

S E V E N

Gifts That Keep on Giving

NEXT DOOR TO my library in Little Rock, Arkansas, is the world headquarters of Heifer International, founded in 1944 by Dan West, who was a relief worker during the Spanish Civil War. That experience convinced him that what poor and suffering people really need far more than temporary help is the ability to support themselves. So he began shipping them cows.

Sixty-three years later, Heifer has evolved into one of the world's most successful and widely acclaimed givers for two reasons. First, it works to end world hunger by giving cows, goats, and other food and income-producing livestock and agricultural goods to poor families around the world. The animals are now bought locally to maximize resistance to local diseases and to help local economies. They produce milk, eggs, wool, and meat, enhancing nutrition and earning money for education, health care, better housing, and small-business endeavors. Heifer partners with local groups to ensure that the agriculture it supports is sustainable, promoting animal health, and water quality, soil conservation,

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and efficient energy use. Heifer also champions equality for women and community development.

Fittingly, because of its commitment to a sustainable environment, the new international headquarters was built making maximum use of recycled materials, capturing and using rainwater, and conserving energy. I believe that the Heifer headquarters and my library, which has a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, will soon be the only two adjacent headquarters buildings in America to receive one of the top two LEED certifications.

The second reason for Heifer's success is that those who receive its animals are required to share the first offspring with others in need, thus multiplying the impact of all donated animals and making their recipients partners in the struggle against hunger and poverty. Since 1944, Heifer has given animals to 10 million people, but through the ritual of "Passing on the Gift," it has helped more than 45 million people in 128 countries around the world, with plans to reach 23 million more by the end of the decade. Heifer's message and methods go out to millions of others every year through the media, its own publications, and its three learning centers in the United States, where fifty thousand people annually are taught how to serve small farmers through teaching sustainable practices like organic gardening and alternative marketing methods.

In 2006, Heifer had 726 projects in twenty-nine states in the United States and fifty-seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, central and eastern Europe, the Asia-Pacific region, Canada, and Mexico. In addition to its gifts of cows, goats, sheep, turkeys, pigs, and fish, the animals it supplies include agouti, alpacas, bees, camels, ducks, earthworms, elephants, geese, guinea fowl, guinea pigs,

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horses, llamas, mules, oxen, rabbits, silkworms, snails, water buffalo, and yaks.

Heifer's animals dramatically improve the lives of poor people. Elmfus Lembusha, a Tanzanian farmer, was trying to support an extended family of sixteen on an acre of farmland when Heifer sent him goats to produce milk and manure to make the land more productive, improve the family's nutrition, and provide them with a steady cash income. A river village in the Dominican Republic forced to relocate by a dam construction project survived and prospered when Heifer gave the villagers goats and trained them in how to care for the animals and how to make the soil fertile for growing livestock feed. A Kenyan widow with three children received a cow that restored her family's health and income. In northern Peru, Heifer provided families not only with animals but also with fuel-efficient kitchen stoves that are safer than open fires and don't require cutting trees for firewood.

When I spoke at the dedication of the Heifer World Headquarters in 2006, one of the beneficiaries in the audience was Beatrice Biira of Kisinga, a small village on the equator in western Uganda. In the early 1990s, Beatrice, her parents, and five brothers and sisters were struggling to survive when they received one of twelve goats Heifer donated to Kisinga. Beatrice had always wanted to go to school, but her family was too poor to afford the school fees. Within a year her mother had earned enough money selling goat's milk to pay the fees. Eventually, she was able to send all the rest of her children to school with her earnings from selling milk and the goat's offspring (after passing on the gift of the first one).

Beatrice completed the first three grades in three months each, showing such promise that Dick Young, producer of a Heifer documentary film that featured her village, helped

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pay for her enrollment at a more advanced school in Kampala, Uganda's capital. From there she went for a year to a prestigious American prep school, Northfield Mount Hermon in Massachusetts, then on to Connecticut College on a scholarship. While there, Beatrice served as an intern in Hillary's Senate office. She has been featured on *60 Minutes* and by Oprah Winfrey, a Heifer supporter. Her remarkable story is chronicled in *Beatrice's Goat*, an engaging children's book written by Page McBrier and illustrated by Lori Lohstoeter. Beatrice wants to go home and use her education to benefit her people by forming a school for poor kids, taking care of AIDS orphans, or running a farm that helps other children the way Heifer helped her and her family.

It all started with a goat named Mugisa (which means "Luck"). But it didn't end there, because Beatrice's family and the other eleven families completed their obligation to pass on the gift, putting twelve more families on the path to working themselves out of poverty.

