

Alex Morrison

Tears

When going through times of trial or sadness I often find myself repeating the mantra “I will not cry” or “I will not let them see me cry” in hopes that my emotional control is simply a mind over matter situation. This mentality draws a direct connection to the time I spent in Ghana - children there were taught to never cry or, really, not to show much emotion at all. The “children are meant to be seen and not heard” mentality is strong and children are constantly reminded of it. In my school I would see teachers take pencils and hit children over the head for misbehaving in class and that was their only punishment but when children would cry - even for a justified reason - they were spanked and thrown out of the class. There is no tolerance for such an emotional outburst. In the United States we tell children it is ok to cry, we assure boys they are just as validated in crying as girls, and we comfort them in their distress even if the reason is trivial. Crying in public, in my mind at this point in my life, is to show weakness and vulnerability and while I know my society is accepting of it to some degree I still repeat “I will not cry” over and over keeping my emotions a secret. This repetitive action is reminiscent to the old punishment of having children write their wrongdoings multiple times on a sheet of paper; as if that would somehow make them a model student afterwards. I think everyday about a boy in I worked closely with in Ghana who hardly ever spoke, his name was PK. His mother came to me as I was working one on one with him daily and told me his story, PK’s father had recently passed away and he was suffering from a persistent spinal injury that left him in severe pain at most times of the day. I thought about him and his stoic mannerisms and could almost imagine him repeating to himself “I will not cry, I will not cry” when truly he had every right and need to. It was no wonder why he was having trouble in school but trying to explain that to my co-teachers was nearly impossible - they all believed he would either rise up to the occasion or fail and there was no need for sympathy.