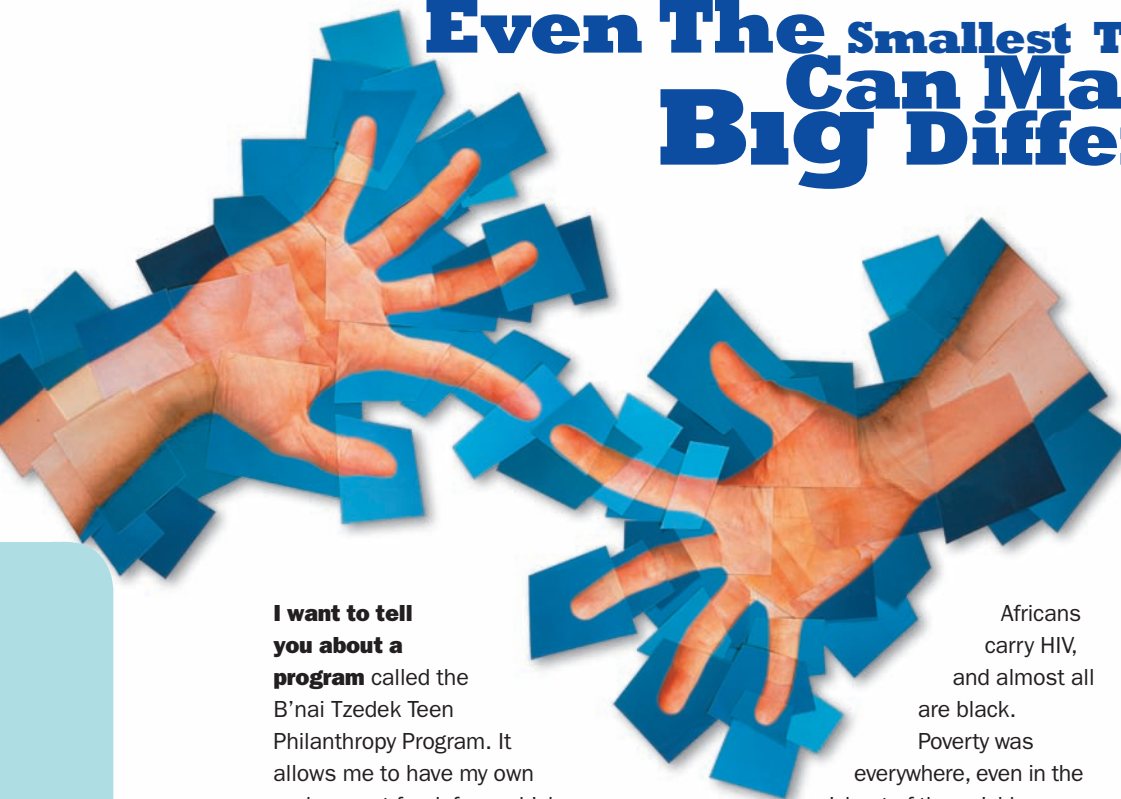


Repair the world

SPONSORED BY THE
HAROLD GRINSPOON
FOUNDATION

Even The Smallest Thing Can Make A Big Difference

SHELI CHABON



I want to tell you about a

program called the B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program. It allows me to have my own endowment fund, from which I can donate money to organizations I choose. To start my fund, I contributed \$125 to my local Jewish Federation. They matched that with \$125. Then, Harold Grinspoon, a local philanthropist, added the sum of \$250 to my account. So I have \$500, and can give away the interest that the fund makes without lowering the amount in the account. The interest is approximately 5%, so if I added nothing to my fund, I could still give away \$25 a year. Think that's not very much money? Think again.

Over Christmas, I visited my family in South Africa and was faced with true poverty for the first time in my life. Apartheid was only banned a mere ten years ago, and the immense differences between the social classes and life styles of the whites and blacks persist in most areas of the country. While the majority of the white population lives in enormous houses with swimming pools and patios, most of the black homes are made of scrap pieces of metal and wood, housing approximately eight people per shack. A third of South

Africans carry HIV, and almost all are black. Poverty was

everywhere, even in the richest of the neighborhoods. We were constantly approached by beggars and learned quickly that giving to everyone would result in an empty wallet. I learned how to say no, and though it left me feeling guilty, I reminded myself that the few cents I was giving couldn't possibly be of much help to anyone. I felt it was out of my hands.

While walking through a wealthy vacation town one day, my mother and I were approached by a young black boy carrying a bag of corn in each hand, a weight he struggled to lift. He put them down, cupped his hands and, asked that we buy his corn for 20 rands a bag. His plea seemed urgent. Twenty rands is equivalent to approximately three dollars. Of course, we had no need for such a huge bag of corn, so we said no and kept on walking.

From a fast food restaurant where my brother was buying a hot dog at nearly the same price, I watched the boy. He approached one person after another, all white, some whom shook their heads politely; others merely waved him off like a fly. I thought of my

11-year-old brother who was around the same age. His life consists of TV and sports, and he will never have to sell corn on the streets to support his family or go to bed on an empty stomach.

I was shaken. Suddenly, I felt like giving this boy everything I owned. I walked over to him, held a five-rand coin and asked, "Can I give this to you?" Cupping his hands to receive the coin, he looked at me through the saddest eyes and gave me a truly beautiful smile. For a moment, I believed I had just saved his life.

Five rands. That's about 80 cents. The cost is nothing to me, and yet, in return for it, I received a smile that has changed my life. Sometimes even the biggest things are triggered by something minute. I realized I can make a difference, and what I may consider small could mean the world to someone else. The B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy program allows me to donate \$25 dollars a year to any cause I want. Twenty-five dollars is about 175 rands. If I was to give 175 rands to children like the one I met that day in South Africa, I would receive 35 similar smiles in return.

Note: If you have a program like this where you live, get involved. If you don't, talk to your Jewish Federation about getting one started. Call K'vod Wieder at 413-736-2552 to find out more. ★

Content is provided by **THE HAROLD GRINSPOON FOUNDATION**, which runs the B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program in Western Massachusetts and assists other communities nationally in the field of Youth Philanthropy. For more information, call K'vod Wieder at 413-736-2552 ext. 14 or visit us at www.hgf.org.