

A Single Drop of Water

by Robert Freeman



A story of how a high school
teacher and his students
set out to change the world,
with a dollar

“Even the greatest waterfall starts
with a single drop of water.”

~ African Bantu Saying

Chapter Eight—Student Heroes

Diana Chou



Diana Chou just graduated from Stanford University with a dual major in Economics and Computer Science. She was Vice President of Stanford Women in Business. Diana is past student president of ODFL and was the organizer of ODFL's 2010 Hand Up for Haiti campaign. She has travelled to Nicaragua and Kenya to help build ODFL-funded schools. While in high school she won first place in singles tennis in the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League. In her spare time, Diana enjoys dancing, tennis, mui thai, and reading. Her personal goal is to be successful without having to "sell out."

Everybody has that one date they can never forget. For one generation, it's the day president Kennedy was shot. For others, it's 9/11. For me, it's January 12, 2010. You couldn't be alive that day and not know that an apocalyptic earthquake had hit the island of Haiti. I saw the pictures of devastation and almost couldn't comprehend it. How could 300,000 people have a home one minute and not have one the next? Most of all, I remember that I wanted to help.

With the help of ODFL, I started a campaign called "Hand Up For Haiti". The first step was drafting a letter. I wrote an appeal to student leaders asking them to join me in a fundraising effort that could save thousands of lives. I wrote and rewrote that letter probably a dozen times. I sent it to over 300 student leaders in schools all over northern California. I signed every single one. I wanted every recipient to understand that I was making an individual appeal from one American high school student to another. The message, I hoped, was clear: If we put in the effort, we can and we *will* save thousands of lives. But I need your help.

I had never so badly wanted a response to a letter before. Not when I wrote to my college-bound boyfriend discussing a break up of our long distance relationship. Not even when I had to wait to hear back from the head of a department where I hoped to get my first job. The events in my past that once seemed life-changing suddenly seemed trivial. The reason might come as a little bit of a surprise.

The truth was I had spoken to some of my peers about ODFL and been severely disappointed. It's easy to become a skeptic when everyone around you only seems concerned with their iPhones and new Coach bags. In one presentation, I asked a

person to give up one cookie in a year to help unite the efforts of high school students all over the country. He told me “no” straight to my face. When I asked why, he said, “Well, it may be one cookie. But it’s my damn cookie!”

I admit, I was probably naïve, but I was shocked. It’s one thing to make an excuse or pretend you don’t have the dollar. It’s another thing to say straight out that you could care less about anybody but yourself.

I knew not everyone in the world was altruistic. But I wanted to believe everyone *could* be. A successful Haiti campaign would be proof of this. With the right inspiration even that selfish person might realize that the cookie is worth more to him when he gives it away. That’s why I wanted – no, needed — so badly to hear back about my letter.



The Haiti campaign logo

I didn’t get a response for most of the 300 letters I’d sent out. But I did hear back from 28 of them. And that was already too incredible for me to believe. Within weeks, 21 high schools under the leadership of 21 students just like me raised over \$20,000. I was in awe of it all! With the help of the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund, we saw to it that every single dollar went into direct relief, on the ground, in Haiti. We bought medical supplies, electric generators, tents, tarps, cooking equipment, water purification equipment, and more.

Something that had started as a simple impulse to help had gathered enough momentum to really make an impact. I knew then that the Hand Up For Haiti campaign would be one of the most important things I would ever do. I also knew it was just the beginning.

I was just a 17 year old girl but I knew I had made a meaningful difference in the world. I had found and inspired 21 kindred spirits, students just like me who both cared and were willing to do something about it. And those 21 people went on and gave twenty *thousand* other high school students the opportunity to act as well.

That was what made the Haiti campaign really special. It was proof that even in the midst of all of our teenage fixations we, high school students, *can* make a difference.

There's a quote from Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, that resonates very strongly with me and the spirit of ODFL:

“The planet does not need more ‘successful people.’ The planet needs more peacemakers, healers, storytellers, and lovers of all kinds. It needs people with moral courage willing to join the struggle to make the world habitable and humane and these qualities have little to do with ‘success’ as our culture defines it.”
