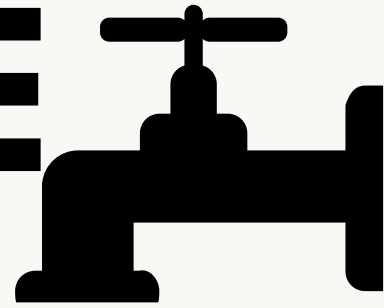


**THE BIG
BLUE
BUCKE**



By: Nitya - Washington State

I hustle down to the end of our community with my big blue bucket, nearing a halt as hundreds of villagers tower over me. Hundreds of huts surround us as we wait in line for our turn. One by one, we make our way closer to what feels like a dream. People begin getting anxious and full of thirst and they start shoving past others to make it to the front of the line. I tighten my grip on my big blue bucket and stand straight and broaden my shoulders – something my mother taught me just a few months ago when I began doing these chores and had all these responsibilities. As I reached the front of the line, I began to loosen my grip on my big blue bucket and got ready to place it on the ground right below the pump.

I reached my hand for the water pump as I placed my big blue bucket beneath it. I pumped until my bucket was full of water and my arms were so tired that I could barely lift my big blue bucket and walk back home without falling. But I had to, and I had no choice. I had to for my father who would work day and night in the farms, plucking weeds and planting crops.

I had to for my mother who would cook for all of us and take care of my brother and me. I had to for my brother who was paralyzed. I had to for my grandma who works so hard to make sure that my brother is fine and doing well. I had to for my family – my family that would do anything for me. I had to do something for them. With that thought in my mind, I continued to walk up the hill to my home.

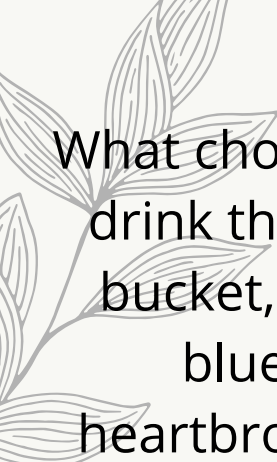
It didn't take long until I got home, but it truly felt like forever to my 14-year-old self who had to walk about half a mile, including up hills with my big blue bucket. I opened the door and pushed the bucket into my home. I ran to my brother's bedroom and sat down, right next to his bed.

His eyes were closed. I heard a sudden gasp and my brother began coughing. I looked around the room and was able to spot a steel cup. I grabbed the cup and went to the front door where I had left the bucket of water. I dunked the steel cup in the bucket, filling it with water. I ran back to the bedroom and helped him sit up. His limp, paralyzed body falling on the pillow that I had placed behind his back.

I poured the water into his mouth, and he gulped down every last drop. There was a sudden sound at the front of the house. I ran to the door and noticed that my father came home.

He gave me a big hug and began crying. He placed a finger in front of his mouth, signaling me to not make a single noise as he handed me a packet.

I read off the first line of the first page, it read "Medical Test Results" – my brother's test results. My eyes darted towards my dad. He nodded with tears still dripping down his cheeks. My eyes perused the text, tears showering down my cheeks once I had found out that my brother won't be with us for too long. I reached the last page and found out that the reason for my brother's fate was due to polio because he had drunk unclean water. My family and I drink this water every day. This same old unclean water that I've been drinking for my entire life. This water that is in the big blue bucket. This big blue bucket that I would carry down the hill, filling it up with unclean water, and bring back up the hill, back home every day.



What choice do we have? What choice other than having to drink that unclean water from that bucket? This big blue bucket, for the first time in my entire life, made me feel blue and dreadful. It made me feel horrified and heartbroken that others out there might be experiencing something similar to this because of lack of access to safe and clean water.

This world is a monster for many like me and my family. However, this monster is truly hidden beneath a blanket as many don't have to go through this and don't experience these hardships. This monster is only visible as a shadow as no one truly understands. No one knows how it feels to lose a brother because of the big blue bucket and the water that is in it.



Thank you

