**CRUCIFY HIM**

“Forgiveness…..Give it a try, it will change your life”.

When you just begin to know someone, understand him and accept him into your life, you lose him forever, this feeling is extremely shattering . Shankar is one of such faces I just cannot forget. He was one of the 39 boys from the Home for the mentally challenged Street Children.

My first encounter with these children was just too shocking and unbelievable. A mob of 39 young brats I would rather dare to say, completely unruly, aggressive, indisciplined and wild.

The very sight of these boys sent a chill through my spine and made me frightened of the environment I would soon be in. Our school had adopted the inmates of this Home by giving them our venue and teaching services. They would come in the morning and go in the late afternoon.

After a week, when they had apparently settled down, we tried to know them, their names and a little more about their life.

“What’s your name?” I asked a boy sitting close to me.

“Oh he is Shankar, Shankar the thief.” They answered in chorus.

“Why Shankar the thief? Why do you call him so?”

“Teacher, he steals whatever he gets.”

I looked at Shankar. He didn’t say a word. Didn’t even try to defend himself. He looked at me. I saw deep pain and sorrow in his eyes.

I too didn’t say a word , a surge of mixed feelings flooded my mind.

I knew most of them were picked up from railway stations and bus stands, guilty for some offences or the other. But the saddest part was most of them were abandoned by their own parents.

Slowly I tried to make friends with Shankar and win his confidence. He didn’t have very severe intellectual disabilities, he could understand whatever we spoke to him. He was extremely good in painting. I was really amazed . He always selected the right colours, the right shades for his paintings. The mountains and the rivers, the birds and the butterflies, the blossoms in full bloom, the rainy skies, and a bright rainbow across it. He always loved to draw a rainbow in a rainy sky. And I wondered why... Could I ever be a rainbow in his stormy sky?

“Shankar do you have parents?” I asked him one day. “How did you land up in the home for street children?”

“ My father abandoned me on the railway station, and the police brought me here.” He was honest enough to speak the truth. One day his father boarded the train from Old Delhi, when they reached Vadodara, his father made him sit on a bench on the platform and went to fetch tea for them, but he never came back, he had boarded the same train and left Shankar on the bench with a world totally hostile to him. He survived two, three days begging and pleading to reach him home. But no one ever bothered. The police had finally handed him over to the Home for street children.

Slowly , slowly I heard his whole story, a harrowing tale of sorrow and anguish. I don’t think I have ever heard a story more heart rending than this. Now I understood why he longed for rainbows.

He continued with his stealing habits whenever he had a chance now and then. His latest urge was the cellphones. Several times he tried to pocket even our mobiles whenever they were left unattended.

He was slowly trying to mend his ways, but he struggled hard to get off the tag ‘Shankar the thief’. Most of us are so often prompt to judge people, condemn them and even crucify them before knowing their real story. ‘Don’t judge people for the choices they make when you don’t know the options they had to choose from ,”someone has very rightly said this.

“Shankar ,I said to him one day.” I want you to be a good boy. Do not steal anything, ask us , we will give you.”

He looked at me, nodded and smiled.. He promised us he would never steal again. I surely knew, one fine day Shankar would be called only Shankar without his humiliating tag.

Just a week before we wound up for the summer holidays the students gave me the most devastating news. ”Teacher, Shankar died last night.”

“What Shankar died !” I was just too shocked for words. They were street children . They did not learn how to use a subtle word for death.

"Yes teacher, Shankar had an asthma attack last night, our Sir had called the ambulance, but he died before he reached the hospital."

I just couldn’t forget his face, his deep sad eyes, his faint innocent smile and his amazing rainbows.

I thanked God, He had given me His grace to forgive Shankar or I would have never forgiven myself.

Shankar had died a natural death due to illness, but the world around him had already crucified him long , long ago.

**Curie Pereira**