

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

London Klauer, Portland, OR



I had no experience, I was not given a grant, I had no obligation to anyone. But I had a dream.

I never realized the impact community service could have. I understood that service hours were great for college applications, although I figured it was hard, unrewarding work. But after hearing Robert Freeman’s keynote speech in Seattle, I promised myself I would change the world in any way I could.

I bolted out of the auditorium to call my mother. Through the heavy, excited breaths I explained to her how I had just become so inspired to make a difference. I suddenly realized that even in a world of 7 billion people it was possible to make a difference. And I told her I was going to do just that.

The adrenaline was still pumping when I got back to my home town, Portland, Oregon. My excitement showed through in every conversation I had regarding ODFL. Finally feeling influential for the first time ever, I made a short speech to my school’s Key Club about ODFL, its values and purpose. We especially liked that it was about empowering teenagers—us.

We quickly began a fundraiser to help build a classroom in Nicaragua. We followed each step in the ODFL toolkit. I visited every classroom I could and gave my short speech telling every student that they could make a big difference by coming together.

Going into each classroom as a freshman was intimidating, but the passion I felt was stronger. As every 15 year-old does, I made mistakes, many mistakes, but I learned from them. At the end of it all, we had raised \$700. I felt proud that I had made it possible for 700 teenagers to make a difference in the world.

The next year, I did things a little differently. ODFL had developed a toolkit for the Kiwanis Eliminate project and asked if we would pilot it. This time I delegated more tasks to others, both to help relieve me but also to ensure that many others were involved as well. I learned that teenagers enjoy being recognized for their good deeds. With a friend and Mr. Freeman, we hatched the idea to give Eliminate stickers to those who donated. It was a big hit!

The Eliminate sticker was a conversation starter to spread awareness of the cause—eliminating maternal and neo-natal tetanus from the world. Watching the school embrace this cause was so thrilling. After weeks of hard work, we had raised \$1,000! The feeling was amazing! In the process, we set a record for funds raised per Key Club member! Everyone in our club was ecstatic.

Feeling enthusiastic and empowered I felt that I could still do more! I contacted Cathy Dwulet of ODFL to talk about going on a summer trip to help construct one of the schools I had heard so much about. I signed up to participate in the Nicaragua summer trip, where I would travel with other teenagers to serve in the community, help build the school structure, and enjoy time with the local residents.



The trip helped me realize how many things I take for granted. I also realized that I can have a very large impact on the lives of others. I knew that most of my fellow trip mates would go home and tell their families of the friendly people, wonderful food, cute monkeys, and hard work. I did that, too, but I also held a small presentation for my family, friends, and Key Clubbers. I made a slide show of my experience, hoping to pass my enthusiasm and new awareness on to others.

I am now a junior in high school. I feel that community service work is the most enjoyable and rewarding use of my time. My goal as this year's Key Club president is to inspire other teens to embrace service work. When we start to complain less and give more our lives will become more enjoyable, purposeful and rewarding in every respect.

I plan to hold another school wide fundraiser for ODFL. My goal is to raise \$1,200 to help build pre-schools in South Africa. I have more support from my school's faculty and peers than ever before. The school is already buzzing with excitement and I am always excited to hear other students talking about "ODFL season coming!"

ODFL has taught me more than any classroom or teacher ever will. I have learned that it *is* possible to make a difference in our world. My views of my community and the less fortunate have been completely altered. We have so much and it takes so little to make a really big difference. Most importantly, I have learned to never limit myself.

I am not paid a dime for any of the work I put into fundraisers, events, and service travel, but influencing others to help toward global embetterment is the best reward I can imagine. I hope other teenagers take up whatever cause inspires them so that they, too, can experience this kind of excitement.