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Wish You Were Here

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Dear Family:

I wish you were here.

I wish you were here to walk the dusty roads with me, and visit the shacks along the way."

Cover Page Footnote

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Connolly: Wish You Were Here
Wish You Were Here

by
Maryann Connolly

Dear Family:

I wish you were here.

I wish you were here to walk the dusty roads with me, and visit the shacks along the way.

From the road, we recognize the stench of garbage, and as we reach the foot of the hollow, see it scattered throughout the area. Several small children, disheveled and filthy, play in the leftovers. With a basin of rain water, a barefoot, weary mother, aged beyond her years, washes clothes.

I wish you were here to see the nine children who live in three rooms. They shy away as I sit on their porch. Only one tries to smile - an older girl wearing a checked dress at least three sizes too large, and held together with rusty safety pins. Sitting beside me, garbed only in a long T-shirt, a 4-year-old boy urinates on the steps. A blond 2-year-old plays with a hammer in the corner of the porch. Covering his leg is an open wound, obviously days old as the blood is dry and hardened, and the flies flock to the infected area.

I wish you were here to spend an afternoon trying to get an 11-year-old to a doctor. Bobby has cut his foot deeply. He is rapidly losing blood, and needs several stitches. The only doctor in town refuses to look at the injury because the patient has no medical card. I wish you could see the love and concern of the neighbors in their efforts to think of a family who has a phone, or a car to take the child to the hospital (30 miles away). But, most of all, I wish you were here to see the tortured look on the mother's face as she says quietly, "My son cannot have stitches until next week." She looks at the blood-soaked towel and, holding back her tears, tells us she has no money.

I wish you were here to take over one period of recreation to teach these children how to play, realizing you must teach them again tomorrow.

Children who have never played an organized game before.

Children who don't know how to follow rules, or let another have a turn.

Children who quit the game before they dare lose.

Children who are rough, bitter and resentful.

Girls who are tougher than most boys we know, who must be to survive in this atmosphere.

I wish you were here so that you could return home with some concept of what life in Appalachia is like. To return with a new awareness, a new encounter, and so much more - a new sense of gratitude.

To return to thank God every day - or several times a day - for the blessings he has given our family. To thank Him because we have not had to grow up in an atmosphere such as this - one of poverty, filth and ignorance.

I hope before you put this letter away, you can take one moment from your busy lives, and thank God that we have had parents who cared so much for us that they taught us, mostly through example, how to love, how to give, how to care for one another. And pray - yes, pray hard - that we may never take these blessings for granted.

Yes, dear family, for a few weeks, or a few days - O Lord, just for a few short hours - I wish you were here!

Love,
Maryann