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Oprah's Legacy



Oprah Winfrey has raised the bar and the lives of African girls will not be the same anymore. She has driven home the concept that one person can change the world, one little girl at a time. Through the investment of her own wealth, she has changed the lives of hundreds of young girls whose existence were a bastion of emptiness, helplessness and profound hopelessness. These girls had stopped being little girls a long time ago, some due to the deaths of their beloved parents and others due to the savagery of rape and some form of servitude. These are girls; some once considered throwaways and now may, due to her selfless generosity, control future boardrooms in corporate Africa and greatly affect how their society treat girls and the impoverished. Oprah has brought hope to girls who have experienced the ugliness and loneliness that a cold world has dished to them in quantities that we can only imagine. She has lit a fire underneath dying human embers, fanned them with love and unimaginable kindness, and lifted their spirits to dream of accomplishing the highest levels of academic objectives and other unrivaled possibilities.

Surely, many American philanthropists have and continue to reach out to Africa with its struggle to overcome some of the most devastating man made tragedies and the catastrophic impact of the relentless and fiercely unfriendly ecosystems. In the middle of the tragedy of Dafur where man's inhumanity to his fellowman reduces even a seasoned aide worker to uncontrollable and body-wracking sobs, they forge on, undeterred by the enormity of the need in Africa. Noted celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have reached out to an African little girl. Madonna, despite the controversy surrounding her intention to adopt a little African boy, has held steadfast in her resolve. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation continue to pour millions of dollars into Africa to support agricultural projects that help to feed the masses, and immense support for HIV/AIDS research. Countless other notable African American churches and foundations large and small continue to reach out to the millions of displaced people who have only these generous citizens of the world as their stay. For years, the World Council of Religions for

Peace (WCRP) has supported innumerable non-governmental organizations doing the best they can with what they have to work with, to change the lives of families for the better.

However, there is something uniquely different about Oprah's approach. She did not send people to South Africa to identify candidates for her school in the hopes that they will make the right choices. Instead, she invested her personal time traveling in between the taping of the Oprah Winfrey Show, to South Africa with her pack of volunteers, to see, feel and experience the conditions surrounding young girls discarded as irrelevant citizens, humbled by poverty, dogged by racism and isolated by sexism. Oprah selected these young girls because of the fires she saw in their eyes, hope in their hearts, the light in their souls and their fierce desire for academic achievement. Their squalid existence did not dampen their faith that someday their day in the sun shall come. They could not have imagined that the bearer of the sun shall come from across the seas in the person of an African American woman, a descendant of Africa's stolen children who has risen from obscurity to become one of the worlds most admired women. A woman who has shaken off all terror of opposition from skeptics and nay-sayers, and keep a promise made to her dearest friend, former South African President, Nelson Mandela. Her promise was to open a school in South Africa to help educate South African girls. She has picked them up from slums and remote villages, spruced them up, held them up in warm motherly embrace and showed them that dreams do not come true only when you wish upon a star, but can outside Disneyworld, and outside the affluence of suburbia. Oprah Winfrey revisited her troubled past, reviewed her own trials and tribulations, has drawn strength from her own triumph, and moved forward. Armed with her strong divine love for children in the land of her ancestors, with determination and the support of her many friends, she created a vision that will forever change the nature of philanthropy.

Unlike many programs that throw money at the problems, Oprah has incorporated dignity, beauty and an extra measure of compassion to shroud these young girls, some in desperate need of a mother's love, with pure unadulterated majesty. They are preparing to become tomorrow's women, South Africa's future leaders, reared in poverty but groomed to ride the freedom bus of destiny. Implanted in their minds, is the reminder that those to whom much is given, even more is expected.

Many have challenged the wisdom behind Oprah's decision to go to Africa to create a group of elite black girls who some contend really do not need that much affluence to become the achievers that they could, if given a moderate level of opportunity. Oprah however sees it differently. According to her statements made in numerous interviews, she feels that people surrounded by beauty, begin to expect and perceive beauty where there had been drudgery and gloom. Many of these girls had never known anything but pain and suffering. I would not expect anything less from Oprah. These were her girls, her daughters. Sanity wonders who would deserve the best that she can offer any more than they?