Passing on the gift turns every Heifer recipient into a better citizen and a mini-NGO. A Nepalese women's group, Gurung Gaon, used a Heifer water buffalo to improve their lot. Beyond passing on the offspring, the women saved enough of their income to buy one hundred geese for five families in China. The group leader, Leela Tamang, said, "Before Heifer, I didn't know what sharing was." Ghanaian farmer Anthony Gygrengye Kodom and his wife, Mercy Dansua, are members of a farmers' group supported by Heifer. In 2005, they received twenty chickens and five beehives and passed on their gift within just seven months, then grew their operation to include more than seven hundred laying hens and twenty-five beehives. They also went beyond their gift requirement, providing land to their farmers' cooperative for communal chicken coops. Women in a Heifer project in Zimbabwe passed on twice as many pigs as

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required because they wanted more women to enjoy the same prosperity they did. In the Dominican Republic fifty-eight families have gone so far beyond the requirement that those receiving dairy cattle have increased more than tenfold, to 650 families.

When I was back in Arkansas for the Heifer headquarters opening, one of the local TV stations ran a story on black farmers in the Mississippi Delta passing on the first offspring of Heifer-provided cows. As governor and as president, I tried to help farmers like them who wanted to hold on to their farms or get back into farming. More of them will do so because of Heifer's gifts and the practice of passing them on.

Just a decade ago, Heifer was still a modest operation, raising \$6 to \$7 million a year. In 2006, contributions reached \$80 million, thanks to good publicity, celebrity support, effective marketing, and energetic and visionary leadership. The Heifer president, Jo Luck, is passionate and relentless in her pursuit of supporters and new recipients. She's equally comfortable talking to corporate CEOs and celebrities and sitting on the ground in Africa, Asia, and Latin America listening to villagers talk about their lives.

Heifer's rapid growth doesn't mean the organization can't use your support. Remember, nearly a billion people still live on less than a dollar a day, and about 820 million go to bed hungry every night. There is virtually no limit to the good Heifer can do. Donors know the program works. And best of all, by turning every beneficiary into a donor, your gift just keeps on giving.

Nearly everyone can make a meaningful contribution. You can give a heifer for \$500 or a share of one for \$50; a water buffalo for \$250, or a share for \$25; a llama for \$150, or a share for \$20; a sheep, goat, or pig for \$120, or a share for \$10; a trio of rabbits for \$60; bees, a beehive, and a training kit for \$30; a group of ducks, geese, or chickens for \$20.

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Young students who want to contribute to Heifer can participate in Read to Feed, in which sponsors pay them for the books they read. Last year the effort raised \$1.2 million.

I have devoted an entire chapter to Heifer because I believe that if the concept of “Passing on the Gift” were to be integrated into other giving programs wherever possible, it would dramatically increase the impact of good works at almost no cost. What if all the givers of money, time, and skills required the recipients of their gifts to do something, however modest, for others in similar situations? In a sense, that’s what happens when those who benefit from NGO leadership-training programs will pass along the skills they’ve learned. Of course, it won’t work in all cases. Infants with AIDS, for instance, are giving back enough if they just survive and go on to a normal childhood. But there are many other efforts in which the positive value of giving could be multiplied by asking the beneficiaries to pass on the gift.

For example, at the midyear meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative in April 2007, the crowd was brought to its feet by a beautifully eloquent seventeen-year-old South African girl who had been helped by the Ubuntu Education Fund, which provides support to orphans and vulnerable children (*ubuntu* means “I am because you are” in the Xhosa language). Zethu lost both her parents to AIDS a few years ago and assumed the responsibility for raising her two young siblings with no idea even of how to feed them. An Ubuntu caseworker, Fezeka Mzalazala, helped Zethu to stay in school and work through her emotional and financial problems. After experiencing how Fezeka’s support enabled her to turn her life around, Zethu said she wanted to “spread the spirit of Ubuntu” by creating a support group for ten younger orphaned girls to discuss the issues they face, help them cope, and bring them the benefits of Ubuntu counseling. Zethu found a way to pass on her gift.

In the United States, the best example I’ve found of pass-

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ing on the gift is the Page Education Foundation. Founded in 1988 by Alan and Diane Page, it offers scholarships to deserving students of color in Minnesota to help them with the costs of a post-secondary education. During his fifteen-year career in the NFL, which earned him a place in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Alan earned a law degree. After leaving professional football, he was elected a justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. He and Diane wanted to give other young people of color the chance to develop their potential: “We know there is no shortage of potential—only a shortage of appropriate support and encouragement.” Since its inception, the Page Foundation has provided more than \$6 million in grants to 3,000 Page scholars, almost 600 in 2006 alone.

In return for the grant, every Page scholar agrees to spend at least fifty hours an academic year mentoring or tutoring younger children of color from kindergarten through eighth grade. Many volunteer well above the fifty-hour requirement in established programs operated by schools, libraries, and community organizations. In 2006, the scholars helped more than ten thousand children. In so doing, they provided young children with both academic support and vivid role models of what they can become if they stay in school and apply themselves. It’s a wonderful way of passing on the gift.

Bernard Rapoport, the legendary ninety-year-old Texas philanthropist and social activist, and his wife, Audre, agree. They give about \$400,000 a year in “service learning” scholarships—with a community-service component—to University of Texas students. Students are required to immediately pass on their gift, and in so doing, to enhance their own learning.

If you’re already involved in service work, I hope you’ll think about whether and how those you’re trying to help can also pass on their gifts.