

Hunger gnaws at conscience

I have never known hunger. I can't imagine the type of hunger that persists day after day, week after week, gnawing away a person's humanity until it first makes him an animal, then leaves him dead.

Real hunger is foreign to me now and will remain so. Starvation is not a part of the middle American experience. No matter how the rest of the world fares in its quest for enough food during the coming decade, malnutrition will not replace obesity as a major health problem in America.

The rest of the world is faring badly. More than a million people in the Indian subcontinent probably will die before the spring harvest. The famine in sub-Saharan Africa is worse—perhaps the worst in human history.

While people starve the world over, Americans spend millions of dollars to join weight-watchers clubs to help them trim the fat they put on by overeating.

We feed our dogs better than the Indian government is able to feed many of its people. India is 12 million tons short of food self-sufficiency this year. It has been able to buy or borrow less than half of its needs.

Morris the cat earns \$10,000 a year making cat-food commercials. The average income in India is about \$80 a year.

We can play with statistics all we want. Most people are aware of the problem, if not the numbers. Juggling zeros at the end of death counts and comparing percentages may be good for shock value, but it does nothing for solving the problem.

The problem is in the way Americans look at themselves. We think of ourselves as a chosen people, the center of civilization,

the saviors of the world.

Reality is much uglier. We are a major part of the food problem. A recent government report concluded there is no actual worldwide food shortage. It blamed hunger abroad on artificial price structures, subsidies, mismanagement, political decisions and "cheap food" policies on the part of rich nations.

That is on the governmental level. On the individual level Americans are gluttons. Our nutritional intake far exceeds our needs. We eat inefficiently (it takes ten pounds of plant protein to produce one pound of beef) and wastefully (we throw away nine per cent of the food we buy).

I sat in on a meeting of the UNL Student Task Force on Hunger Sunday. Hazel Fox, chairman of the Department of Food and Nutrition, was there.

"We have no protein problem," she said about American eating habits. "We are so overdosed with protein—that's not our problem. We would have no trouble getting along without meat—not as long as we have milk and eggs. A loaf of bread will give you all the protein you need."

"Most of our health problems in this country are related to over-nutrition. We would be doing ourselves a favor by eating less. We would be healthier; we would live longer."

"For the world to survive it will happen no other way than for us to lower our living standards—not only in food but other resources," Fox said. "This sounds so easy, but it's so hard—to get people to change their food habits. We don't have the surpluses anymore and, if we give (food to other countries) now, it will have to come out of our hides."

The food problem will be solved one way or another. We can take preventive measures to bring world population down and food supply up, such as self-sacrifice at the dinner table and voluntary birth control.

The alternative is death control, imposed without our consent. The famine is one aspect of death control already begun. Another is disease. The famine probably won't come to America. Disease may, but it could be controlled.

The United States would be touched directly by a global food war, another solution to overpopulation. The underfed nations can be expected to go only so long before they turn against the overfed and demand food. India has nuclear weapons and other countries can get them.

When the food war comes, we will be the bad guys. We must fight world hunger now, before we have to fight the world's hungry.

This is easy to say but hard to do. The answer lies in both individual and political action.

The UNL Student Task Force on World Hunger may help. It is a new campus organization consisting of people who want to act rather than despair. They have some good ideas about what individuals can do.

The world hunger group is sponsoring a scaled-down local version of the United Nation World Food Conference in Rome this week. The UNL conference will be in the Nebraska Union Main Lounge Nov. 12 at 7:30 p.m.

The group will meet today at 8 p.m. at the campus Lutheran Student Center, 535 N. 16th St. It welcomes anyone who wants to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution.

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