Furthermore, Oprah understands that when you empower women, you empower a nation! When these girls receive their education, I imagine that it will include self-esteem

development, nation building and knowledge of the wealth in their country. They will learn how to harness them for the betterment of South Africans. Their bloodline will be reared to include philanthropy as part of their educational agenda and a requirement for their African citizenship. They will help to stop Africa's bleeding.

As a Nigerian woman living in the United States of America, I have asked myself what Oprah's unrivaled generosity means to me. It means that I was right for years, as I have endeavored to reach out to children in my country and right here in the US community. She reminds me that I must continue to render my talents to uplift and empower young lives subdued by birthright, which they should be proud of, yet hindered by it. Oprah reminds me, in the actions she has taken, that I can selflessly give all that I can humanly give, to shower rainbow dusts on dreary lives. My spirit is high from the knowledge that she is the reason and the cause of the budding and sprouting of flowers that have lain dormant for years, but are now beautiful, colorful blooms..., and I can too. I realize that I cannot do so as elaborately as she has, but I can through every means available to me...with the help of many caring and loving people...leave a legacy of love. My father reminded me until the day he ascended to a higher spiritual realm that I do not have the right to die until I have made a difference and never to live anywhere unknown. "When you leave this earth, what would your tombstone say?" he asked me persistently. He was such an inspiration to me, as well as my mother who challenged her daughters to reject the limitations wrongfully assigned to womanhood and dream the impossible dreams. Now I can add Oprah to my list of motivators.

The world has gotten closer. When altruistic people refuse to be hampered by arguments and haggling over where to express their kindness, wherever there is a need becomes more relevant. What joy it is for me to see a world that can now see little black girls as future leaders who are worth investing in to revive a dying continent. Womanhood no longer carries the stigma of weakness but the formidable and potent force needed to fight poverty and illiteracy. Women are now poised to reenact Africa's glorious past and greatness.

There are many high spirited, keen and intelligent girls throughout Africa anticipating their own day in the sun. I am sure that Oprah will venture into other lands ultimately in search of other miracles yet to be unfolded. We shall embrace her but do realize that we too must step forward ahead of her. It is not her responsibility to bear the burden of the world on her shoulders. She has opened the door of philanthropy wider to expose the unimaginable human rewards associated with it. I would like to see the sons and daughters of Africa arise from backstreets and boardrooms, from record stores and coffee shops, from hair braiding and barber shops, record studios and medical offices, corporate America and corporate Africa, from wherever the children of Africa congregate globally, reach out and take the baton from Oprah Winfrey. The track has new asphalt; the lines are visible for all to see. The hurdles were yesterday's event. It is now straight 100 yards dash. The track is now open. Let the human race of kindness, altruism and volunteerism begin. We may still save the children of Africa and give it back its heart and soul.

I would like to see America reach out to the girls that struggle in the inner cities of America, where hope has dampened and apathy reins. We must use our collective resources and talents to make the reality of South African girls a benchmark for girls throughout the world. Oh, and there is a matter of the lost boys...baton anyone?



Jerell Watkins on prom night.

Jerell is a handsome twenty -year -old African American young man with a bright smile and huge heart. He is the very loving son of a close-knit family in Pontiac Michigan. When most young men tattoo the names of their girlfriends on their bodies, this fine son has Michelle, his mother's name tattooed on his arm.

He is a hero to his 10-year-old brother who now wonders when he would have another opportunity to skate with his brother... an activity he shared faithfully with Jerell every weekend.



This is a picture of the Prayer Bracelet made by Michelle Watkins, Jerell's mother. All \$50 or more donors will receive this bracelet. Wear it and keep the prayers growing while at the same time helping our fundraising effort.

Visit [AWEOnline](#), Biz to the Marathon Runner link and make your donations.

Where there is Hope Miracles Happen Jerell's fight for life. The Story of Jerell Watkins

Jerell is a good son, who stayed close to home and never got into any trouble with the law. He aspired to go into the construction business with his Dad Jerome Watkins. He adored his 19-year-old girlfriend Kailey, who calls him "My Knight in shiny armor". Jerell 's very bright future ended at the hands of a man who did not even know him or what he means to his family and the community. On August 6, 2006, Jerell was a victim of a violent crime. A white man with a long history of criminal behavior stabbed him four times, as he exited his lovely girlfriend's car at the Glengarry apartments in Pontiac Michigan. He was stabbed once in the face, arm, shoulder and chest, puncturing his lung and heart. Due to the stab wound in his chest, Jerell had a lack of oxygen, which has left him in a coma for the past four months. Because of the injuries, he has many medical devices helping him live, such as a tracheotomy, feeding tube, and a Foley catheter.

