



I looked at the poster and loved the colors... it would be great in my newly redecorated room. My oldest sister had accepted a teaching position in Chicago and moved out last summer. Her parting wish was that I take over her old room. It is the largest of all the kids' bedrooms and had always been my favorite. I am not sure if it was the room itself or all the memories the two of us shared in that room that made it so special. When she came to visit last month, she brought me this poster as a "housewarming gift" since I had finally completed my renovations of her old room. While I loved the gift, it is the story and its ensuing legacy that has made it so special.

My sister had read an article about the recent Nobel Peace Prize winner, Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai. In the story, Ms. Maathai parallels her efforts towards peace with an ancient Japanese fable about a hummingbird. The tale tells of a huge fire that was devastating a forest. All of the forest's creatures ran away except the hummingbird. The bird instead flew to the nearby river and filled its tiny beak with water. It then flew back to the fire and emptied the water from its beak onto the massive flames. The hummingbird did it over and over again. The other animals watched from afar and made fun of the bird, which despite her efforts was making no real impact on the intensity of the fire. The other animals jeered at her and asked her what she thought she was doing. Her response to them was simple; she replied that she was just doing what she could. Like the hummingbird, Ms. Maathai's efforts toward peace, conservation and

democracy on the African continent were accomplished in small steps over a long period of time.

The moral behind this story was the reason for my sister's gift to me. She had graduated from University of Michigan's School of Education with a dual major and University Honors. She could have taught anywhere she wanted and yet she chose an impoverished South Chicago urban school district. Her reason sounded like that old saying, "I want to teach where I can make a difference." But she meant it. I watched from the side as she faced a laundry list of objections to her choice from many. Low pay, crime riddled location, minimal school resources and failing district standardized testing scores were but a few obstacles. Yet she remained steadfast in her desire to teach there. It is a year later and she truly loves the path she chose. She gave me the poster to remind me of the fable and its underlying moral. I need to know me the importance of being true to myself and trying to make a difference against all the odds in life. It was especially timely as I stand at my own crossroads. What direction shall my life take? What choice of college will best serve that direction?

My sister, like the hummingbird and Ms. Maathai, has set an example for me. I had the opportunity to visit with her and her class several times this year and was amazed as I saw the progress of her students. She has such an innate gift as an educator and the patience and empathy to deal with the challenges her students face. She may not have been able to change the world these children lived in, but she has been able to "do what she could" to make their individual lives better. If I can set my internal compass in a comparable direction, I know I will be able to make a difference too.