

Songbirds: 'Charity Begins At Home' Part 6

By: Dino Mahoney

Characters

Serena: Serena Lau is generous, compassionate, selfless, giving
Agnes: Ordinary, a bit thoughtless, easily influenced, self-centred
Fanny: Fanny Pong is nice but secretly mean and self-centred, she always puts herself first.
Steven: Fanny's younger brother.
Mother: Mrs Pong, Fanny's mother, teaches her daughter to be self-centred.

Synopsis

When Serena Lau returns to school she comes with a great idea – every student in the class to donate half their pocket money every week to a charity to help the victims of the tsunami disaster, 'Half Your Pocket Money Could Save A Whole Life.' Fanny is not impressed.

The class teacher allows Serena to speak to the class. Serena proposes passing a collection box around. Fanny come up with an ingenious way of looking good but avoiding donating any money to the Red Cross – she suggests signing a pledge, a promise to donate half their pocket money rather than putting money publicly into a box. She also volunteers to write the pledge and show it to the headmistress. The class gratefully vote for Fanny's option. Fanny ends up popular and with praise from the headmistress while not having to pay a cent to any tsunami

Scene 1: Reprise:

(SFX: Ambient sounds of school playground)

Agnes: Look Fanny... Serena's back!
Fanny: She looks a lot thinner.
Agnes: (Calling) Serena! Serena over here!
Serena: Agnes... Fanny.... My dear friends, I've missed you so much.
Fanny: We've missed you too Serena!
Agnes: Sorry we didn't come and see you in hospital Serena only poor Fanny was so ill and, well... you know.... But we did pray for you Serena, didn't we Fanny.
Serena: That must be why I got better... the combined prayers of my dear friends.
Fanny: What's that cardboard box for Serena? And that rolled up paper?
Serena: I'll tell you. While I was lying in bed in hospital... I kept thinking about all those poor people who lost their loved ones and their homes in the tsunami...and I was thinking of ways to try and help them.
Fanny: But so many people have helped them already Serena... we all gave money when it first happened.

Serena: But that was in the beginning, with the first shock... but now people are beginning to forget... and we mustn't forget... villages still need to be rebuilt... fisherman still need boats... babies still need milk.

Fanny: And maybe we need something too... a chance to, well... get on with our lives without always having to have gloomy thoughts about those faraway people.

Serena: That's 'compassion fatigue.'

Fanny: I'm sorry?

Serena: After a disaster... an earthquake, a fire, famine, tsunami we all feel really sorry for the victims and we give money... but soon we forget and we get tired of giving and feeling sorry... that's what 'compassion fatigue' is and I've thought of a wonderful way of overcoming it.

Agnes: How Serena?

Serena: (Enthusiastic) A campaign!

Fanny: Not another one.

Serena: Yes I know there have been a lot of campaigns on the radio and television... but they're all done by other people... those campaigns are good but somehow distant from us. What we need is our very own campaign so that we feel really involved again.

Agnes: So what sort of campaign Serena?

Serena: How much pocket money do you get a week Fanny?

Fanny: Um... it varies.

Serena: Agnes?

Agnes: About a hundred and fifty dollars a week usually.... A hundred from my dad and fifty from my mum.

Serena: Is that the same for you Fanny?

Fanny: Something like that.

Serena: I get fifty dollars.

Agnes: Is that all?!

Serena: It's all I need.... Anyway...listen... (Enthusiastic) my idea for a campaign is for each of us to give half our pocket money every week to the Red Cross!

Agnes: Half our pocket money?! Every week?

Serena: Why not? It would be a real sacrifice and it would give us a chance to support each other... share things instead of buying new things.

Fanny: Like what?

Serena: Well... if a classmate wants to buy a new hairbrush for example... I'd give her my hairbrush ... or if a classmate wanted to go to see a film someone could lend her a DVD.

Agnes: And if she was hungry and wanted to buy something to eat...?

Serena: Someone could bring something to eat from home... a cake or a bowl of rice. I mean we're always buying things... things we don't really want or things we don't really need... it's so shallow, so meaningless... but this way we'd be doing something that had meaning and we'd be doing it together... we'd become like brothers and sisters banding together to help our poor brothers and sisters in other countries. (Pause) So... what do you think?

