In Marsabit it hardly rains the land lay barren for much of the year but once in a while it rains but mere drizzles which quickly soaks into the ground. My whole clan lives together, we're pastoralists meaning we move in search of greener pastures which are certainly rare in Northern Kenya.

I have always dreamt of going to school. However, we are pastoralists which mean there is no time for school. Many times government officials have come up to our clan elders and have insisted that they take my cousins and I to school. But their pleading fell on deaf ears and the government officials stopped insisting on it. In the whole clan there is only one man who can read and that is my father who used to sneak off to school while herding the cattle. He finished high school but could not go to university since there was no money for that.

My father inspired me to go to school however; the problem is that the closest school is in Moyale which is many miles away and would take days to get there.

But me going to school is my second issue, the first is finding water. Living in a semi-arid area means water is scarce and very precious. It hurts me to see how the water we dig out from the oasis is wasted. It's understandable when it's used to water the cattle and camels, to bathe and to drink. But they use the water for weird rituals, where they pour the water into the ground and if it soaks it means the ancestors have drunk the water if not the water is bewitched. It keeps reminding me of the world if we don't take care of our precious resources. Imagine a world where water will no longer be a necessity rather than a commodity, flora and fauna extinct and food is synthetic. This is what keeps me cautious of how I use the water we find.

For a long time now I have wondered how people in Mombasa and Turkwel get tap water, my father told me there are huge walls built in a river to hold back water which forms a lake. The water is then piped to a water treatment plant that make the water suitable for washing, cleaning and even drinking in many countries. So I have made a plan of building a dam on the mighty Ewaso Ngiro River.

This way my clan and many other clans won't have to be pastoralists. We can all settle down and the children can go to school, finish and even go to university. There is one problem I am only a child and I can't go to Nairobi alone, so that is why I told my father my plan. He agreed with me and we planned to go Nairobi together. I have always wanted to go to the capital city. We went to Nairobi by airplane it was a great experience but not for my father he was shaking like a leaf and said flying is for birds not man. I immediately burst out laughing; the most educated, most respected and most intelligent man in my clan was scared to be in an airplane.

Once we reached Nairobi, I was flabbergasted Nairobi was big and busy. There were cars everywhere and people walking minding their own business. Many of them were holding briefcases and talking into mobile phones. Thereafter, we booked into a small hotel in the central business district. We were both exhausted and dozed off. It was hard to sleep with all that noise pollution.

The next day we went to Ministry of water, Maji house and showed my idea to the minister. She liked it and even implemented the construction of Ewaso Ngiro Dam. The news about the dam building spread like wildfire and it was all over the news, luckily no news reporters caught my father and I.

Once we got back to Marsabit we found our clan members holding a feast for us after hearing about our mission in Nairobi. The dam is still under construction. Now many clans including ours have settled down in a town near Ewaso Ngiro and named it Drought city because of its surrounding.

We should all start thinking of alternatives to provide and preserve our precious resources. We can start using solar power for heating water and houses, biogas or wind energy for electricity.

2011 International Essay Contest for Young People
[Children's Category – 3rd Prize]

My Story of Inspiration

(Original)

Raymond Cho

(Age 14, Korea <Living in Japan>)

Saint Mary's International School, Tokyo

I'm neither Gandhi nor Thomas Edison. I am not able to lead my country's people to freedom, nor am I capable of inventing something so grand, like the "light bulb," that will be able to change the way people live. I know that deep down I would like to be like them, but as a 14-year-old boy I know my limits.

However, knowing my limits doesn't mean that I can't try or dream about changing the world someday. The fact is that my role models didn't become great leaders or pioneers in a single day. It took time for them and they started out from a very simple step, which is "positive thinking."

After reading autobiographies, I was able to see one thing that all of them had in common. It was positive thinking. It seems very easy at first and it seems like anyone can do it, which is true. However, the real challenge is being able to continue without losing hope. I think this is why they were able to change the world while others have failed.

Since I learned science and love to do experiments, I believed that once I have a hypothesis I should be able to test it out. My hypothesis was to continuously stay positive for one month without any exceptions, and compare if this month will have a better outcome than the regular months of my school year.

I have to be honest; it was harder than I had thought it would be. There were many times I wanted to give up and just be mad or angry. If you wanted to be seen as positive, you have to really feel positive inside to be able to show it outside.

