

Chapter 1 **Each One, Teach One**



Service is the rent we pay for living.
—MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

As far back as I can remember, I've been engaged in some kind of service, activism, or volunteer activity, and that without a doubt is thanks to my mother, Gayle Fleming. My mother is an activist from way back—she must have gotten her interest in politics and world events from *her* mother, who was a voracious reader and writer, and she clearly decided to pass both an interest in politics and a commitment to service down to me.

What I remember most from my childhood is not so much specific issues, concepts, or causes—those came later. Instead, I remember what it felt like to be exposed to service and to be taught about volunteering. There was the thrill of getting to go somewhere with my mother, who would talk to me beforehand about the journey we were going to take for the day, whether it was a rally, a meeting with a nonprofit, or a door-to-door canvass for a candidate she was supporting. Though, like every child, I only really knew what it was like to be in my own family, I did have a sense that I was being exposed to politics and service in a way that was special and slightly different from other kids I knew. Now that I am an adult, this makes perfect sense to me because I have a mother who will get on a bike and ride from Washington, DC, to North Carolina to raise money for HIV/AIDS awareness and funding, who will plan a yoga-thon to raise money for Darfur, who will enter a book-writing competition and ask her friends to sponsor her for each word written and then give the proceeds to an orphanage in Kenya, and who will plan a fund-raiser for a local food bank to help pay off their mortgage so that they can focus on putting more food on the shelves. Now, when I take my own children to a Darfur rally, or to New Orleans to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina either through advocacy events in the lower Ninth Ward or rebuilding houses in St. Bernard Parish, or to visit the friends they've made in South Africa's shantytowns, I think of my own mother doing the same for me in our quiet Oakland neighborhood, and I feel that I, too, am carrying on the traditions of our family.

At any given moment, whether it was at breakfast, in the car, walking down the street, or at dinner, my mother and I could talk about service, volunteering, and the whole wide world. My mother found many ways to make it clear that we were citizens of the world, even if I did not have a chance to personally see the whole world up close. She often reminded me that “everyone does not have the same blessings as we do, and because of this, it's our absolute duty to give back.” One of her favorite quotes was Marian Wright Edelman's saying “Service is the rent we pay for living.” It is a motto that I, too, have adopted because it resonates with me so deeply. As everyone who knows me will agree, I repeat these words more than any other quote, and it remains one of my favorite sayings, a touchstone for how I view my life. As a matter of fact, journalist Soledad O'Brien recently joked that Marian Wright Edelman should start collecting royalties from me based on the number of times I repeat these words as she introduced me at an awards dinner.

Our household wasn't only service oriented; it was also very political. My mother and her friends could always be found discussing and debating local and national issues. What was the new mayor going to do to make people's lives better? Was this new policy good or bad for our neighborhood, our people, our city? Where was our country headed, and what should we all be doing about it? Now when my husband, Chris, and I talk politics at the dinner table, I feel that same connection to my past, and I hope my daughters are learning the

same lesson: Family is important, yes, but family doesn't begin and end at the dinner table. We're all part of a larger family, and if any one of us is hurting, then all of us are. *If I get there before you do, I am obligated to bore a hole and pull you through*— that's what my mother lived, that's what she taught me, and that's what I try to teach my girls.

Now, don't get me wrong. I did not always want to go everywhere my mother wanted to take me. I did not really want to join her at her meditation center no matter how much she tried to convince me that it would help to make me a better person. I can remember my mom had a friend she meditated with and did a lot of service work with who also had a teenage daughter, one of my classmates. Mai and I were very similar. When our mothers went overboard (as we saw it), we were able to hang together and commiserate.

As of this writing, my older daughter Lola is only seven and my little Zahra is only five, and I do pull them from pillar to post, as my mother did with me, in order to show them the many ways people live in this world and to instill a sense of service in them from a very early age. Though I fully expect them to do their own share of teenage complaining eventually, I hope that they ultimately feel the way I do now: eternally grateful that my mother made me take part in both politics and service, because those were the experiences that helped to shape me into the woman I am today.

Certainly the issues that were closest to my mother's heart are close to mine as well. My mother attended Mills College in Oakland, a very feminist place, so she was always concerned with the rights of women, as well as with every woman's responsibility to make the world a better place. Mom was also deeply committed to civil rights and equality for African-Americans. Living in Oakland, she had the chance to become good friends with Black Panther leaders Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, so I remember us hanging out with them and their children while I was growing up.

Mainly, though, my mother was concerned with poverty, both here in the United States and around the world. She was and continues to be a big supporter of RESULTS, an extraordinary NGO* that lobbies the U.S. government to allocate more resources for poor countries and supports other groups that work directly for the poor. As a teenager, I remember going with her to lots of RESULTS fundraisers and advocacy events, where I learned more about how to effect change for the world's poor, lessons that I use today in my work with orphaned and vulnerable children in South Africa.

These days, my mother lives in Washington, DC, where she continues to come up with innovative ways to raise money and awareness for the causes most important to her. She's still working on behalf of hunger issues both in the United States and abroad, showing special concern for food pantries, which have become a mainstay not only for the poor but also for many middle-class people who've fallen on hard times and don't have any kind of safety net to rely on due to our tough economic climate. As when I was growing up, my mother is still part of a vital network of friends who share her interests, and she hangs out at DC spots like the bookstore café Busboys and Poets, where she can talk to her heart's content about issues affecting our world, like the war in the Middle East, the genocide in Darfur, the economy, and how to help those who are hurting because of the mortgage crisis. Times and topics have changed since I was a child growing up in the liberal and very active cultures of Oakland and Berkeley, but one important constant has remained: *If you have an opportunity to help, then you must help.*

On my father's side, I come from a long line of educators with a close connection to Howard University, the historically black institution of higher learning in Washington, DC, established in 1867, two years after the end of the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery. My father's uncle was for many years the head of Howard's political science department. When it came time for me to go to college, Howard University was my first choice. Not only

did I want to attend a school with a rich and illustrious legacy in terms of educating freed slaves, I was also aware of Howard's prominent alumni, including such politicians and activists as David Dinkins, Vernon Jordan, and Andrew Young; author Toni Morrison; Supreme Court judge Thurgood Marshall; physician and medical pioneer Dr. LaSalle D. Leffall Jr.; and entertainers (and sisters) Debbie Allen and Phylicia Rashad. In fact, Howard University graduates more African- American doctors, lawyers, and other professionals than any other HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) institution in the United States.

