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Edmonton, AB

A Troop of Hearts

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I stopped working for a moment and pushed up my large straw hat to look up at the blistering hot sun. The soil under my bare feet was almost completely dry. I had to water it every day with a watering can and a pump because we were trying to grow squashes and turnips. There were no more berries, as the sun had dried them out. I was outside on my family's small farm. My mother was at the front of the house, or the "store" called "The Crop of Hearts" selling fruit. Sighing, I returned to my work – watering the soil and digging out any weeds. We could not afford any power tools, so we did all of the work by hand. Soon it was almost too dark to work, not because it was late, but because the sun was setting behind the huge "presidential house" of our dictator.

That's what life is like in Haiti, a country that's been struggling for a long time. Ever since the earthquake things have been falling apart. First, many people died and there was a lot of poverty. Then, as if to add to our problems, Baby Doc returned and was "re-elected". Since then he has restarted his terrifying corrupt rule with an iron grip. My parents didn't like the way he abused his power, but they kept their opinions to themselves to keep our family safe. The only person they voiced their opinions to was me, Frantz Gorges Alain. I was born and raised on this small farm. I've been helping my father Azacca by picking the fruits and veggies since I was able to walk. When I turned 12, my parents decided I was old enough to take orders at the front of the shop while they were out of the house getting more seeds.

Since then, I've been working extra hard by picking the food, taking orders and tending to the gardens. It was the same routine day after day with nothing exciting happening until one day I saw an old, bedraggled woman hobbling into the shop.

"How may I help you?" I asked politely.

"May I please have three squashes and two turnips?"

"That will be 8 gourdes and 36 centimes."

"I'm sorry. I don't have that much money."

"Really?"

"Yes, I am very poor; nobody wants to hire me, because I have a problem with my leg, so I don't have a job."

"Oh sorry, here you go."

I handed her the food, as well as an extra couple turnips for later. She smiled and walked away quietly. It felt great giving something to somebody less fortunate than me, so I returned the smile. In a few minutes I closed up the shop and walked around town. I looked around and saw the old lady I gave the food to. She was walking down the street giving some of her food to people. It was great to see, somebody giving to others. Then I realized how I could help people. I could give them the food they needed.

The next day I left the house with an armful of food and I handed some of it out to anybody who needed it. I turned around when I was almost out. I kept some in my bag for my family so I wouldn't have to gather more when I got home. But when I saw a beggar in the alley who I missed, I decided to give her half of what I had left. When I got close enough, I noticed there were two children beside her, I gave her what I had.

"Here you go."

"Oh, we don't need *that* much, here, have this." She said in a motherly while giving me back a squash and two radishes.

"Thank you!" I said while walking away. It was amazing to see how anybody, no matter who they were, or how little they had, could give. As I was walking back home I thought I was lucky my parents weren't here. What would they say if they found out that I wasn't making any money, and that I was just giving out free food?

The next day I went out with even more food and handed almost all of it out again. The more I spoke to people the more I learned about what happened after the earthquake. I found out all the foreign relief funds and troops stopped arriving, they figured that it was a waste of money sending things to a "hopeless country".

But, I don't think that we're hopeless. We have people who are willing to give what little they have to help others. With a simple act of sharing food, we have become a community. We have love. We have much to offer but we now see how our happiness is being suppressed by Duvalier. Our 'esteemed' leader is keeping us from having jobs, decent healthcare and even food. We can't let this be the way that we live.

As I walk and give food I have been talking to people to see what they want from their country. Do they want to continue with no rights or do they want to fight for their freedom? Slowly, people are starting to talk more openly about how dire our situation really is. We needed to find a way to help our people escape from Duvalier's grasp forever. We decided it was time to defend our country. It started small – a small protest outside of the Presidential House. But that quickly grew.

What Duvalier thought was nothing to worry about turned into a massive protest. We all shouted our slogans and waved our flags. We did that for two months and three days. We slept on the streets and everyday my parents came from our store 'Crop of Hearts' to bring food to the troops fighting for their rights. They called us "A Troop of Hearts."

Finally, it was over. Baby Doc left for a 'meeting' back in France, and just never came back. In the years that followed I was recognized for my efforts to give hope to a 'hopeless' country and given a citizenship award! The Troop of Hearts protest is used as a lesson on what happens if you never give up, but I think the moral should have been that if you help your community, you can help the world. I now know that it was better to give to others and to take all opportunities to help my community. But, I hope I will never be the only 'great' citizen in the world, as long as others continue to help their community and do what is right for everyone, not just themselves. I hope my memoirs will inspire others to help those who are less fortunate and the world becomes a better place filled with many great young citizens.

-President Frantz Gorges Alain-