The first real challenge came when we had to do our first history group project. The teacher divided us into groups and we had to do a group presentation. I don't know if the teacher knew about my experiment, but I was grouped with the laziest people in our class. I know that I am not supposed to judge other people. However, I was really wishing that I would be with another "smart" group. If it was the "old me," I would have thought "I'm so doomed and I'm so going to fail this project." Instead of thinking negativity, I began forcing myself to think in a positive way. When I asked for opinions, I really tried to hear their ideas and I tried to work with them. I suggested to work after school with them, and I put my effort to making them think that we can do it. I think that my group knew that we were going to get a low grade from the start, because they really didn't care about what I was doing. However, as time passed and I consistently made positive comments, I was surprised to see my fellow group members working together. I'm proud to say that we ended up getting an A+ for the school project. After a month of positive thinking, I was able to change the way my friends thought about school and other friends.

Of course, people can argue that this was a "one time good luck." Therefore, to prove that positive thinking is what can really change me and the world around, I need to look into more books and see if it is true for others.

From my search, I was shocked that famous people actually failed a lot of times before they became successful. And the key force that was able to make them succeed was positive thinking. Every single one of them didn't give up hope and always thought that there was a brighter side to every outcome. One of my personal favorite quotes was from Thomas Edison. When a reporter asked how he felt when he failed so many times to create the light bulb, Edison replied by saying that he didn't fail but it only took him that many steps to create the light bulb.

Overall, I think that through my experiment and research, my inspiration that will be able to change the world is positive thinking. By being able to think positively, I am able to act positively and change others to become positive. If this continues, I think that it will be like a little stone thrown into a pond and creating a ripple over the entire pond, changing it for the better.

The Power of Prayer (Original in Japanese)

Noriko Tsushimoto
(Age 16, Japan <Living in U.K.>)
Teikyo School United Kingdom, London

On the afternoon of June 5th (2011), I was hurrying toward central London in a cold rain. Soon, more and more of the people I passed were Japanese people in formal dress, a somewhat unusual thing to see in a foreign city. The line of Japanese people crossed the busy road and entered the famous Westminster Abbey. We had come to join in the Great East Japan Earthquake Memorial Service being held in the abbey.

When I mention Westminster Abbey, the first thing that probably comes to mind is the magnificent royal wedding that recently took place there. At the same place where the people of Britain prayed for the happiness of the newlyweds, we Japanese people were going to pray for the victims of the earthquake, and for the restoration of our homeland. The Japanese flag flown high above the abbey signified that this service was being conducted for the people of Japan.

As a student living in London, I heard about the Tohoku Earthquake at dawn on March 11. Even now, I vividly remember turning on the BBC news and instantly snapping out of my sleepy state. At first, I didn't understand what had happened. But as I watched images of the events, I got goose bumps all over my body, and was at a loss for words. When a horrific photo of the disaster-struck area covered the front page of the next day's newspaper, I once again felt the gravity of the situation.

People in Britain were quick to take action. They immediately set up various charities, and collected relief funds and donations for the affected areas. On the front page of one newspaper was the red sun of the Japanese flag with the Japanese words "がんばれ日本、がんばれ東北 (Ganbare Nihon, Ganbare Tohoku: Don't give up Japan, Don't give up Tohoku)." People I did

not know were giving me encouragement. I think this kindness of the British people was the driving force behind the service I was attending.

The ceremony was carried out with solemnity. Passages from the Bible were read; hymns and pipe organ music echoed from the high ceilings of the sanctuary. As the program proceeded, to my surprise, Kenji Miyazawa's poem *Ame ni mo makezu* (Be not Defeated by the Rain) was read aloud. The power of its words struck me deeply. It dawned on me that this, too, is a form of prayer. Up until then, I had thought of prayer as putting one's hands together or kneeling down in devotion to God. I realized, however, that there are other forms of prayer as well. Surely, anyone listening to this reading must have prayed for the advent of a safe and peaceful world, and envisioned a vigorous rebuilding of Japan. I felt the poem quietly guiding our spirit, and uniting the hearts of all those in attendance.

I think what is meant by prayer is 'the power of thought.' Even Japan's restoration and rebirth cannot begin without thoughts. It is through thoughts that action takes place. People say that prayer alone will not change anything, but in times of crisis, I think it is what we need most. Indeed, all I can do at present is pray, but it seems to me that this is by no means an insignificant force. When all of us who had gathered at Westminster Abbey united our hearts and prayed together, I believe that our thoughts became a great force that reached the areas affected by the disaster.

Another thing that moved me was the international cooperation. I could feel intensely the kindness of the British people toward Japan, and their strong desire to help. Many people are praying for the restoration of Japan and the happiness of its people. Amidst this, I feel that I have caught a glimpse of the true warmth of international cooperation.