I believe that by attending Howard, I was truly blessed in terms of my education. I had the great good luck to be taught by some of the most brilliant professors in the nation and to share my time with bright and ambitious classmates. To walk across such a historic campus every day filled me not only with pride but also with a sense of responsibility. Like a lot of graduates of HBCUs, I felt my ancestors' legacy, and I wanted to make them and the people who graduated before me proud—especially those first graduates, who walked to college, literally walked to Howard University, because they did not have the money for transportation, from cities all over the Deep South, seizing against incredible odds their first opportunity at higher education.

Another plus: Howard University offered me the chance to live in the nation's capital. I remember during my first semester going down to the National Mall to visit the Capitol and sitting in on congressional hearings, listening to the people who make our laws arguing and debating. I'll be honest: I usually got lost in all of the back- and- forth and the long speeches made by some lawmakers. But as the child of an activist, I understood that the laws they were talking about would have a huge impact on people's lives and even on my own life. I was thrilled to see that such life- changing debates were held in public and to be able to witness political debates by leaders who had been elected by ordinary people like my family and myself. Something about living in DC made politics more urgent—and somehow more real.

So although my major was in arts production management, I minored in political science. I even thought about going into politics for a time, though I eventually decided not to, and it's a good thing, too; I don't have the temperament for it. What I love about service is the hands- on aspect, working with people, especially children, who need my help; that excites me far more than sitting in some conference room hammering out policy. Plus I think I would be far too impatient—as in bite my arm off!—with the slow pace of creating policy when I can serve in a hands- on way on behalf of critical issues that need immediate attention. I understand, though, that politicians, administrators, and especially advocates are a crucial part of service. Howard was where I first began to understand that each of us has to find our own path, our own particular way to serve.

I was also conscious of the fact that Howard, like so many well known institutions of higher learning—such as the University of Southern California, Yale, and Columbia, to name a few—was located smack- dab in the middle of a low- income, primarily African- American neighborhood struggling with crime and drug abuse. I felt a sense of responsibility to serve where I lived and attended school. Since I was close to the Washington, DC, headquarters for RESULTS, the organization my mom had long supported, I ended up working on its special events, volunteering to help set up rallies, street fairs, and even a huge gathering on the Mall. I also have fond memories of mentoring a little girl who lived in my neighborhood, a child who was being raised by her grandmother. To protect her privacy, I'll call her Jasmine M. Over the three years that I mentored her, Jasmine M. and I became very close, and I got a huge lesson in how far a little bit of time can go in someone else's life.

I also saw that “it takes a village to raise a child,” since I soon had pretty much everyone I knew involved in mentoring Jasmine M. as well, including all my girlfriends and my then boyfriend. Whichever one of us was available would spend time with Jasmine M.,

sometimes just hanging out with her or maybe taking her to museums and exhibits. I had a weekend job as a concierge at the Embassy Suites Hotel, and soon Jasmine M. was sitting behind my desk for my entire shift, coloring or reading. After a while, she became everybody's child. And isn't that how it should be?

After graduation, I tried to stay in touch with her, and on my trips back to DC, I often took Jasmine M. out to lunch. Though I do not know where she is or what she is doing all these years later, I can only hope that I had a positive influence on her life. I know that she had an amazing influence on my life and I still think of her to this day.

Bright Lights, Big City

But despite the satisfaction I felt with Jasmine M. and my calling to change the world, I had other goals as well. As a child and young adult, I'd wanted to be an actress, even to the point of spending my summers at theater camp in Minneapolis. But somewhere along the way, I understood that I had only a tiny chance of becoming a working actress. The people who succeeded in this demanding profession lived and died by their desire to do that work. I just didn't want it that much, which I was wise enough to realize meant that I probably wouldn't succeed at it.

So instead of majoring in theater, I got a degree in the business side of the arts and set my sights on going into public relations. I'd been inspired by an article about Terrie M. Williams, who headed the largest public relations firm owned by an African-American woman at the time. Over the course of her impressive career she has represented such clients as Eddie Murphy, Janet Jackson, Johnnie L. Cochran, Essence Communications, Time Warner, and HBO.

I was especially intrigued to read that Terrie had been a clinical social worker before she'd become a publicist. After giving it her all in this field and feeling like she needed a change, she became a successful public relations professional, and when she began her new line of work, her first two clients were Eddie Murphy and Miles Davis. Talk about starting at the top!

Terrie had gotten her start by convincing Murphy and Davis to give her a chance, so I thought maybe I could persuade her to do the same for me. My senior year at Howard, I wrote to her, expressing my desire to work for her, and she actually called me personally. Later I learned that Terrie treated every single letter or phone call the same way, whether it came from the head of HBO or some college student she'd never heard of. No matter who it was, she responded promptly, either in person or by having someone on her team follow up (and if you were the one who was supposed to follow up, you had to prove to her that you did!). That was an important lesson that has stuck with me to this day.

Terrie was kind enough to offer me an internship with her company in New York. There was no pay, only a small stipend, but to me it was the opportunity of a lifetime. At the same time, I got a "real" job offer from a fashion merchandising firm in another city, with a substantial salary that would have had me living pretty well as a new college graduate.

Still, whatever the cost, I had to choose Terrie. As a college student, I was no stranger to living on a budget, and I was used to working hard. Choosing the route of greater opportunity seemed worth the challenge of struggling in order to live as my more authentic self. And as luck would have it, Terrie promoted her assistant a few months after I got there. I got to move up into the assistant position, which paid better than the internship had—but just a bit!

