

Trembling from the cold as well as circumstance, I attempted to describe the scene to an emergency operator on the other end. As I did, details came into focus; her matted hair, her dirt-stained cheeks. She was wearing tattered white pedal-pushers and a pair of slip-on Vans tennis shoes. No socks, no purse, no coat. No jewelry but for a blue plastic watch on one wrist and several black plastic tube bracelets on the other. She looked like one of those skinny kids you see sleeping under freeway overpasses, the kind of kid you could imagine shoplifting at a 99¢ Store.

I tugged at my beret, tightened my wool scarf, and buried both hands in the deep, warm pockets of my army surplus coat. She must've been cold, really cold.

I could hear a siren in the distance. We waited in silence for it to arrive. Nine days later, she was more real to me than when we'd met. For nine days, there had been two voices pounding in my head, one mine, one hers. It didn't matter which one I listened to. The question was the same. Why?