

More Than the Wound

Category: Guts

written by Suleiman Mohiuddin | April 25, 2026

His naked, dirt-caked foot draws closer, each step accompanied by strained, raspy breathing. He's missing a shoe, and his ragged clothes offer little to no protection from the elements. His face is gaunt and hollow, his cheeks hardened by the passage of years.

His eyes appear drawn to our black van, painted with bold red lettering: Chi-Care, Serving Humanity on Our Streets. Onboard the van, among other volunteers, I watch him approaching.

The rat-infested underpass the van is parked in reeks of mold and rot and is littered with makeshift tents. As he comes closer, his eyes remain downcast.

"Water," he croaks.

I hand him a warm meal and a water bottle as I step out of the van to meet him at eye level. He cracks open the bottle and takes a long gulp. I think back to my first time volunteering, when I hesitated to even touch a homeless person's hand, secretly fearing I would catch some disease. That hesitation is gone now. Instead, my fear is something harder to face—what he is living through.

Then, without warning, he lifts his shirt.

Nothing could have prepared me for the infected gunshot wound in the center of his stomach, oozing pus, a bullet still lodged within it. Its sickening smell hits me instantly and is strong enough to trigger my gag reflex. He looks to me—urgently, directly—for help.

The supervising Chi-Care staff member shakes his head sadly. "We don't have what you need. You'll have to go to a hospital."

The man's eyes widen, yet not out of relief. Instead he looks afraid.

He shakes his head and mutters that he cannot afford treatment. He is adamant that he will not go.

In that moment, my stomach churns: *A man with a gunshot injury is more afraid of treatment than of pain.*

Up until then, I had believed that if help existed, people would take it. *Why would there be a reason not to?* Standing in that underpass, I realized how incomplete that belief was. We had help to offer—including food, water, and even a referral to a hospital. Still, none of it was enough.

Long after our van drove off, his fear stayed with me more than his wound itself.

*Suleiman Mohiuddin
Glenview, Illinois*