The A Campaign

An Honors Thesis (JOURN 495)

by

Laura Merz

Thesis Advisor
Michael Hanley

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Abstract

Stories are most easily told in person, as body language, facial expression and voice inflection provide tremendous aide to any message. For this project, however, I was challenged to convert such a story into a digital format. Stories can be powerful, but only if they are heard. With our increasing access to technology, stories can be shared with people near and far, if they are compiled into a single, cohesive and powerful piece.

My story follows my journey from Muncie, Indiana to Liberia, West Africa, where I founded a philanthropic organization last spring. Starting with my desire to travel, it chronicles a brief history of Liberia, development of the campaign, and finishes with the lasting effect the journey had on my life.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Michael Hanley for his guidance over the past four years. His help during this project is only a small fraction of the advising I have received from him during my time at Ball State.

I would also like to recognize all those who supported me during my time in Liberia. Thank you to my friends and family, supporters of the A Campaign, Seren Frost of L.A.C.E.S., the Samaritans Purse staff, and my wonderful host family, the Chapmans.

Lastly, I’d like to thank my dear friend and co-founder, David Bond. This project would not have been possible without his time, talents, and heart. Alberta’s life and mine are forever changed because of his compassion. Thank you, David.
Author’s Statement

While I learned the importance of storytelling my freshman year during my journalism courses, it wasn’t until I saw it in action that I understood its power. This fall, the founder of Falling Whistles, Sean Carasso, spoke to a full house at Emens Auditorium. He discussed how his organization advocates for peace in the Congo to an audience more captivated than I had ever seen; Sean had mastered the art of storytelling. As Sean told his story, I started to reflect on my own. While I had told it many times in person, I had yet to write it down. For my thesis, I implemented my skills in copy writing and graphic design to narrate my story digitally. It is written for web, and includes photos, video, and links to additional information.

My story has always been told in many words, and would be easy to convey as a novel. However, for this project I challenged myself to tell it in as few words as possible. Without leaving out any important aspects of the story, I have compiled my journey into a concise and cohesive single piece.

The story of Falling Whistles informed and inspired every student that heard it. I hope that through this project, I can inform and inspire others as well.
Works Cited


The A Campaign
Once upon a time,

Just before my final semester of college, I decided it was now or never for a **big adventure**. Graduation was just around the corner, and a full time job was sure to follow. If I wanted to see the **world**, I needed to do it soon. So I pleaded with my parents and packed my bags.

On February 12, 2011, I left Muncie, Indiana for Liberia, West Africa on an adventure that would change my life. During my journey I met a little African girl named Alberta.

This is our story.
Liberia:

The third poorest country in the entire world →

Bordered by the Ivory Coast on the east,
Guinea on the north,
and Sierra Leone on the west.

Where the average person lives off less than $1 a day,
and doesn't have access to clean, safe drinking water.
A country devastated by war

Where villages were plundered
men were shot
women were raped
and children were kidnapped

then forced to kill.
For **fourteen** long years, [ from 1989 until 2003 ]
Liberia suffered through bloody civil war.

The fighting left hospital facilities looted and **destroyed**, health professionals forced to flee or **killed**, and the country’s medical infrastructure **crippled**.
While the road to recovery is painful and long, the Liberian people are resilient.

Let me introduce you to an example → → →
She is 5 years old and her name is Alberta.
I noticed the scar on Alberta’s forehead, and asked her grandmother, “What happened?”
I was unprepared for the answer.
When Alberta was three years old, she fell into hot frying oil.

Miraculously, she survived.

Her burns were extensive, and with access to only Liberia’s poor medical care, her treatment was minimal.

During her painful recovery, the burned skin on her upper arm and torso fused together, leaving Alberta severely deformed.

Her condition not only caused her physical pain, but would inevitably cause her a life of hardship and ostracism because of her deformity.
My heart broke.

I didn’t know what I could do, but I knew I had to try.
I took Alberta’s photos, and emailed them to a dentist. 

...Let me explain.

