



Real Kids

Real Stories



Real Change



Courageous Actions Around the World

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Garth Sundem
Foreword by **Bethany Hamilton**

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Thanks to my family for carting me around the world as a child and helping me understand that while cultures differ, heroes are universal. Thanks also to Ms. Pikiewicz's sixth-grade classes in Bozeman, Montana, for their enthusiasm and insightful comments – keep writing!



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Foreword

It's still a little weird to think of myself as a hero. After losing my left arm to a tiger shark on Halloween morning of 2003, I just kept living my life the best way I knew how. Sure, I tried to be brave, and sure, it was hard to get back in the water, but what choice did I have—it wasn't like I was never gonna surf again!

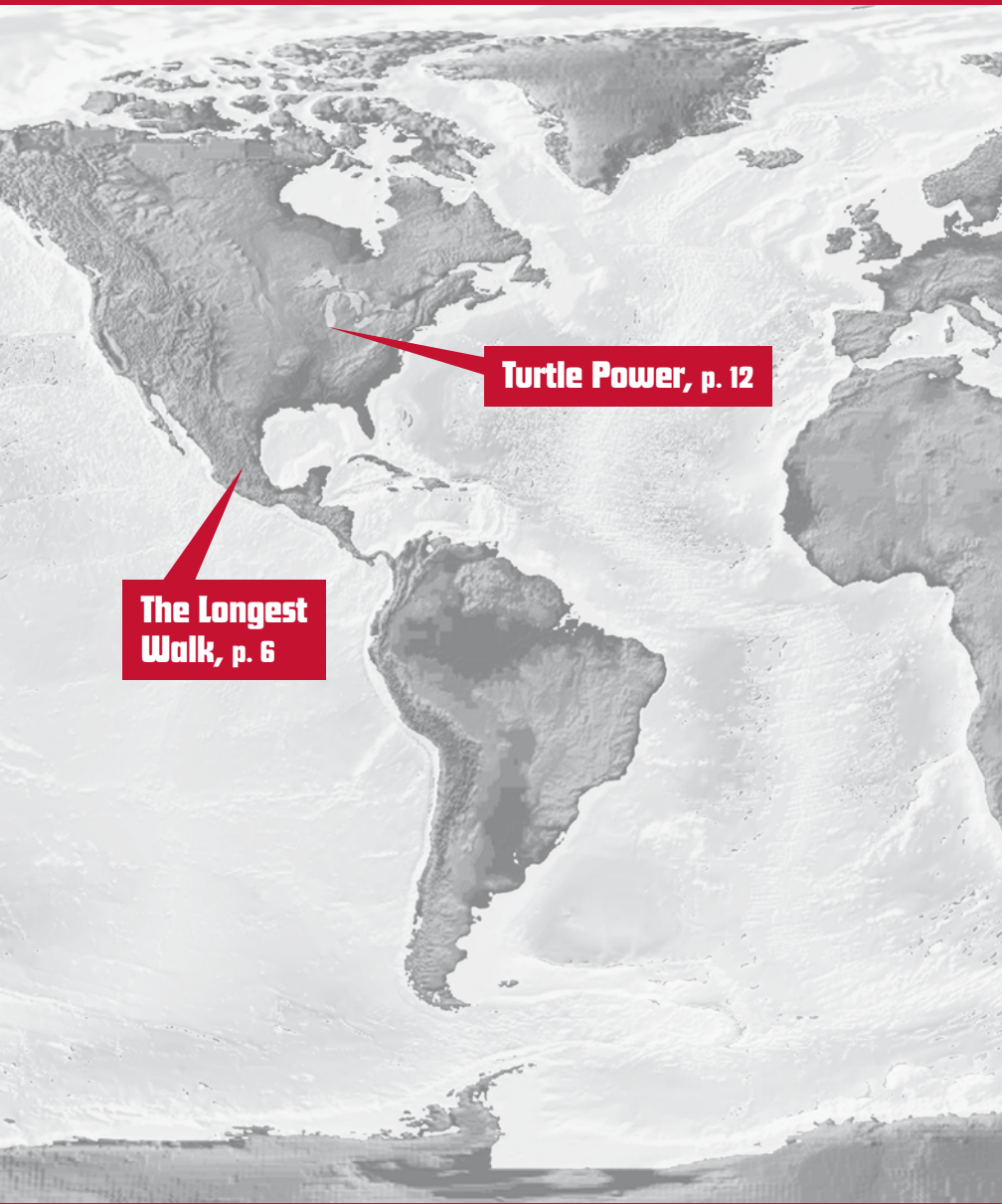
And as I read this book, I see 30 other young heroes who did the same thing. They're not crazy comic book characters born on some alien superhero planet or anything. These are kids, just like you and just like me, who faced a challenge head-on and chose to do something amazing—something we can all look at and be proud of.