Terrie was busy, as always, and she believed in delegating responsibility. She was and continues to be a dynamo who whirls in and out of a room and in and out of town like a tornado. She also judges people by what they can do, not by their age, how long they have

been in the business, or what is on their résumé. She just wants to know whether you can do the job. So when the time came for the premiere of Eddie Murphy's film *The Distinguished Gentleman*, she said to me, "You know what? I really need you to do some serious work on this, so I am going to give you as much to do as you can handle. But you are going to have to work hard."

It was an extraordinary opportunity. I ended up coordinating a lot of the press relations for the premiere with Terrie, doing far more than any assistant would normally have been allowed to do. I loved the work leading up to the premiere and especially loved working the night of the premiere, which was held at a theater downtown that I always went to on the weekends to see movies. All went well, and from there, I just kind of moved on up. Terrie hadn't been lying—I *did* work hard! I often slept at the agency, but if you are given a chance to be taught by the best and given opportunities that most do not receive, and you are learning a lot to boot, you better take advantage of it!

Of course, I also had a lot of fun. I was invited to amazing events; met interesting and inspiring people; went to great parties with Terrie, or without her when she told me to go in her place; and got to be a part of New York City in a way that I would have never been able to had I not taken the chance to move up there and work for the Terrie Williams Agency. And, just as icing on the cake, it led me to meet my husband, the comedian Chris Rock.

A Turning Point

Terrie was demanding, hardworking, and generous to a fault. As hard as she worked for all her high-profile actors and executives, she worked just as hard for her pro bono clients, and she was able to give nonprofit agencies access to resources that they never would have had if not for her influence. So I saw firsthand how you could have a successful business while mentoring young people and helping nonprofits. What an inspiration!

I spent three wonderful years working with Terrie, but then I realized that it was time to begin a new chapter in my life.

I've always loved makeup, so when I heard about a job opening at Elizabeth Arden's media department, I thought it would be perfect for me. Because, okay, I'll admit right now, I don't just love makeup—I'm a product queen! What I had liked about public relations was the chance to convince somebody that a person with talent was worth being talked about or that the world should take note of a particular new TV show, movie, or CD. Promoting a creative person or product required all *my* creativity, which I found both challenging and fun. And it was a terrific high to read the article I had helped to place or to watch the talk show I'd managed to get my client on. I liked knowing that I had helped talented people—especially new talents—achieve their dreams or get the chance to promote a project they were proud of. That said, as much as I liked wearing makeup and perfume, I just didn't get the same thrill from promoting them. I very quickly realized that what I really wanted was to take my love of public relations, along with all the skills and experience and connections I had acquired working for Terrie, and use it to promote something worthy that I believed in.

What happened next seemed like fate—I came across an ad in the *New York Times* that seemed to have my name on it. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF was looking for a public relations person with a background in entertainment, specializing in celebrity relations and special events, someone who could start a new division within the public relations department at the U.S. Fund to help raise the organization's profile. As soon as I knew the job existed, I wanted it, and though it took a lot of patience and persistence, I got it!

UNICEF, of course, is the United Nations Children's Fund. It's supported by contributions from member organizations around the world. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF

raises money and awareness in the United States to support UNICEF's critical lifesaving work worldwide.

My job at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF was to build up the celebrity relations department, plan special events, and work as part of the public relations team to promote the U.S. Fund's and UNICEF's major initiatives and reports. UNICEF had traditionally had a very successful relationship with celebrities who worked very hard as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors. Past Goodwill Ambassadors whom we all know and love include the glamorous and caring Audrey Hepburn and the extraordinary actor Peter Ustinov. Current and longtime Goodwill Ambassadors include Roger Moore and Harry Belafonte, who are still hard at work traveling the world raising awareness for UNICEF.

But now the U.S. Fund was looking to expand the program. They wanted to bring in younger celebrities and well-known people of all colors and backgrounds. They also wanted to make better use of the Ambassadors they had and find new ways that celebrities could help promote UNICEF's mission.

Since I came to UNICEF from the entertainment field, I knew firsthand that there were many celebrities who already had a deep commitment to helping their fellow man. I decided to concentrate not so much on collecting big names as on finding an authentic connection between the celebrity and the cause that he or she was promoting. Usually—not always, but usually—you don't want just someone's name; if at all possible, you want their heartfelt commitment and genuine passion. You want the person to be knowledgeable, so that when he or she talks to the media, the interview has some real content. And you want them to care—really care—about the facts and figures and stories that they share about your issues, so that even to the most cynical reporter, their words ring true.

Given the kinds of in-depth celebrity relationships I hoped to develop, I was looking not just for famous people but for down-to-earth individuals who just happened to be celebrities because of their gift of talent and good luck at having us all enjoy what they do. I wanted stars who would be willing to come to events, do media interviews, and also take UNICEF-assisted trips: going into the field, learning about the situation on the ground, and then talking about the nitty-gritty needs of that particular area.

Luckily, I had a great roster of people to start with, including actors Edward James Olmos and James Kiberd and actress Jane Curtin. These three phenomenal people were so kind to me, welcoming my ideas with open arms, telling me freely what they were passionate about, and working so hard for the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. I was especially moved by the work of Edward James Olmos, who is known as a spectacular actor with great intensity and who took that same intensity and used it as he traveled throughout Latin America, so he could advocate in the United States for the needs of Latin American women and children. Within months, I was free to call Edward, James, and Jane at home with my requests, and they called me, too, sharing their ideas and telling me how they wanted to help. It was a true partnership that I hoped to extend to other celebrities, making it the model and not the exception for the U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

That's why I developed what you might call a niche approach to celebrities while I was at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, seeking ways we could link our organization to something they already cared about and that made sense for them to speak about. Once you let people find their own platform, they become so much more committed. They do their homework, deepen their involvement, and speak so much more passionately. Celebrities with a genuine personal connection to an issue will not only do a much better job of communicating with the public, they will also be excited to take part in innovative approaches to promoting their cause and will go above and beyond to make themselves available for whatever is needed.