This great disaster has brought about changes in me. It led me to reconsider the meaning of prayer, which I had only experienced in form, and to learn what true prayer really is. I was also able to understand the spirit underlying the words 'international cooperation,' which I had previously understood as merely a political term. In the future, I hope to use this 'power of thought' that I keenly felt during recent events to reach out to the international community. The 'power of prayer' and 'power of thought' are infinite.

A Bright Spark (Original)

Palvannanathan
(Age 16, Singapore)

"There is a sufficiency in this world for a man's need but not for a man's greed." The words of the Mahatma spoke to me as I waded through the polluting fumes of car congested India. Ability to withstand the unbearable heat wave wearing thin, I retired to the cool solace of a building shade nearby. Man's actions confounded me. Then, something caught my eye. In the corner of the street, a man was pedalling away furiously, as if for a purpose. Curiosity stoked, I went closer and to my pleasant surprise, I saw that it was connected to a computer. Feeling interested, I felt that I had to know what was going on. Thus, I approached the man regarding what his big idea was.

"Oh, this contraption was given to me by someone from an environmental awareness organisation. If I pedal, it powers my computer," the man mused. Stunned, I took a closer look at the design of the wonderful invention. Being ingeniously simple yet generating enough power to power a computer and even a few light bulbs at will, this machine stoked my curiosity about generating clean power—power without emissions. This was the holy grail of energy production. What a boon that would be to countries like India and China where the evils of environmental degradation and global warming were destroying the livelihoods of people and the beauty of the country.

Going deeper into zero-emission technology, it dawned upon me that the technology had to be accessible to the masses. What good is a technological breakthrough if it cannot reach the man on the street? Thereafter began a quest to find a solution to the world's energy problems. One of my major aims was to make sure it was affordable. Being a student, I could only conceptualise ideas. Some of them had coincidentally been attempted before, but I pursued my original ideas and tried to use the scientific knowledge I had acquired until then to design these contraptions. One of them was an electromagnetic engine which used electromagnetism

to move a piston. Modelling this engine was a mammoth task—one which my father and I undertook and completed.

The benefits of the low cost renewable energy solutions that I wanted to give the world are nothing short of revolutionary. What is wishful thinking now—a pollution free world—could become a reality. Hitherto never been done, the masses could be able to be one of the first to enjoy the fruits of a technological breakthrough. The thought of this new energy paradigm energised me in my quest for a solution. I even explored the idea of converting space mass into energy according to Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$, whereby energy could be produced from mass, possibly that in outer space, and beamed back to the Earth by satellite. Farfetched ideas but theoretically and recently, partly have been proven true in reality. These findings ignite the sparks of hope within the minds of the researcher and the common man alike.

When Marconi broached the idea of transmitting signals by air, those in the scientific community labelled him a lunatic. Today, we know him as the inventor of the wireless radio. Mavericks are seldom, if not never, not laughed at or cast aside. It was disheartening when the same things happened to me. Many of the people, whom I spoke to about my ideas for a low cost zero-emission mode of energy, only appeared to agree with me although their consciousness could not accept this new and abstract idea. Dismissals were what I received from some of the more candid people I brought up this idea with. Inspiration and not defeat welled up in me whenever my ideas were disagreed on.

One day, I hoped that those very people would look back and say to themselves, "Maybe I should have listened to that guy."

Even today, I am still reading journals and articles trying to keep abreast of the latest trends in clean energy. Promise pervades where bleakness reigned supreme once. From time to time, I think of small inventions that could push us towards achieving this vaunted goal. I pencil them down onto paper and then review them to see if they make sense. 'Eureka' moments are rare but the joy of inventing is fuel enough for me to continue in my quest. In my country Singapore, many research institutes such as The Solar Research Institute of Singapore (SERIS) are spearheading research to get the next breakthrough in renewable energy. Advancing these worthy causes is definitely one of, if not my main, life's goal.

The passion for lighting up this world without blighting the world with smoke burns brighter than the Sun—the best natural source of energy—in my heart.

The Boy Whose Light Went Out

(Original in Japanese)

Riki Yamaguchi

(Age 17, Japan)

Waseda University Senior High School, Tokyo

Human beings are born, and they die. This is an immutable fact, but the time and place in which they are born can largely affect the way they die. There are different opinions about what makes the end of one's life a happy one, but it is probably safe to say that Japan is a country with many fortunate deaths.

Previously, I lived in the Philippines. There are many poor people in the Philippines, so it can hardly be called a wealthy country. However, I feel that my life there was extremely blessed.