In this book, you'll find kids who went looking for their challenges and others whose challenges found them (mine was a tiger shark—yikes!). And you'll see that not all heroes are six-foot-four muscle men in capes and funny suits. Heroes come in all sizes and all colors, and they live in every corner of the globe. I guess it doesn't matter who you are or even what your test is—it's what you do that matters. Do you let your challenge stop you, or do you use your courage, your creativity, your mind, and your heart to rise above?

So, am I a hero? Are any of the young people in this book heroes? Well, that's for you to decide! But I think we are all heroes—me, the other kids you'll read about, and *even you*—only, you might not know it yet!

— BETHANY HAMILTON

Kids Saving the Environment



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The Doggy Dung Disaster

HARUKA MARUNO

Would you believe that a 12-year-old Japanese girl was named one of nine “Heroes for the Planet” by *Time* magazine for picking up dog poop? What’s even weirder is that this girl, like most people, *hated* picking up poop.

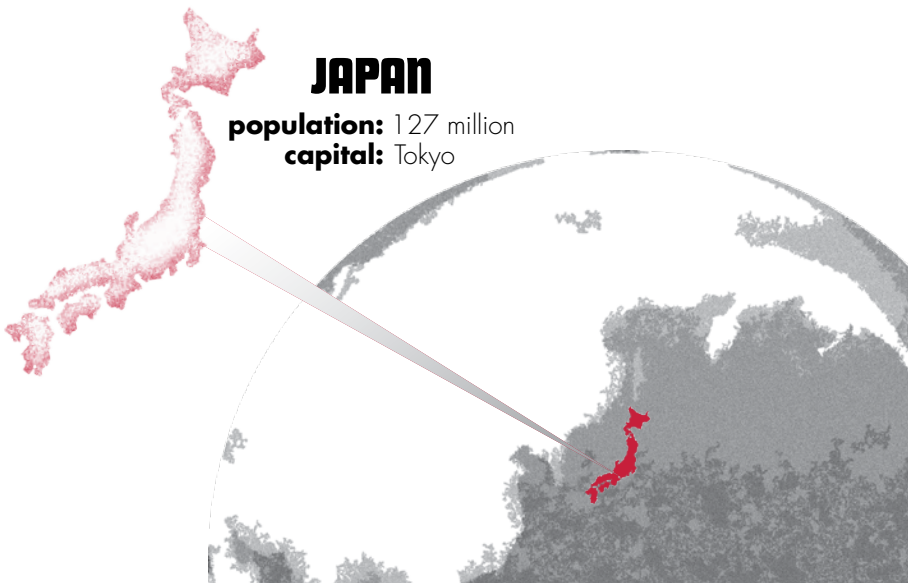
“It was gross,” Haruka Maruno told *Time* magazine in 2000. Every morning when Haruka walked her dog, Patrick, she grimaced when she had to scoop his poop with a plastic bag over her hand. It felt warm and mushy, like a handful of, well . . . dog poop. Yuck!

But it turned out that cleaning up after Patrick with a plastic bag was more than just gross—it was also harming the environment. Just like they keep your sandwich fresh for lunch, plastic bags also keep animal waste from decomposing—breaking down back into the earth. Instead of becoming fertilizer, the poop-bag combo just sat in the local landfill looking disgusting, smelling bad, and taking up space.

Japan has over 10 million dogs, which produce over 2 million pounds of waste daily. That's a massive mountain of poop every day. Just imagine what the mountain might look like after a *month!* And because Japan is a small island, there isn't a lot of extra space. As much as people would have liked to keep mountains and mountains of dog poop sitting around, there just wasn't enough room. . . . Japan had a real doggy dung disaster.

Haruka Maruno decided to do something about it.

"What else could I use to scoop poop?" she thought. A shovel might work, but you couldn't just throw the whole shovel away. People would have to wash it when they were done—not very convenient. Maybe a plastic cup, but it might get a little messy, and messy was the *last* thing she wanted. Finally Haruka found a way to cut and fold an empty paper milk carton into the ultimate poop scoop.