For example, I read that the actress Sarah Jessica Parker had trick- or- treated for UNICEF as a child. I immediately hoped we could use this early UNICEF connection to involve her further.

Trick- or- Treat for UNICEF is a Halloween tradition that began in 1950, when five kids in Philadelphia decided to collect money to help the children in postwar Europe, using milk cartons that they had decorated themselves and raising \$17, a considerable sum at the time. The tradition took off, and soon, children across the United States were collecting money in official orange UNICEF boxes. Over the years, U.S. kids have collected more than \$150 million for UNICEF, while Canadian children have raised more than \$96 million in Canadian dollars, and Hong Kong kids have contributed more than \$5 million in Hong Kong dollars—figures that I bet would have astounded those first five kids in Philly.

Sarah Jessica Parker was one of the many U.S. children who grew up participating in this tradition, so in 1996 I contacted Michelle Kydd Lee, a wonderful woman who is the executive director of the CAA Foundation. CAA is one of the leading talent agencies in the world. Its foundation exists to help the agency's clients and employees serve. Michelle was so cool and immediately liked the idea of the future *Sex and the City* star being that year's Trick- or- Treat for UNICEF spokesperson. Sarah Jessica also liked the idea and agreed to appear at our annual kickoff event. She has gone on to support the program—and UNICEF—in numerous ways, as she is now a Goodwill Ambassador. I owe a debt of gratitude to Sarah Jessica Parker and Michelle Kydd Lee, because my thought that you should find a celebrity who had a genuine connection to the cause proved true very early on in my career at UNICEF and set the tone for my work at the agency.

Likewise, TV journalist Katie Couric and poet Maya Angelou stand out in my mind for the level of dedication and commitment they brought to their roles as Ambassadors. Katie in particular was very good at communicating to the public an overall sense of UNICEF's goals: universal access to clean and safe water, immunizing every child against major diseases, ending child labor, improving health care, and decreasing mothers' mortality rates. Part of her ability to be such a passionate and effective spokesperson was that she was so well informed about the organization's work and the hot button issues that affected the global communities UNICEF supported.

To make sure all of our Ambassadors were as well informed, one of my most important responsibilities was to plan UNICEF assisted field trips, official visits that allowed our celebrity spokespeople to tour a particular region and meet with field- workers, doctors, volunteers, other UN staff, and members of partner NGOs, as well as, of course, the communities receiving UNICEF aid. These visits let our spokespeople see UNICEF's achievements for themselves as well as what problems still remained to be solved.

During these trips, I needed to publicize the celebrity's activities, using his or her fame to gain attention for the people living in the countries where UNICEF worked, while also making sure that the trip reflected the celebrity's interests. We needed to know both what we needed to get out of a trip and what our celebrity spokesperson wanted to get out of it. To this end, I generally worked with our Ambassador's publicist and manager while also communicating with our field offices, helping them put together a trip that would speak to the celebrity in question.

I think back to a particularly successful trip I helped plan for Claudia Schiffer to visit Bangladesh. Claudia actually called us, inspired by learning that the glamorous and dedicated Audrey Hepburn had been one of UNICEF's most respected and beloved Ambassadors. We met with Claudia, but I remember that there was a little bit of trepidation in our offices about whether to move forward with her. I think some people might have been skeptical that

a stunningly beautiful supermodel could also be a serious person, or maybe they were just afraid that she wouldn't be taken seriously.

I was really clear, though, that working with Claudia would be a terrific plus for our agency, and I lobbied for her acceptance. At the time, Claudia Schiffer was one of the hottest supermodels in the industry. She had a huge fan base, and that's exactly what we wanted. I knew that any time she opened her mouth, reporters would be eager to publicize what she had to say.

Claudia was eager to go into the field. I was thrilled, of course, but wanted to make sure that she had firsthand information that would help her to be a credible spokesperson. Her first stop then was an orientation program we set up for our Ambassadors to visit UNICEF's international headquarters, across the street from the United Nations, and meet with every single department head at UNICEF as well as with certain UN officials who helped UNICEF do its work. This orientation was always a wonderful day that proved very helpful to our spokespeople.

After orientation day, it was time for Claudia to visit a developing country so she could see UNICEF's work on the ground. Her first trip was to Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, hard to navigate and harder still to find any comfort in. Claudia was used to traveling first-class and staying in luxury hotels, and as a model, she obviously wore designer clothing for a living. Yet she was so understanding of the fact that as a nonprofit we did not fly first-class and that she needed to dress down not only because of the poverty-stricken environment but also out of respect for the country's culture, the people's religious affiliations, and the simple need for comfort!

We needn't have worried. Claudia was wonderful on her trip to Bangladesh. She was generous with her time, kind and gentle to the women and children she met, full of energy, and extremely inquisitive, everything you need to be an effective Ambassador. She continues to be one of UNICEF's most valuable spokespeople.

Celebrities Pay Their Rent

There are many celebrities who speak out for important causes every day. There are also many well-known people who have started nonprofit organizations to raise money for a particular need. Here are some of my favorite admirable celebrities. If you share my appreciation, you might consider volunteering with or donating to one of the groups listed below.