Agnes: Um... what do you think Fanny?

Fanny: It's a nice idea.

Agnes: Yes, a nice idea.

Fanny: But....
 Serena: (Enthusiastic) Just think!... if we each gave half our pocket money every week... there are forty students in our class alone... if we each gave thirty dollars that would be over a thousand dollars and just think what the Red Cross could do with a thousand dollars... that money could feed a baby for a whole year! Look... yesterday I made this poster... (SFX: Poster being unrolled) Look.
 Agnes: Let's see... what does it say? (Reading) 'Half your pocket money can save a whole life.'
 Serena: That's what I'm calling my campaign. I'm going to ask Miss if I can put this poster up in the classroom.
 Fanny: I don't think Miss will allow that.
 Serena: We'll see... oh look, there's Miss now, excuse me a minute... I just want to go and talk to her. (Calling) Miss! Oh Miss! (SFX: Fade)
 Fanny: Give half our pocket money?!
 Agnes: I know.... but she makes me feel guilty.
 Fanny: Don't worry... Miss will stop her.... She'll never let her put that poster up in class.

Scene 2

(SFX: Ambient noise of students chatting before a class starts)

Agnes: Look Fanny! Serena's poster!... It's up on the wall. 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life!
 Fanny: I didn't think Miss would allow it!
 Agnes: But look, she has.
 Fanny: And it's on the wall right in front of us next to the blackboard... we're going to have to look at it all day.
 Agnes: But it's not fair... I get more pocket money than most of the other students.... Serena only gets fifty dollars a week so she'll only have to contribute twenty five dollars... but I get a hundred and fifty dollars so I'd have to give three times as much!
 Fanny: You're not going to give half your pocket money are you Agnes?!
 Agnes: I don't want to Fanny... but I'd feel very guilty if every body else gave their pocket money and I didn't.
 Fanny: But why should you feel guilty?
 Agnes: I don't know... but I do.
 Fanny: I mean it's your money Agnes... and you can spend it however you want to!
 Agnes: Oh no look... I think Miss is allowing Serena to speak to the class before lessons begin.
 Fanny: Oh no... not again... we heard it all before in the playground.
 Serena: (Public voice, addressing while class) Good morning everyone... Miss Poon has kindly allowed me to talk to you for a few minutes about a campaign I am launching... 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life.' As you all know I have been in hospital recently and while I was there I had a lot of time to think about people who were suffering a lot more than I was... about people in South-East Asia who last December had their families and homes washed away by giant

waves. Although it is many months away now many of these poor people are still suffering... the aid which they first received is fast running out as people start suffering from compassion fatigue. That is why I am launching this campaign... 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life'... to show our brothers and sisters in Indonesia and Thailand and Sri Lanka and India and all the other places... that we still care... The idea is simple... for the rest of the term... that means for another six weeks... we give half our pocket money to the Red Cross, a respectable charity that is helping these people to rebuild their lives. We all get pocket money... I get fifty dollars a week and I am happy to give half that to the Red Cross for the rest of the term and I hope you will be too. My idea is that we can share things to make up for the loss of our pocket money... maybe we can share our CDs and our chocolate and snacks, share our comics and our magazines... that way we won't feel the loss of half our pocket money... and we can have fun giving to the needy and sharing among ourselves... we can rediscover who we are... brothers and sisters with hearts and feelings... I propose that we start tomorrow... I shall pass around this cardboard box and whoever wants to can put in half their pocket money to be sent to the red cross. Now are there any questions? Yes Fanny?

