

Sheila Morris

English 101

Professor Shannon

22 November 2010

### Donations from the Heart

Sitting in the audience of a fundraising lecture by Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, I realized my own small town had a local, home-grown heroine just like him. In that same realization, I knew her non-profit organization, Africa Unveiled, needed my support more than Greg Mortenson needed my support. That night, my tiny village donated \$32,000 to Greg Mortenson and the Central Asia Institute he founded. Two of us in the audience donated additionally to Africa Unveiled, and we both accepted a standing invitation to join its board of directors.

Sharing personal resources through donations to grassroots organizations creates sizeable impacts worldwide. I don't donate much, but my few dollars help make a huge difference to the education of fifteen orphaned children and therefore, an entire community in Kenya. On the flip side, many wonder how the daunting problems we see on the daily news can be influenced by our small contributions across the world.

One adolescent boy in Atlanta was appalled to learn that 27,000,000 people are still enslaved today around the world, mostly women and children in sex trafficking. He began a small fundraiser called Loose Change to Loosen Chains (LC2LC). In the first year he raised \$8,500. Now in high school, he travels the country organizing other LC2LC groups and has written a book for teenage philanthropists, *Be the Change: Your Guide to Ending Slavery and Changing*

*the World* (Kristoff and WuDunn 54). Starting from loose change, and at the grassroots level, this young person has created a national organization dedicated to a worldwide cause.

African Cuisine: 48 Hours of Hunger is a weekend project created by Africa Unveiled to raise funds for education of AIDS-affected orphans in Kenya. At our first weekend attempt, twenty-five students in Leavenworth raised enough money to build a house for a family of twelve and dug a well for income. Now one adult has housing for her orphaned nieces and nephews, a well that generates income, and provides the only water source in a seven-mile radius. These students learned a powerful lesson about small donations making an enormous difference improving lives. African Cuisine has become an enthusiastically supported annual event where local students learn to share resources across the world (Africa).

Americans are known worldwide for our generosity, especially in times of national adversity. We take pride in stories of dropping care packages at the end of World War II, the outpouring of aid after Hurricane Katrina, and fundraising via text messaging after the Haitian earthquake. All this relief aid comes from the personal pockets of Americans, mostly in small amounts. The Index of Global Philanthropy claims the largest private support of health care for disadvantaged nations is probably from U.S. religious organizations, who donate \$5.4 billion annually (Kristoff and WuDunn 144). In addition, countless church members pay their own way around the world to volunteer in fighting poverty and AIDS, or providing health care, construction, and education. These efforts all start within individual churches with small contributions one member at a time.

The first printing of *Three Cups of Tea* was subtitled “One Man’s Efforts to Reduce Terrorism Through Education,” which was chosen by the editors in order to appeal to the average American reader in the years following 9/11. Mortenson’s single-minded education

campaign has proven so successful that counterterrorism agencies in the U.S. have become increasingly interested in grassroots projects. Because of him, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have put girls' education in Pakistan and Afghanistan on their agenda. Another organization, Averting Maternal Death and Disability, has sparked study sessions in the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. In other words, our government agencies are turning to grassroots organizations to study the lessons learned in order to disempower terrorists (Kristoff and WuDunn xxi). Mortenson has applied the African proverb of "educate a boy and you have educated an individual, educate a girl and you educate a village" (qtd. in Mortenson). The return on investment in girls' education shows improved economic benefits, smaller family size, decreased infant and maternal mortality rates, reduced domestic violence, healthier children, and women's empowerment (Ronnow 34). These are powerful outcomes from individuals donating small amounts to various grassroots organizations.

Given the attributes of such phenomenal success stories from donations to small organizations, why do people hold back from personal contributions? Many times we don't see the outcome of our donations, especially if they are sent to the other side of the world. Sometimes our gifts do not have immediate effects such as conservation of lands for future generations. People are also concerned that their donations are actually trickled away by administrative and overhead costs. In some large relief agencies, it may be true that only pennies of a dollar donation actually go to relief aid. However, in times of natural disaster, those same large agencies are the ones set up to act immediately, so our small donations pool resources for direct relief. To safeguard against fraud, the misuse of donations, and ensure our contributions actually benefit the intended recipient, the U.S. government has codified specific laws so the major percentage of donations are actually sent to the beneficiary (501(c)3 regulations).

For me, the most defining reason I hold back is the overwhelming decision of where to donate. I want to address local issues as well as expand out into the world. I have found my own personal methodology of spending my time, my money, and recycling. Within my community I volunteer my time in the school system and donate my professional massage services to fundraising events. My family has handpicked the Women's Resource Center for recycling unwanted household items or clothing. The Seattle Times Fund for the Needy has its overhead costs contributed by the newspaper, so my complete donation supports families who are sidelined by the current economy. To support the education and living expenses of one beneficiary of Africa Unveiled costs \$250 per year; in my mind that's simply a latte a week. When I feel compelled to make a difference on a global scale, I go online to Globalgiving.org, one of my favorite philanthropic websites. It offers choices by location or need, all administrative costs are covered by various businesses and foundations, and it gives transparent accountability.

In a commencement speech given at the University of Portland by Paul Hawken, author of *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming*, he called the abolition of slavery the first global movement to defend the rights of strangers rather than filing grievances for the self-interest of a group, and it united both liberals and conservatives in a common objective. Hawken said, "For the first time in history a group of people organized themselves to help people they would never know, from whom they would never receive direct or indirect benefit." Since then, tens of millions of people have organized themselves into one to two million groups who place social and environmental justice at the top of their strategic goals. The scope and scale of this effort is unparalleled in history

(Hawken). I encourage all of us prosperous Americans to follow the model of Dr. Owen Geiger,  
*"If everyone makes a difference, the world will be different."*

Works Cited

“Accountability.” [globalgiving.org/Partners](http://globalgiving.org/Partners). Web. 22 November 2010.

Africa Unveiled. Web.

Geiger Research Institute of Sustainable Building. Web.

Hawken, Paul. “Healing or Stealing.” University of Portland. Commencement speech. June 2009. Web.

Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. Print.

Mortenson, Greg. *Three Cups of Tea*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2006. Print.

Ronnow, Karin. “Educate Girls, Change the World.” *Journey of Hope*, vol. iii (2009): 32-34. Print.