Celebrity Activists

- Drew Barrymore, World Food Program Ambassador, dedicated to making sure all people have access to nutritious food
- Beyoncé, supporter of Feeding America, dedicated to aiding the hungry by delivering more than 3.5 million meals a year to local food banks nationwide
- Don Cheadle, raising awareness and aid for the genocide in Darfur
- George Clooney, raising awareness and aid for the genocide in Darfur
- Sheryl Crow, raising awareness of breast cancer and environmental issues
- Ted Danson and Mary Steenburgen, activists for environmental issues, especially clean and safe oceans
- Mia Farrow, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, serving children and women in 160 developing countries, especially involved in the campaign to end the genocide in Darfur and in protests against China's sale of arms to Sudan

- LaTanya and Samuel L. Jackson and Deborah and Carlos Santana, board members and founders respectively of Artists for a New South Africa (ANSA), working to combat HIV/AIDS
- Wyclef Jean, founder of Yéle Haiti, which provides aid to Haiti
- Angelina Jolie, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador, raising awareness for the world's most vulnerable displaced people
- Lucy Liu, U.S. Fund for UNICEF Ambassador
- Jay-Z, supporter of Water for People, a UN initiative for clean and safe water worldwide

Celebrity Nonprofits

- Andre Agassi: The Andre Agassi Foundation, supporting youth educational development, www.agassifoundation.org
- Lance Armstrong: The Lance Armstrong Foundation, supporting cancer research, www.livestrong.org
- Bono: The One Campaign working to end extreme poverty and preventable disease and to establish debt relief in developing nations, www.one.org
- Michael J. Fox: The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, www.michaeljfox.org
- Mariska Hargitay: The Joyful Heart Foundation, founded to help heal those who have faced sexual assault, www.joyfulheartfoundation.org
- Elton John: The Elton John AIDS Foundation, funding direct-care services for those with AIDS as well as AIDS prevention programs, www.ejaf.org
- Alicia Keys: Keep a Child Alive, providing lifesaving antiretroviral treatment to children and their families with HIV/AIDS in Africa and the developing world, www.keepachildalive.org
- Madonna: Raising Malawi, supporting orphans in Malawi, www.raisingmalawi.org
- Alonzo Mourning: Alonzo Mourning Charities for youth educational development and mentoring, www.amcharities.org
- Paul Newman: Newman's Own, a for-profit company that donates all profits and royalties after taxes to educational and charitable projects; the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, which provides seriously ill children with a camping experience, www.holeinthewallgang.org
- Brad Pitt: Make It Right Foundation, providing Hurricane Katrina relief through building sustainable green houses, www.makeitrightnola.org
- Christopher Reeve: The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, which develops treatments and cures for paralysis caused by spinal cord injury and other central nervous system disorders, www.christopherreeve.org
- Marlo Thomas: St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, a hospital for children with cancer, www.stjude.org
- Lee and Bob Woodruff: The Bob Woodruff Foundation, helping to heal the physical and psychological wounds of war, www.remind.org

Boy Soldiers and *Apocalypse Now*

I had many wonderful experiences working with all of the Ambassadors at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. But the one person who made a really lasting impression on me was the actor Laurence Fishburne.

I didn't know Laurence at the time, and I don't even remember whether we approached him or he came to us. All I know is that at some point, he said, "Maybe I'll get involved with you guys—let's talk," and I came in on the talking part. I bonded with his

publicist, a phenomenal media guy named Alan Nierob, the first time we chatted, and Laurence also got along really well with the U.S. Fund's then president, Charles J. "Chip" Lyons.

Laurence proceeded to tell us a remarkable story. He'd begun filming his breakthrough role in *Apocalypse Now* when he was only fourteen, a grueling two-year stint in the Philippines. Like many of the actors in that film, Laurence found the experience both inspiring and traumatic because of the subject matter. And like any great actor, he'd taken to heart the experiences of the character he played. Even though he hadn't actually been a child soldier, he'd been a fourteen-year-old who played a soldier—a soldier involved in a particularly brutal war—and it had left a deep impression on him.

When Laurence came to meet with us, the issue of child soldiers was very much in the news—and very much on his mind. Because of his experiences filming *Apocalypse Now*, he wanted to help raise awareness of this painful issue and to join in UNICEF's mission to end the illegal and atrocious practice of using children as soldiers in the military.

In response, I set up a trip for him to the Ivory Coast and then on to war-torn Liberia, a West African nation then notorious for having abducted and drugged many children whom it had involved in its recent seven-year war. The war had just ended and UN peacekeepers were still stationed in the battered nation. I accompanied Laurence on that trip and I'll never forget landing in the country's capital of Monrovia, where the vast majority of the people still had no lights, no electricity, and no running water. We who stayed on the UN base were able to benefit from generators and a rudimentary plumbing system, but our use of lights, showers, and even toilets was highly restricted.

With UNICEF field-workers as our guides, we traveled through the city and some of the countryside, learning how UNICEF was helping the young victims of that war. One of the main issues was reuniting the former child soldiers with their parents. Many of these children had been kidnapped during the night, often with their villages burned and families tortured. Stolen as young as fourteen, twelve, and even nine, they had often been given drugs by the warlords who had induced them to kill—and kill horrifically.

When the war finally ended, UNICEF was there to reunite these children with their parents or a family member who had survived the war, as well as to provide counseling for the traumatized youths, and eventually job training. It was a daunting task. Imagine a boy stolen from his parents at age nine, drugged, and made to kill. Now the war is over, he's sixteen, and by his culture's standards, he's a full grown man. He's lived through too much to go back to school, but he's not trained for any kind of productive work. Nor does he have any idea how to live within a family, a community, and a country attempting peace; all he knows is traveling through a war-torn city or a devastated countryside, scavenging for food with his fellow soldiers, also young boys, and committing the atrocities he's been trained to undertake. How does a young man like this return to any kind of normal life?

UNICEF had a three-part program: reunification with families, counseling, and job training. It seems miraculous that it could be successful—but in many, many cases, it was.

Both Laurence and I were shaken by what we saw, and he emerged from that first trip fully committed to UNICEF and its extraordinary work. He helped promote the agency's goal of eradicating the practice of using child soldiers as well as its three-part mission to help the children. Sadly, UNICEF's work has had to continue in Africa today, where the problem is most critical in countries such as Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan, Uganda, and Congo. Children are also used as soldiers in various south Asian countries and in parts of Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East, in countries such as Sri Lanka, Colombia, Russia, Afghanistan, and other nations. And Laurence Fishburne continues to be a staunch supporter of former child soldiers and is also the chairperson of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF's

campaign against HIV/AIDS. For more information on the plight of child soldiers worldwide, visit the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers at [www. child- soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org).