- Fanny: I think your idea is marvellous Serena and I think the whole class should give you a round of applause. (SFX: The class applauds)
- Serena: Thank you Fanny... you are very kind and generous.
- Fanny: But Serena, can I suggest one small little change to your proposed campaign?
- Serena: Yes Fanny... of course... please do.
- Fanny: Thank you. Well what I propose is that instead of passing that box around the classroom tomorrow... why don't we pass a piece of paper around?
- Serena: But the box is for...
- Fanny: (Interrupting) Let me explain. To give money openly in front of everybody else in the class could be embarrassing... some of us may get a lot more pocket money than others... and some may get a lot less.
- Serena: But that doesn't, you see the idea is...
- Fanny: (Interrupting) The idea is... to avoid embarrassment... instead of the box why not pass around a paper for us to sign... the paper would be a pledge... a promise to pay half our pocket money to the Red Cross... with our signatures next to it. You could write the address of the Red Cross on the board and we could send our money to them by ourselves. We could then pin the pledge on to the notice board for all to see and Miss could ask the headmistress to announce it in the morning assembly and invite other classes to do the same.
- Serena: But we could put the money in the box in secret.
- Fanny: How?
- Serena: We could erect a screen of some kind... Our own collection box would be a symbol of what we are doing together... and it would be so nice to give the money to the Red Cross in a lump sum and get a letter from them written to the school thanking us and we could pin that on the notice board.

Fanny: Yes but I don't think the screen would be very practical and who is going to look after the money and what if it gets lost or stolen... If we sent the money ourselves a lot of these problems would be solved.

Agnes: Can I speak please?

Serena: Yes Agnes... please do.

Agnes: Thank you... First I want to say that I think your 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life' campaign is a fantastic idea Serena.

Serena: Thank you Agnes.

Agnes: And I agree with you Serena... the world is in danger of forgetting those poor people who suffered from that terrible tsunami... Now we have heard two ideas about how the money should be collected... the classroom collection box... and signing a pledge promising to give the money to the Red Cross by ourselves. I would like to propose that first we vote on your proposed campaign... 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life'... and second... if the majority of the class are in favour of the campaign... that we vote on how the money is collected ... the box or the written pledge.

Serena: Thank you Agnes... that is very sensible. So following from what Agnes has just said let's vote on if you want to join in the, 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life' campaign. Okay... all those in favour raise your hand... Gosh! Fantastic! Every single one of you has put your hand up! Thank you, thank you so much... the victims of the tsunami thank you with all their hearts.... And now let us vote on how the money is to be collected... (Enthusiastic) Those in favour of collecting the money in the classroom using the box raise you hands? One, two, three, four... five.....six..... six.... Is that a seven? No. So... six.... any more?...No?...Right. (Off hand) And those in favour of the pledge, please raise your hands? One, two, three, four, five, six (she counts hurriedly under her breath reaching thirty-three)... thirty-to, thirty-three. And any abstentions?... One. (Deflated) So the vote is carried in favour of signing a pledge and donating half our pocket money individually.

Fanny: (SFX: Starts the clapping and all join in). And Serena... I would like to volunteer to write out the pledge on some nice paper, pass it round the class, show it to the headmistress and then pin it to our notice board. (SFX: Applause for Fanny).

Scene 3

(SFX: At home. Dinner table. Clink of chopsticks on bowls)

Fanny: Mmm... these scallops are delicious mum... and the bean curd is so soft and smooth.

Mum: Hey Fanny... leave some scallops for me!

Fanny: Oh shut up Steven.

Steven: But I've hardly had any!

Fanny: Don't be so greedy!

Steven: I'm not!

Fanny: Yes you are... you're a greedy little boy, isn't he mummy?