While I was there, I went to a private school that was surrounded by a high fence, completely cut off from the outside. This was to keep beggars from coming in. However, we could see outside from within the school grounds. From inside the school, I would gaze outside, looking for a boy who was always there. He was a child beggar. He wore a large t-shirt that was too big for his thin body as he looked for scraps of food. In the sweltering heat, he scavenged through garbage that was swarming with flies. I watched him out of the corner of my eye as I studied in an air-conditioned classroom. His life continued on in this way—completely normal for him, but far out of the ordinary from my perspective.

But then, one morning, in front of the school, I found a dog with blood around its mouth. It was nothing like the kind of cute little pet dog one might see in Japan. It was a thin dog, with protruding cheekbones. I thought it had been in a fight with another dog, but the next thing I noticed was the boy, bleeding from his leg. The light had gone out of his eyes, and he lay there as if he were dead. But after two or three days, I no longer saw his lifeless eyes. He had died. Perhaps it was rabies. From my classroom, I could clearly see him suffering, and then dying. After he died, a city sanitation worker put him in a bin, just like trash. To the sanitation worker, the boy was merely garbage. As always, I watched it from my air-conditioned classroom. That

was all I could do—watch—because I was powerless. But, what could I have done back then? Even now, I don't think I could do anything. However, in the future, I may be able to do something. Or, I should say, I need to become a person who can do something. That is how I have come to think about it.

In my opinion, the dog did not kill the boy—it was society who killed him. Perhaps this kind of thing is happening all over the world. There are also more than a few cases where society kills people directly—by wars and other means. Generally speaking, it is money that runs society, but in countries like the Philippines, there is no system established to adequately circulate money within society.

It was because of my father's job that we were living in the Philippines. My father has a job giving technological support to developing countries. He teaches people how to make and sell products locally in order to provide for themselves. Although I respect my father, I am not considering following in his line of work.

I want to take a fresh look at the social system itself, and work to reform it. My dream is to work on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Of course, there are many things I will have to study, and that is why I am going to school now.

It would be no ordinary task to try and make up for the moment when I sat in my air-conditioned classroom and watched the boy dying. Now that I am living in peaceful Japan, I think it is important to tell people about my experience—one that would not likely happen here—and bring up the issue with them.

I don't think I will ever forget that boy for as long as I live. Every time I recall that incident, I feel it grabbing at my heart. I don't know how many years from now it will be, but I hope to visit the Philippines again—this time, to see boys not with lifeless eyes, but with eyes full of hope.

From the Stone to the Heart (Original)

Harun Iseric
(Age 18, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

I am not going to tell you a big story: how I was changed by an earthquake or cuman. My story is simple human, story of the little guy. Indeed, it is difficult to describe someone's life. And much more difficult to describe your own, and what influenced him, changed him. To understand what had motivated me to change, you need to know who I was and what I was before I changed. I was born during the war in Bosnia, in besieged Sarajevo. My grandfather was killed in sniper shot 1995th year. Even in those moments, when I was only two years old, in me hatred was born and developed, hatred which until then I did not feel to the people. A few years later by a landmine my friend Damir was killed, a man with whom I mostly hung out. Then the hate inside of me grew and grew, so that it crossed the boundary which is located in the heart between good and evil, to the detriment of the good. After this happening, I have very rarely communicated with people. I avoided parents, I have seen them only when I had to. I started to close my heart. I rarely left his room. The neighbors, I did not know them. I simply did not love people, and what is worse, I began to hate them. I blamed them for the deaths of people that I at least liked.

One evening while I was returning from school, I saw a man who was lying like a dog on the street. Passing him, he smelled to the alcohol. I just walked past him as I passed near a cemetery. The next morning I was awakened by sirens ambulance. It turns out that the man I had seen the night before suffered a heart attack and died in the early morning hours, which would mean a few hours after I went past him. Every human creature would have felt a feeling of guilt. But I did not feel anything. Indeed it was as if I have a stone instead of the heart. I did not care about the life of God's creatures whose life I could save.

One morning, in August 2005th year, I was woke by cat, who gave birth in the courtyard of my building, and kittens. Frankly I was glad to see how these kittens were trying to struggle to survive everyday life. I did not even think that these kittens will just change my life for ever.

