

The Starfish Story: one step towards changing the world

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out,

“Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?”

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied “Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can’t return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water.”

The old man replied, “But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I’m afraid you won’t really be able to make much of a difference.”

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, “It made a difference to that one!”

Final Reflections: By Peter Straube

We all have the opportunity to help create positive change, but often delay our actions by rationalizing “I’m already really busy, and how much of a difference can I really make?” This is especially true when we’re talking about addressing massive social problems like tackling world hunger or finding a cure for cancer, but it pops up all of the time in our everyday lives, as well. So if you catch yourself thinking that way, it helps to remember this story. You might not be able to change the entire world, but at least you can change a small part of it, for someone.

They say that one of the most common reasons we procrastinate is because we see the challenge before us as overwhelming, and that a good way to counter that is to break the big challenge down into smaller pieces and then take those one at a time—like one starfish at a time. And to that one starfish, it can make a world of difference.

Final Reflections: by Mrs. Simones

This same principle applies when we see groups of people being singled out for unjust persecution. All it takes is a single voice to speak up. Soon that voice becomes collective voices. All it takes is a single act of consciousness. Soon that brave action spreads out and impacts many. But if no one speaks up or takes action, what is to prevent that persecution from eventually being directed against you?

A quote by Chris Bohjalian (bow-jail-yen) a Vermont author and speaker whose grandparents were survivors of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, which occurred between 1915-1922, summarizes it well with this quote: “A single, ordinary person still can make a difference – and single, ordinary people are doing precisely that every day.”