JAPAN

population: 127 million

capital: Tokyo

The best part—other than being much less gross—was that the paper scoop allowed air and microbes to get in. You could throw the scoop away, and after a while everything would be gone, decomposed back into the earth like ice cream melting in the sun. No more taking up space in a landfill.

Haruka entered her “paperscoop” in an invention contest, held in her city of Miyakonojo. Her poop scoop won first prize! But that was not enough for Haruka.

Fast Facts

Tokyo and the surrounding region is the most densely populated metropolitan area in the world.

She thought about it: if only a few people knew about the paperscoop, it wouldn't get used enough to make a big difference. Haruka needed more than just a paperscoop stand on the corner if she wanted to win

the battle against gross, smelly dog poop. She knew this was where her dad, Isamu, might be able to help. He was a businessman and helped Haruka set up her own company, which they called “Haruka Family.”

Imagine what life is like for most seventh graders you know. Now imagine a seventh grader running a major company that sells environmentally friendly products. It wasn't easy! At 12 years old, Haruka Maruno was not only an inventor, but a sharp businesswoman as well.

Every day, Haruka came home from school, grabbed a snack, and then got to work. She and her father had to find a factory that could turn recycled milk cartons

into “Haruka’s Paperscoops.” They had to hire employees and keep detailed records of exactly what they sold and where. They also had to convince stores all over Japan to put a product on their shelves that encouraged people to get up close and personal with dog poop.

All of this hard work paid off. The poop scoop was a hit in stores. And the government of Japan took notice of the paperscoop and asked Haruka to represent Japan at the Children’s Conference for the Environment in Africa. The conference, sponsored by the United Nations, gave Haruka the chance to talk about her special poop scoop with kids from many countries around the world. Her paperscoop was even used by the city of Miyakonojo as part of its Good Manners Project.

Today, Haruka Maruno has graduated from high school. She now gives lectures about intellectual property rights. Haruka continues to run her business online while working on inventions that help preserve the environment. You can be sure that the world will be a better place because of her work!

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MEXICO



The Longest Walk

OMAR CASTILLO GALLEGOS

Like citizens of many big cities, people in Mexico City do a lot of walking. Many walk to work or stroll to the bus stop. Others mosey to the grocery store or amble out at night to see movies and dine in restaurants. Kids jog down the block to visit friends and hike to city parks where they play soccer, baseball, and other games. However, the rainforest is 800 miles away from Mexico City, so people most certainly *do not* walk to the rainforest.

Unless, of course, you're eight-year-old Omar Castillo Gallegos.

One evening Omar watched a TV show about the destruction of the Mexican rainforest. He learned that up to 50,000 species a year become extinct as their rainforest habitat is slashed and burned to make room for farms. Omar also found out that only one-third of the world's rainforests remain, and that many

people believe in 40 years there will be no rainforests left at all. In fact, every second, over an acre of rainforest is destroyed.

Though many people saw this same TV show, it was Omar who decided to do something about it.

But what could an eight-year-old boy do to stop a thousand bulldozers? He thought that if government leaders only knew about the destruction of the rainforests, they would have to do something to stop it. So Omar decided to write to the president of Mexico. Instead of putting the letter in the mail, he went to the president's palace and gave the letter to the guards standing outside.

The president agreed to save the rainforest and everybody lived happily ever after. . . .

Actually, that's not quite how it happened. After writing five letters and delivering each one to the guards outside the president's palace, Omar Castillo Gallegos still had received no response. He didn't even know if the president had *read* his letters.