UNICEF for Life

The fascinating thing about both the U.S. Fund for UNICEF and UNICEF itself is that almost everyone who works there becomes in some sense a lifer. Most employees simply work there forever, and if I hadn't married a man whose career took him all over the world, I certainly would have stayed there, too. (More on that life- changing decision in the next chapter!)

But even those of us who have left still consider ourselves UNICEF people. We identify with the organization and seize every chance to support its work. I am personally blessed to have been on many UNICEF- assisted trips to developing countries since I left the organization. That's how I first visited South Africa, which opened up a whole new world to me.

So in one way, I don't feel that I've ever left the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. But since I'm no longer with that wonderful agency officially, I'd like to take a minute to acknowledge all the extraordinary ways in which it transformed my journey for change.

First and foremost, working at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF cemented for me that advocacy and service were indeed what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It was one thing to sit at my desk at Elizabeth Arden and dream about working for a nonprofit; it was another thing entirely to get out into the world and realize that my dream actually had some substance. We've all had dreams that didn't quite fit us and made moves that weren't quite right for us. Working at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF showed me that this was one dream that had enough staying power to last a lifetime.

I think the U.S. Fund for UNICEF also opened up my ability to think globally. Working for an organization that helps children around the world, how could I help but develop a broader view? I consider myself to be a smart, aware person, but there is no way I would have known about the problems facing most of the world's people had I not worked at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. In fact, that's why I took so much pride in working so hard to promote the organization, so people could learn about the problems it was trying to solve. Thanks to the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, I've seen with my own eyes and felt with my own heart the plight of the world's children, and painful as that often is, I know it makes me a better mother, friend, wife, and world citizen.

In particular, I'm grateful to UNICEF for my first trip to the continent of Africa, which was that journey to the Ivory Coast and Liberia with Laurence Fishburne. That experience, the opportunity to hug and kiss former child soldiers, to watch UNICEF fieldworkers work so diligently at child reunification, and to hear a group of schoolchildren taught in a bombed- out church singing, "We want peace, not war," to us, created in me a lifelong commitment to Africa and a lifelong respect for that troubled but inspiring and enriching continent.

Last but not least, I think my time at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF taught me that fieldworkers—no matter which government agency or NGO they work for—are the angels who live on this earth. I'm not a field- worker—I do some hands- on work, yes, and that grounds me and nourishes me to a remarkable extent, but most of my work is in creating and supporting programs. Those heroes who live every day in the shantytowns of Johannesburg or the refugee camps of Sudan or the homeless shelters of New Orleans are the people I most admire. I don't think that I'd have truly appreciated the work they do if I hadn't had the chance to meet the UNICEF staff and to see for myself just how much difference they make in the lives of the people around them.

So I spent three wonderful years at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF—and then it was time to leave. But UNICEF holds a special place in my heart as the agency in which I really discovered my inner humanitarian. Of course, you don't have to find a full-time job at a nonprofit, but I hope my experience shows you how rewarding this sort of work can be.

However, there are as many ways to contribute as there are causes that need your help. One of the most basic forms of service and a way to begin to make a connection with an organization is a simple charitable donation. If a journey begins with a single step, a journey for change can begin with a single check.

Finding Your Authentic Self in Giving

Finding just the right place to make a charitable donation can be daunting. After all, there are so many different groups that need money, and often you are bombarded with direct mail from many of them. How do you decide whom to give to—and how do you say no?

Whether you're thinking about donating five dollars, five hundred, or five thousand, this is an issue that requires some consideration. No matter how much or how little money I have to work with, I always try to think it through and make smart choices based on research and my personal giving platform.

Although my commitment to making careful choices hasn't changed, what has changed is my attitude. As I've found my authentic self in giving, discovering which causes and issues mean the most to me, I've simply had to get over my guilt at not being able to donate to *everything*. I respect a wide variety of causes, so much so that I promote them on my website and speak about them a lot, but I may not personally donate to them because they are not a part of my personal giving platform. Examples include the symphony, the opera, large museums, and institutions with large endowments and a lot of donor plaques all over the buildings.

I won't give you rhyme or reason for my preferences; they're just the issues that I happen to care most deeply about. And if you're going to make donations of your own, you need to develop your own preferences—and then get comfortable with them, too. This way, not only will you feel extraordinary when you write your check for \$10, \$100, or \$1,000, you will also soon begin to feel the fruits of your giving, because you are focused on a cause or an organization and will be able to follow up and know that your contributions are making a difference.

Now, one thing I always do is read what is sent to me and listen when people explain to me why their cause is important. I cannot tell you how many times I have learned something new, have met someone whom I find interesting and want to stay in touch with, or have even been convinced to give a donation I thought I would not give.

Take the organization Opus 118. At first glance, it is a symphony, and I do not normally fund them. But Opus is a symphony for children living in Harlem. And because programs for at-risk youths are at the top of my list, Opus 118 fits my giving platform. Most of the time, though, I use my own gut instinct to decide how I'm going to allocate my resources and which causes I connect with. After all, when it comes down to it, you can't force somebody to care about something that you care about.

Look, hard as he's tried, my husband can't force me to get interested in baseball—I just think it's boring! I just cannot make it through a game, especially one that goes on and on into extra innings. I am always like, "Can we go home?" But that's another thing I can't feel guilty about. We are who we are, and we give how we give. The most important advice I can ever give you is to be passionate, smart, and educated about your choices.

Deciding How Much to Give

Now that you've decided *to* give, how do you decide *how much*? Again, this is an area where a lot of people come unglued. They often start feeling guilty about how small their gifts seem, not realizing that every cent counts to a nonprofit organization. They turn what should be a joyous, positive, self-affirming experience into something that causes them guilt or sadness. And no one should be feeling either of these emotions when they have decided to serve by giving.

Again, the first thing to remember is that a donation of any amount, no matter how small, means a great deal. When I was putting together Journey for Change: Empowering Youth Through Global Service, for example, I went for the big grants and corporate sponsorships because I needed to raise a large amount of money in a short amount of time. But I was also heavily dependent on the private donations I received, both large and small.