After a few mornings which kittens woke me, suddenly I did not longer heard their voices. I looked out the window and there was something to see. In an attempt to cross a street kitten was hit by a car and killed. Another kitten, his brother, went and began to lick. The kitten began to do what I should to the man that I saw lying on the street. He started licking him, pushing his head. It lasted about an hour, and the whole time I watched it. Unbelievable how his brother was persistent to wake his brother. After the insight that there is no success, he just lay down beside him. At first it seemed that he will lie only for a few moments, but it happened is that he lay down beside him and no longer stood. Brother's heart broke from love to a dead brother. Those few hours I watched the drama, they broke my stone, piece by piece until the heart has not grown. For the first time since ten years I shed a tear. I had already forgotten what it feels like crying. Two kittens, animals, from obelisk had ripped a man. Death of two kittens have motivated me to become better human and to make world around me better place to live. I took kittens and buried them in the courtyard of the building. These two graves will forever remember me who I am, what I am and what I have to be. After that day I have never allowed myself not to smile to neighbors, not to say good day, a girl from the cafe, a boy from the bakery. I met some of my neighbors that I had no idea that they live in my building. Human must turn to the nature of which it was created. Nature provides man what he really needs today: humanity, compassion and peaceful coexistence. A man should live as nature requires. Nature is one that can and must make us better for today, tomorrow, for the life

When Tempers Flare (Original)

Nkachukwu Nnebemchukwu Fredrick
(Age 24, Nigeria)

Bloody riots broke out yet again in the Northern parts of Nigeria which is Muslim predominated. This time the catalyst that lit fire to this inexplicable outburst of pre-existing prejudice was the purported cartooning of Prophet Mohammed in faraway Denmark.

Southerners, majorly Christians were maimed and killed—I'll spare the gory details. This continued unabated, and on the third day a truck brought back 106 bodies to the southern city of Onitsha, most of which had their parts dismembered. Tears flowed freely from all that beheld the regrettable sight, yet no amount of wailing made the dead to stir. Those who hitherto doubted the capacity of the blood bath as being reported by the media were then overly convinced. The youths in Onitsha who felt that the government was doing little to squash the ongoing brutality against Christians, took up clubs and machetes and went hunting for northern Muslims; many of who had anticipated the reprisal attacks and had gone into hiding, but few others who defied common sense and remained on the streets were killed.

My village, Igboukwo, is not too far from Onitsha so by few hours past noon, the reprisals have seeped into it. I was entering my father's compound when I heard voices like sea tides surge towards me. I looked back and saw 6 Northerners running furiously and behind them were irate youths hot on their heels, hurling stones as they pursued. Reaching where I stood, the eldest amongst them—breathing laboriously—said to me in my dialect and with an unwavering accent. "Please don't let us die, please I beg you my son!" Behind them I saw the mob gather pace. Just then a well hurled piece of stone crashed onto the head of one of them; it nudged him dizzily into waiting arms. The sight of warm trickling flow of blood from his bruised skull erased every reservation I had against them. I quickly opened my gate and when they had run in, I padlocked the Iron Gate and threw the key over the tall fence while I stood back braving the approaching mob.

Seeing what I had done, their voices heightened. Then did the import of what I was likely to face dawn on me; I immediately felt like I was going to urinate on my pants. When they had gotten to me, they addressed me in father's name—a respected name in my village. They commanded me to give up those I had given refuge or they'd break down the gate and spill their blood right inside my compound. I swallowed hard but still stood my ground staring into their eyes filled with pain and vengeance. I persuaded them to listen to me so I can talk to them briefly. They agreed to my request, only on the condition that the last decision was theirs to make.

"Our people have a saying that—two persons cannot go mad at the same time, there ought to be one sane enough to help the other regain his lost senses—so my people we can't allow ourselves go mad with violence also.

"Retaliating barbarically on these innocent Muslims that speak our dialect, eat and have lived among us peacefully for so long is utterly senseless and won't lead to a reasonable change up north. My people let us not allow our emotions rule our actions but let us listen to our conscience and think deeply before casting stones." I spoke to them at length until I started seeing contorted faces straighten, clubs and stones dropped on the floor. It was absolutely miraculous.

I ended with these words—"I have no doubt that these ones if spared will endeavor to enlighten their brothers in the north; I believe that they will also repay this gesture in kind, to our own people whenever and wherever they have the opportunity to."

This was how providence used me to kill the nascent reprisal that stretched into my village; not a single northerner was killed. Since then I have gained so much affection from northerners who still reside peacefully in Igboukwo. I'm also favored with free sticks of Sugarcane—a plant largely cultivated in the Northern Nigeria—from my northern friends each time I happen to be in our local Nkwo market. This singular event has greatly inspired me to be an advocate of peaceful co-habitation of people all over the world, irrespective of differences in creed, tribe and tongue. I may not have had the opportunity to instill this into all men but I have started with people I meet daily. There is beauty in diversity.