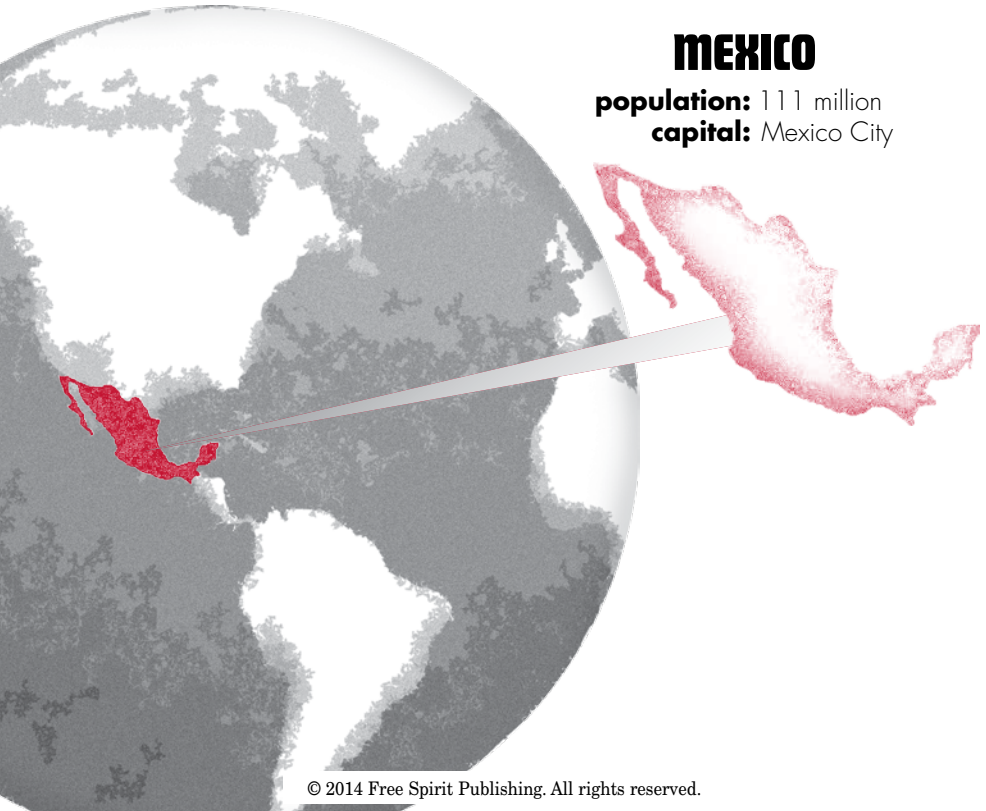
"If it's that important to you," joked his father, "you should go to the rainforest and save it yourself."

Later that evening, Omar packed his bag. The next morning he was ready to leave for Chiapas, the Mexican state where the rainforest was being destroyed. Because he didn't want Omar to walk alone, Omar's father decided to go, too. He probably thought that Omar would get tired and want to return home before they got far. Once Omar started, though, he wasn't

about to give up. The pair walked past Omar's neighborhood and through the streets of Mexico City. They reached the outskirts of the city, and then the suburbs, and still they kept walking. And walking. And walking. . . .

And then they walked some more. By the end of the first day they had walked almost 15 miles, and Omar's feet hurt. Only another 785 miles to go!

Day after day Omar and his father kept walking. Along the way something wonderful started to happen. One day, a woman came out to the road and



offered Omar and his father food and water. She had heard about their journey to protect the rainforest, and she wanted to help. The next day, two people met Omar and his father on the road and offered them homemade tortillas. The day after that, a man offered them a place to sleep. Word of Omar and his father's walk was traveling faster than they were!

Now people came out to join Omar and his father on their walk. Instead of being just a hike, it was more like a parade. And as people came from all over to see this eight-year-old who was walking 800 miles, the parade grew!

Finally, after three pairs of shoes, 800 miles, and 39 days of walking, Omar, his father, and the parade came to the town in Chiapas where the governor lived. Omar led his followers to the steps of the governor's palace and yelled with all his might, "Save the rainforest!" He yelled again and again, "Save the rainforest!" Omar's father and all the people who had followed them to the governor's palace also yelled, "Save the rainforest!"

Finally, the governor came out onto the balcony of his palace and the crowd fell silent. The governor looked down at Omar Castillo Gallegos and his father and said, "I'm sorry, but if you want to save the rainforest,

Fast Facts

Scientists continue to discover new plants and animals that live in the rainforest.

you will have to talk with the president of Mexico, who lives in Mexico City.”

Omar and his father had just walked 800 miles *from* Mexico City, where they had already tried to make contact with the president. Now they were tired and sore and it looked like they would have to walk all the way home. But they had not counted on the support of others. People all over Mexico had heard about their mission, and someone bought Omar and his father bus tickets back to Mexico City.

But once Omar Castillo Gallegos had made up his mind to save the rainforest, it would take more than this little setback to stop him. He pitched a tent outside the president’s palace, and during the day he walked around shouting, “I want to meet with the president so that he will save the rainforest!”

Other kids joined him, and other adults, too. Soon TV news crews showed up to report on the small “city” that had sprung up on the brick square outside the palace. The president could ignore them no longer. He invited Omar to meet with him. After talking with eight-year-old Omar Castillo Gallegos, the president of Mexico decided to protect the Chiapas rainforest. All it took was an 800-mile walk!

But it turned out that helping protect the rainforest was only Omar’s first step. Once he had the ear of the people in charge, he realized there were many other things in the world that needed saving. So, he organized more than 5,000 children in Cancun to stop