Truth be told, the individual contributions are what made it possible for thirty at-risk youths from Brooklyn, NY, and thirty college age mentors to go to Johannesburg, South Africa. I'll never forget the time I received a \$10 Wal-Mart money order from someone who heard me on the radio. She was so moved by the idea of my taking children who had never traveled to South Africa that she just up and sent me a donation—she found the address on my website. And when we came back and she read about how the children were preparing to become Global Ambassadors, continuing to raise money and advocate for change in South Africa and at home, she sent me an additional \$20. Those two gifts mean the world to me, and they stand as a tribute to the power of giving, no matter what the amount.

Having said that, I suggest that you sit down and figure out what's a comfortable amount to give based on *your* budget. Remember, everyone has a limit, so be generous, but be realistic, too. You should also figure out how you're going to give: Monthly? Yearly? At certain times of the year?

When Chris and I were first married, we'd set aside some money every month and sit down together to think about how to spend it. I'd bring him four or five organizations to choose from and we'd talk about which one we wanted to support. These days, what I do is target about three-fourths of our charity budget for groups that I'm already committed to, which leaves one-fourth for people who come to me for funds. If their project fits my platform— at-risk children worldwide, breast cancer research, HIV/AIDS, women's issues, and education—and if I think the group is legitimate, I send a donation. I may not make my involvement with this group a long-term thing, but I'm thrilled to support them once, twice, or yes, maybe long-term if it works out that way.

A Little Goes a Long Way

One of the things that is hardest for people to understand is how impactful even a small donation can be. So often I've had people tell me that they'd like to give but that they can only afford to contribute \$50 or \$10 or even \$5 to an organization. Surely, they say, such an amount is far too tiny to make any difference, so why bother to give?

In fact, when it comes to giving, no donation is too small. Here a few examples of just how far your dollars can stretch:

- A \$5 gift to Table to Table (www.tabletotable.org), a hunger-relief organization in Bergen County, New Jersey, helps the group deliver lunches to fifty children, while \$10 given to the same group would help feed a family of four for a month.
- A mere \$30 a month—that's only a dollar a day—could help UNICEF (www.unicefusa.org) test twenty children for malaria, perhaps saving their lives from this treatable but potentially fatal disease.

- A \$50 donation to Free the Children (www.freethechildren.com), an international group whose goal is to end children's exploitation, would buy textbooks or sports equipment for a school. So the next time you consider making a donation and catch yourself thinking that it's too small, picture the children in Malawi or Thailand or even Bergen County, New Jersey, who are receiving lunch, or malaria shots, or textbooks. Think about the difference you're making in their lives. Think about them growing up happy, healthy, and strong because you took the time to send in a donation that, at the end of the year, you will hardly miss—but that they will remember forever. And then, click on that website icon or fill out that check, secure in the knowledge that you are truly making a difference.

Investigating Charities

So many people tell me that they'd like to give money to a charity but that they get scared about where their money is *really* going. I totally identify with this concern. What I'm not in favor of is deciding *not* to give because of this uncertainty, especially when it's now so easy to find out more about a charity.

The main thing you're concerned with is whether the organization is allocating enough of its income to actual services rather than spending money on overhead, fund-raising, events, or savings for the future. You're going to be most interested in the percentage of funds that goes to administrative costs, since those are the dollars *not* going to the people whom the charity is intended to benefit.

Basically, a group should be spending no more than 25 percent of its income on overhead, with at least 75 percent going to actual services. Anything more than 75 percent is really, really good. Anything between 50 and 75 percent should make you wary and want to ask some questions before donating, e.g., why is so much money going to expenses *other* than the work of the charity?

Most nonprofits list this information in their annual report, which you can find on their website. You can also ask any group to send you this information by mail or e-mail. Smaller groups may not produce a formal report and may not even have a website. Don't hold that against them, though, since they, too, should be able to send you financial information by mail or e-mail if you request it.

Groups That Can Help You Research Charities

You don't have to do all the work by yourself. The organizations listed here can help you determine whether a charity is legit—and whether it is operating efficiently.

Independent Charities of America (www.independentcharities.org)

One of the most respected charity-rating organizations in the country, this group awards the Independent Charities Seal of Excellence to member organizations that meet the group's highest standards. Of the 1 million charities operating in the United States today, fewer than two thousand have been awarded this seal.

Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org)

Charity Navigator provides information on more than five thousand charities, evaluating the financial health of each group it rates. The ratings are based on organizational efficiency and organizational capacity. If a charity spends less than a third of its budget on the programs and services it exists to provide, then Charity Navigator gives that charity a score of zero for organizational efficiency. Under "Tips" on this website you'll also find a very useful list: "The Top 10 Practices of Savvy Donors."

BBB Wise Giving Alliance (www.bbb.org/us/charity)

The BBB Wise Giving Alliance awards the BBB national charity seal to groups that meet its standards. Don't expect small, local charities to have a seal; only national charities are eligible. Among other requirements, the BBB expects charities to spend at least 65 percent of their total income on program activities and to spend no more than 35 percent of contributions on fund-raising. It also expects charities to avoid accumulating funds that could be used for current activities.

Simple Gifts: Five Fun Ways to “Pay Your Rent”

If you're interested in making a donation, you can feel great about writing a check. But if you have more time and want to try something different, there are lots of ways to make giving more fun—and to get your family, friends, and neighbors in on the good times as well! Here are seven simple ways to “pay your rent for living” while also providing you and your loved ones with a good time.