Mercy Ships is an organization that takes old cruise ships and revamps them into floating hospitals. The ships travel to third world countries providing first world care. Keith, an American missionary dentist based in Liberia, was temporarily on one.
The ship he was on was docked in Sierra Leone → → →

Could Alberta get help there?
I waited and waited and waited.

[ The next 24 hours felt like an eternity. ]

At last, I received a reply from Sierra Leone.
And the answer was yes.

Yes, there is a surgery to fix a burn contracture such as this.

Yes, we can perform that surgery here on the ship.

Yes, we will accept Alberta as a patient even though she is not from Sierra Leone.

All you have to do is get her here.
I couldn’t wait to tell Alberta’s family the news. I drove to her village as soon as I could.

The feeling of joy was remarkable,

but I knew my fight for Alberta was just beginning.
With only enough cash to fund the remainder of my own trip, how was I possibly going to fund Alberta’s journey cross country?

It wasn’t a matter of if she was going to get to Sierra Leone, but it sure was a matter of how.
I sat and
I thought and
I had an idea.

I called my Liberian friend, Jon,
who carves beautiful coconut jewelry.

I called my American friend, David,
who creates beautiful web design.

I sketched layouts,
outlined ideas,
plotted and planned.

And late that night, the A Campaign was born.
A web site to tell people her story.

A bracelet they could purchase to fund her travels.

A solution to the problem.
Generating the idea was easy.

Bringing the idea to life was not.

Communication was a huge struggle
and logistics were a nightmare.

Phone calls from Africa to North America between David and I constantly dropped.

Jon's broken English and my inability to understand the local dialect hurt our conversations.

There is no postal system in Liberia, and no UPS or FedEx to ship bracelets from Liberia to the states.
However, with a little perseverance, patience and creativity, the site was live.

David purchased the first bracelet to make sure the functionality of the site was in working order.

The Steven bought a bracelet.

Then Becca.
Then Kevin.
Then Kelly.
Then Robert.
Then Tracy.
Then Kristie.
Then Daniel.
Then Melissa.
Then Andy.
Then Nick.
We asked people to donate their voice.
David and I told all of our friends, who told their friends, who told their friends.

At first the bracelets were selling to people we knew, moms dads aunts uncles classmates roommates but soon they were selling to people we didn’t.
Less than a week later,
the A Campaign had raised enough money
to fund Alberta’s journey to Sierra Leone,

+ thanks to David and Jon
and people like you.
When it was time to leave for Sierra Leone, Alberta climbed into the van with a smile on her face.

She had never before been outside of her village; she gazed out the window until she grew tired.
We crossed into Sierra Leone and prepared to say our goodbyes.

I hugged Alberta tightly, wondering when I’d ever see her again.

I thought saying goodbye would be the hardest part of the journey, but I was about to be proven wrong.
While reentering Liberia we were stopped by Sierra Leonean guards.

The rising volume of their voices was terrifying; they shouted in a language that I did not understand.

My mind raced with the worst possible scenarios.
At last, the guards allowed us to pass, and I was overwhelmed with relief.
I returned to Liberia that evening excited.

Alberta was one step closer to a brighter future.
The following months were filled with waiting, waiting to hear if Alberta received her surgery waiting for updates on her recovery but they were also filled with joy.

The surgery was successful and she made a full recovery.
But even with this news, the wait was not over.

I still wait for the day I’ll see Alberta again.

I don’t know when that day will come, but I have no doubt that it will.
I cried when I packed to leave Liberia, but it wasn’t until I got home that I realized I’d left something behind.

My heart broke the day I met Alberta, and she kept a tiny piece of it. She will always be a part of my story, and consequently, a part of me.
I never expected to take on a project like the A Campaign, but I am incredibly thankful that I did.
In both big and small ways, the campaign made a difference.

Over a thousand people visited the web site where they learned a **new story**, Alberta made it to the Mercy Ship where she got a **new arm**, and I left a part of me in Liberia, where I gained a **new faith**.
A faith that I can make miracles happen,
but that I can’t make them happen alone,

that it only takes one spark
to get a fire going,

and that one of the most powerful weapon
a person can fight with is a story.
Alberta’s story changed my life.

I hope that in some small way, our story can change yours.
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