The need to assist Jerell in his effort to overcome his challenges cannot be overstated. We can all contribute something in any way that we can to assist him. We are excited that the United Way will be assisting in some measure, to offset the cost of some of his needs but we need so much more. We have submitted Jerell's story to the Extreme Makeover television show to see if they will be willing to help. We would like to see other organizations such as churches, schools, and other community organizations step up to the plate and assist us to provide quality care for this young man. He needs bed pads, Suction Catheters, bandages and an opportunity for physical therapy.

It is amazing that young people who commit crimes are more apt to get media attention than a young man who through no fault of his own is now experiencing the pitfalls of being the victim of the ugliness inherent in our society.

*What has been a profound realization to me is that many organizations that profess to care about members of their community and preach the love of God fail miserably when approached to offer their assistance to people in need. The excuses have been creative and frankly, sad. One pastor consumed with what Jerell's religious affiliation is before he could even consider calling the family and show how **godly** he is, never did. I dare say that despite our efforts, the so-called man of God who parades his love of God and for humanity on his religious television, has not found the time to share some words of consolation to this family.*

The good news is that God has Jerell in his loving hands and we fully anticipate the glorious day when he shall rise from his bed and walk again. We know it, claim it and have the Champagne chilling for the celebration....want ice?

Next Month, more update on Jerell.

Shantrell Griffin- Gods Living Treasure

On Saturday 18, 2007, I met an Angel. Oh, she was not the typical Angel you read about in the Bible or see in biblical pictures. I dare say that you cannot find this Angel anywhere else but here on earth. This Angel was real. She was flesh and blood.....a human treasure.

I was having one of those days where nothing seemed to go well, yet everything went right. On this Saturday, I lost my car keys and desperately ran throughout the house looking for it. I was running late for my appointment as well as my daughter's friend birthday party! I ran outside to see if I left the keys in the car and dropped my handbag on the snow. When I picked up my handbag, there were the keys in the snow, underneath where the bag had dropped!

I went to the bank, withdrew \$100, dropped my daughter off at the great Lakes crossing mall where they were to celebrate her friends 15th birthday, gave her \$20 and the same to the birthday celebrant. As left, I lost my earrings in the parking lot of the theater, got ready to drive off and a woman runs behind my car shouting" Ma'am I found what you were looking for". At this time, I was getting a bit flustered.

Nonetheless, I rushed off to my meeting. Afterwards I stopped at the TGIF in Southfield Michigan for a salad, had the meal but could not pay! I had dropped my money somewhere! As I desperately searched for the money, I gave the waiter my purse to hold as I ran to the car to see if I dropped my money there, or perhaps left it in my coat pocket. No luck! I went back into the restaurant and asked the Manger if I could use the phone to contact a friend who lived nearby (I know, where was my phone you ask?.... never mind!). No luck! My friend was not picking up.....small wonder since in the moment of confusion, I was calling the wrong number!. Oh and I had forgotten to put my credit card back in my wallet, so I could not pay with that either.....the darned thing was on my bedroom dresser where it belonged, right? Never ever, rush out of the house....really!.

The TGIF Manager had that expression on his face that quickly told me he was not buying my story! The humiliation was taking hold; I was nauseous and felt faint. Suddenly just when I thought the day was really going to end on a bad note, a soft hand touched my arm. I turned to face a most gentle creature. A young African American woman named Shantrell Griffin. "Did you lose your purse Ma'am "she asked? Words cannot express my relief when I heard that question. Shantrell proceeded to pay for my lunch. Oh I know it was not a million dollars. However, it felt like it to me. I returned to the restaurant and formally introduced myself to her as the President of the African Women Economic Consortium and reminded Shantrell that in life, you never know whom you shall meet.

You never know how your actions will influence the lives of others and yours as well.

I shall formally extend an invitation to Shantrell and her friend so that they can attend AWEC's "Against all Odds" event in September '07 at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, featuring women who have achieved phenomenal success and make a difference in other people's lives. Shantrell and her friend will be AWEC's special guests. I want the world to meet my new friend, a young woman who just in time gave me back my dignity and reminded me that a friend can be a stranger.

Thank you ShantrellYou are God's living treasure.....and I thought my list of phenomenal women was complete!