

# A toothbrush feeds



story involving the ultimate symbol of Dentistry changed my life and the way I face the world: a simple toothbrush.

In 2015, I was in search of volunteer work out of Brazil, more exactly while traveling in the African continent. In my searches of the infinite world of the Internet, I learned about an NGO called Mission Africa, where today I am the person in charge of Dentistry. Well, let us go back to October 2015, my first traveling day, and my first moment with the children in Mozambique, a “Mzungu” among them. We were in a circle talking about hygiene and I asked those 50 children:

– Who here has a toothbrush?

Only three kids raised their hands.

Another question:

– And how do you brush your teeth?

Observing the kids’ reactions, I experienced my first “moral blow”.

– With a finger and dirt.

I felt very stupid. Meaning is lost and you feel useless in front of 4-to-10-year-olds.

Thirty minutes later, a child came up to me:

– Mister, I did not get one, I did not get a toothbrush.

For some moments, I was wondering if I had indeed given him a toothbrush, but soon the other children around said:

– He did get one, mister, he’s asking for it again.

– You already got one, you cannot lie to me, lying is wrong.

I was there trying to lecture a boy that might have been about 9

years old... Who are we to question anything in the midst of so much misery?

As I called him to a corner, the other children started saying:

– He sold it, mister, he sold it.

– You cannot sell what I have given you.

– I did not sell it.

– You sold it; you cannot lie, it is wrong. I’m not going to give you another one.

The child started crying.

– I sold it, mister.

– Why did you do it?

– Because my little sister has not had anything to eat for two days, and I exchanged it for some fruit.

Silence.

An abyss opened up in my mind. For a moment, I questioned God’s existence, questioned my own heart, questioned Humanity. Today I know something for sure: it’s not God’s fault, it is OUR fault! There is no lack of bread, no lack of anything; what we lack is people to share. Differently from math, if we divide and add smiles, we end up multiplying them.



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