Mother: Have some more pak choi Steven.
 Steven: I don't want pak choi... I want scallops.
 Fanny: (Mimicking Steven) I don't want pak choi I want scallops.
 Steven: Not fair... you always hog the best bits.
 Fanny: Shut up whining you pathetic little nobody.
 Mother: I can't get over that Serena asking for all your money.
 Fanny: I know.... but you should have seen the look on her face when the class voted against her precious collection box.
 (SFX: Phone rings)
 Fanny: Well don't just sit there Steven... answer it!
 Steven: Why? You know it won't be for me.... It'll be for you... it always is!
 Fanny: Mum tell him to answer it.
 Mother: Come on Steven... don't be so lazy.
 Steven: (Getting up. Sulky) Not fair. (SFX: Picks up receiver) Hello?..... Yes, just a minute.
 Mother: (Prompting Steven) Please!
 Steven: Please. (To Fanny) It's for you.
 Fanny: Who is it?! (To mother) He never asks who it is?
 Steven: (On phone) Who is it?
 Mother: (Prompting Steven) Please!
 Steven: Please. (To Fanny) Agnes.
 Fanny: (Slight pause) Hi.
 Agnes: You were brilliant in class to-day... everybody said so.
 Fanny: Why thank you Agnes.
 Agnes: Cindy Wu phoned me earlier on and she said when Serena started her speech everyone got a fright... she said nobody wanted to give any money but Serena was making her and everybody else feel really guilty... and anyway, she said what could anyone do if there was a box going round the classroom. So when you came up with that brilliant idea of signing a bit of paper...
 Fanny: The pledge.
 Agnes: Yes, the pledge... Cindy said when you suggested the pledge she and everyone else gave a great sigh of relief. They all signed the pledge... but secretly Cindy told me that nobody is going to send any money.
 Fanny: That's up to them...it's their money... not Serena's or anybody else's.
 Agnes: They're all so grateful to you... Cindy said they want to take you out and treat you to a cake or something.
 Fanny: That would be nice.
 Agnes: Everyone's laughing at Serena... to her face they say what a great idea she's had... and behind her back they just laugh. (She laughs) It's so funny. Bye the way... what did the headmistress say when you showed her the pledge.
 Fanny: She was very impressed and she thanked me.
 Agnes: It did look lovely the way you did it... that was beautiful paper.
 Fanny: The art mistress gave it to me.
 Agnes: Anyway... I've got to go now... my dinner's ready.
 Fanny: We've just finished ours.
 Agnes: What did you have?
 Fanny: Scallops with bean curd in black bean sauce.

Agnes: Yummy, yummy! I wish your mother would invite me round to dinner one night.

Fanny: See you tomorrow Agnes.

Agnes: Okay. Bye Fanny. (SFX: Puts receiver down)

Mother: What did Agnes say?

Fanny: She said some of the other girls had phoned her and they were thanking me for coming up with the idea of signing a pledge rather than putting money in a box.

Mother: I should think so. That Serena and her mother think they're so good and so holy... Huh! The teacher should never have allowed Serena to talk about her stupid campaign... people work hard for their money and they don't expect their kids to give their hard earned pocket money away to some silly charity. But I'm glad the headmistress was pleased with you.

Fanny: Yes she thanked me and said how nice the pledge was and how well I had written it and she made an announcement to all the school over the intercom system.

Mother: At least something good came out of all Serena's nonsense.. huh.... 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life' what nonsense!

Steven: I'm going to give half my pocket money to the Red Cross.

Mother: (Appalled) What?! No you are not young man... I haven't been slaving away at the office to give you pocket money just for you to throw it down the drain!

Fanny: Ignore him mummy... he's only trying to get at me.

Steven: Fanny said people should be able to do what they want to with their money... well the pocket money you give me is my money and I want to give it to the Red Cross.

Mother: Okay young man...if that's what you want to do with my hard earned money I'll stop your pocket money!

Steven: You can't!

Mother: Of course I can. Then you'll have to get a Saturday job and work for your money and then we'll see if you still want to give it away to some silly charity!

Fanny: Can I have Steven's pocket money instead mummy?

Mother: Why not! At least you won't throw it into the wind like him!

Steven: That's not fair! Not fair!

Mother: Charity begins at home Steven... that's something for you to learn... and this way... you won't forget it!

Music

Serena: (SFX: Echo effect) Oh mother... when the whole class put up their hand to vote for the 'Half Your Pocket Money Can Save a Whole Life' campaign, it was the happiest moment of my life and I shall never forget it... (Flashback) 'All those in favour raise your hand... Gosh! Fantastic! Every single one of you has put your hand up! Thank you, thank you so much... the victims of the tsunami thank you with all their hearts... (SFX: Echo off)

Mother: Remember Steven... Charity begins at home... At home!

(SFX: The loud slamming of a door)

The End