

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 Eleven—Teacher Heroes

Lisa Cardellini, Los Altos, CA



Lisa Bolton Cardellini lives in San Francisco and served as ODFL's Director of Delivery Services for five years. She caught the travel bug in college and so was thrilled to plan and lead ODFL summer service trips to Kenya, Nicaragua, and Nepal. Lisa stepped down from the director position to pursue her national board certification in teaching, but remains active as the ODFL club advisor at Los Altos High School. Lisa grew up in Southern California but moved to San Francisco for all the wonderful opportunities available to science teachers in Silicon Valley. When not leading ODFL trips, Lisa spends her summers interning at local biotechnology firms.

"How in the world did I get here?" So, I thought, while I sat at a dinner party with an incredible mix of people, so proud to be included in such distinguished company, but feeling so far out of my depth.

To my left was Robert Freeman. When he speaks, you cannot help but listen, eager to learn how you, too, can make a difference in the world. To my right was Roma Hammel, a passionate co-worker with a Ph.D. from Stanford, and our hostess for the evening. She is such a gentle, brilliant, enlightened soul. Finally, across the table were Bijay and Anjali, two Silicon Valley professionals working to raise funds to help address poverty in their native Nepal.

Roma had brought us together to discuss raising money for a school outside of Kathmandu...and that's exactly what we accomplished in 2008.

As I drove home that evening, I thought about the turn of events that had brought me here. It all started in 2006 when Margaret Lewis, ODFL's first student member, came to me and asked, "What do you think about asking every kid at this school to donate a dollar so that we can build a school in Kenya?" She had gotten the idea from Robert, and I thought that was great!

Later came the tough question, "How would you like to lead a student trip to Kenya so that we can go help with the construction?" My eyes bulged. I had never been to Africa, I didn't know anything about construction, and I certainly didn't have the time to take on a task like that. I was writing a new curriculum to teach forensic science and had just begun working on my national board certification.

But this was Margaret Lewis, and I couldn't tell her no. She's the kid who brought me a CD of her playing the guitar and singing about my biology class. The kid who made me a silly "how-to" video to show to my future classes when I assign the insect project, just because she thought the kids might appreciate a little extra help. If you're a teacher, you'll understand what I mean; that this young lady is one in a million. Margaret inspires me on a daily basis so if she wanted me to do it, I would. I put my national boards on hold and dove into that first school project in Kenya.



It didn't take long for me to realize that ODFL was going to be big. The idea of empowering teenagers to truly make a difference in the world was the noblest of causes, and I was so honored that Robert and Margaret had asked me to be a part of it. In 2007 we had recruited a handful of students at my high school to run the fundraising drive and we did it! We asked each student in the school to give just one dollar and between our school and four others, we raised enough money to fund a classroom in Kenya. This was more exciting than I could have imagined, but what I didn't expect was the growth in the students.

For example, in our group of recruits for that first trip was a young man who had a troubled start in high school. He was struggling to maintain his grades and was partying pretty hard. Initially, I was dubious about whether he was a good fit for what we were doing. He was a sweet kid. He just didn't have his priorities in order. Little did I know that through ODFL he would transform into a compassionate, caring, young man who became one of our greatest advocates. Traveling to Kenya on our inaugural trip completed his metamorphosis.

He returned as a senior, committed to do well in school and act responsibly, reaching out to other students who were making the same mistakes he once did. I could not be more proud of him.

Six years later I still advise the ODFL club on campus. I feel so fortunate to have a hand in an organization that helps young people realize their potential and become bigger people. At one lunch meeting, I asked the kids what we should say to students at other schools to encourage them to start a club of their own. One young lady proclaimed, "I feel like this is the only club on campus that actually DOES something." A murmur of agreement spread across the room inspiring another to share, "It's so awesome to see our dollars at work. We get those photos back from the construction site and I'm like 'I did that!' " Another chimed in, "Yeah, and it's so easy!"

Kids show up in hoards to our meetings now. *They* plan drives for clothing, school supplies, shoes, LEGOs, and sporting equipment. *They* have embraced the idea that they

are not impotent, but effective. And they are, more than any students I have ever seen. It's magnificent.

This may seem like a lot for one teacher to take on. Between lesson planning, grades, staff meetings, and creating a safe classroom community, we are overburdened. The thought of any additional responsibilities is daunting, but the beauty of ODFL is that it is *so easy*. For each of our drives, we meet once a week for 3 weeks to do the planning. Then with everything in place, we collect the money for one week. The whole campus gets into it. Can you imagine any other opportunity where such little work yields such momentous results?

Finally, ODFL gives me with the opportunity to get to know my students on a much deeper level. During class, I am pressed for time to cover the state standards and we have few opportunities to open up and discuss who we really are. The connections I make with these teens makes my job so much more rewarding. It's hard to say goodbye to the seniors who've been active in ODFL, but I cherish every email and Facebook message from graduates telling how ODFL has changed their life.

One student decided to study abroad in Egypt, another pursued a career in documentary film, one joined the Peace Corps, and another changed her major from communication to international business. ODFL has opened kids' eyes, showing them that the world is smaller than most think, and what they gain is immeasurable. I am so thankful for the life-changing opportunities ODFL has given me and my students.