

# Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



I suspect there really are starving people in the world.

You see a lot of bloated bellies and stick-thin limbs on these folders, and statistics about who's dying where of starvation are bandied about so much they've become trite.

But this is all far, far away and we wouldn't have to think of it at all were it not for some congressmen practicing their rhetorical talents on the relative merits of UNICEF.

They get sort of argumentive after a heavy lunch about food going to those little bloated bellies in Commie dominated countries.

Heavens, I agree.

I've heard that if you mix milk, powdered eggs and quinine just right you get an atomic bomb with real socko.

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Anyway, I've been snooping around for some time for someone whose eyes have actually seen a starving human, and Tuesday I found him.

He is 33-year-old Yousef Al-Katib, a native of Iraq who is now teaching chemistry at Soquel High school.

He's a bright acting, black haired man who seems to run rather than walk, probably a trait ground in him while clawing his way out of the teeming mass of squalor to graduate from the University of Bagdad and pick up a masters degree at the University of Arizona.

In 1954 he was teaching in southern Iraq.

"In the Middle East it is not hard to find hunger," he said, "but even I was not prepared for what I saw in some of the villages.

"In one village I saw no market place and asked an old man where the people bought their meats, fruits and vegetables, and clearly remember the answer. "He said, 'My son, where have you seen such things? Where do you get them'.

"Their food, what there was of it, consisted of rice, dates, tea and sugar.

"I wandered into one hut and saw a mother lying on a mat, too weak to move. Her child was sitting nearby eating dirt.

"Around the village children and old people were moving out like skeletons covered by tin," said Yousef.

He's been in the U.S. about

seven years now and is getting used to the healthy well-fleshed specimens who surround him and come to his classes.

"Sometimes I hope happy people will never have to see what I saw. I think it hurt my happiness for good."

Yousef is inclined to favor the work of UNICEF because he watched a unit in action at the small village of Kumait.

Some of those living skeletons aren't too sharp on politics.

Yousef tells about a Prince Rabeeha in southern Iraq who owned some 50 villages in the late 1940s.

The villagers didn't vote. They couldn't express an opinion. They couldn't read or write. They were never drafted into the country's military service because the prince simply did not register them.

Later, when the government rationed out sugar, these serfs didn't exist as far as it was concerned. But ol' princy didn't let his people down. He imported sugar from India and sold it to them. Smart boy, that Rabeeha; he's going places.

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Quite a land of contrast, Iraq. While teaching in Omarah, he remembers the son of a sheik, dressed in scarves, gloves and sturdy garments sitting in class beside a boy who was barefooted and ragged — with a shirt so torn that he could count his ribs through the holes.

He taught chemistry. After dark there are few lights in the homes. But some students were lucky and lived near street lights.

"With my own eyes I saw chemical equations scrawled on the pavement under a number of street lights. Homework."

Well, at last I've talked to someone who really saw starving people.

It makes me sort of grudgingly admit that we have it kinda good over here and I would really like to help those starving people, in some way.

But being that UNICEF is somewhat controversial, I'm afraid of what my neighbor's might think if I'm caught giving a dollar to those trick or treaters tonight.

I'll help another way. By going on a diet.

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