1. Have a Party!

Who doesn't enjoy spending time with family and friends—and this way you can do it in the name of a good cause. For example, you could choose a local charity and send an Evite to your family and friends to come over for a fun get-together complete with appetizers and cocktails or a playdate for the kids. Include information about the charity on the Evite and ask each guest to bring a prewritten check in a sealed envelope. Collect the checks as guests arrive and proceed with your event. This is a cool way to raise money without your guests feeling any pressure as well as a wonderful way to enjoy your friends' company! Or perhaps instead of asking guests to bring a check, ask them to bring designated items such as winter coats, shoes, professional work clothes, baby items, canned goods, and the like. Or you may consider asking guests to bring an assortment of travel-size toiletry items, such as toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, soap, razors, and so on. Have baskets, cellophane paper, ribbon, and scissors available for your guests so that they can create care packages while they enjoy your appetizers and cocktails. Then donate the items to such venues as a local homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, food bank, welfare-to-work organization, or teen support center, or send them to our soldiers overseas. Remember that people who are going through a life transition often don't have even the very basics, including diapers for their children, coats, shoes, and blankets. Your small gift can mean a great deal to someone in need.

2. Blessed Blooms

Whenever you host a special event, consider donating the floral arrangements from your special day to a local hospital. Just contact the community relations office of your local hospital and they'll help arrange for transportation. You can also ask your florist to transport the flowers—often, they'll say yes. The flowers are usually arranged in public areas where families and patients gather, but sometimes they're delivered to actual patient rooms. What a great way to share your special day with others!

3. Bowling for Dollars

Invite your friends and family to go bowling. Ask each person to bring along a check of any amount along with an idea for a charity to support. You bring pens, envelopes, and a basket to the bowling alley. Then whoever wins the game will have the honor of choosing the charity to which the basketful of checks will be given. Have the guests make out their own

checks and seal them into individual envelopes. When you get home, slip all the little envelopes inside one large manila envelope and drop it in the mail.

4. Spring- Cleaning Block Party

Send out flyers inviting your neighbors to join you for a spring cleaning block party. Together you can decide on a date for the event and choose a charity. Then make up more flyers and distribute them all over town. You might even convince a local newspaper to write a profile of your charitable neighborhood! This idea not only raises money and brings you closer to your neighbors but also helps you get rid of the items in your household that you no longer need.

5. Knit and Crochet for Good

Do you belong to a knitting or crochet circle? Why not designate a month where you knit or crochet for good? You might make hats and booties and donate them to a homeless shelter, domestic violence organization, or teen- parenting center. Or you could make shawls and blankets for the elderly. Use your creativity and enjoy the company of your fellow crafters while you make beautiful items for those in need.

Giving of Yourself

I hope I've given you a sense of all the ways you can pay *your* rent for living, making a difference just by doing simple things. In the next chapter, we'll take it a step further. I'll show you how to find groups right in your own area to volunteer with—and I'll share with you my own experiences of doing just that.

MY JOURNEY: AUTHOR AND ADVOCATE
TERRIE M. WILLIAMS

It was really such a pleasure to conduct an interview on volunteerism and service with Terrie M. Williams, my first boss, social worker by training, public relations guru, inspirational author, mental health advocate, and founder and president of the Stay Strong Foundation.

Q. When was your first volunteer experience? What did you do?

A. My first volunteer experience was actually as a Girl Scout—and later it was being the president of the Keyette Club at Mt. Vernon High School. We were a community service organization founded to participate and engage in activities, such as volunteering at local nursing homes and tutoring children, that would uplift our town.

Q: Who influenced your life, in terms of giving back and serving others?

A. My parents sowed the seeds for and influenced my philanthropic spirit. My sister and I were taught to always share with others—and to remember that we are all one. “The best and the blessed of us must take care of others.”

Q. What has been one of the most meaningful ways that you have given back to society?

A. Connecting with an individual's spirit, acknowledging, smiling, and saying hello to people who we meet in our travels who are often ignored and considered “nobodies,” literally transforms both spirits. Founding the Stay Strong Foundation in 2001, an organization serving youth, whose motto is “If we don't give our kids time, the system will.” Finally, the outpouring of e-mails and letters from people responding to my work in the field of mental health has been *the* most inspiring—waking people up to naming our pain and explaining what depression looks like, sounds like, and feels like in the black community is gratifying.

My book *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting* and the Stay Strong Foundation's Healing Starts with Us campaign has transformed thousands of lives and has begun the healing of so many of our distressed communities across the nation.

Q. What makes you choose to support a particular initiative or service project?

A. There is an overwhelming sense of need in humanity. We must share ourselves with one another. We must guard ourselves from overload; therefore, I match my involvement based on whether I or someone I care for has been touched by a cause.

Q. Since you are a very busy career woman, how do you balance your professional and service obligations?

A. Terrie "Plus One," an "outside the office" opportunity for young people to join me and other professionals to attend black- tie fundraisers, corporate and private dinners, movie premieres, sports events, awards shows, speaking engagements, and special events. We have fun and introduce our young people to others and new situations. Since there are other people at these events, we encourage them to interact with the kids . . . and it's not solely on our shoulders. Our youth have to be at the table with us if they are going to hope, dream, aspire.

Q. What is your advice to someone who wants to serve and give back but does not know where to start?

A. There are many websites available that will match your talents with a local not- for- profit organization that is seeking volunteers. Also, I encourage individuals who are passionate about a cause that is not being addressed to form their own organization or coalition. Watch, look, and listen—everywhere you go.

Q. Though I know you support many endeavors, your passion is the Stay Strong Foundation. Can you tell us about this foundation and its mission?

A. The Stay Strong Foundation is a New York-based 501(c)(3) not for profit organization that works to support, educate, and inspire America's youth through a series of programs and events that are designed to raise awareness of teen issues, promote the personal well- being of young people, and enhance their educational and professional development. The foundation encourages corporate and individual responsibility and develops educational resources for youth and youth organizations. We launched in July 2009 a campaign in partnership with the Ad Council, SAMHSA, and the Grey Group to address the issue of mental health in the black community. Our message is "Share ourselves . . . Healing starts with us."

Q. What can the average person do to help your platform of raising awareness and funding for mental health issues?

A. Visit our website at www.thestaystrongfoundation.org and www.healingstartswithus.net to find out what the signs of depression are in everyday language—what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like—and spread the word.

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