

Keep Durham Beautiful Inc.
2011 Fay St.
Durham, NC 27704

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SPEECH TEXT

The Girl in the Mud
Tania Dautlick, Speaker

Ever since I can remember, I have been the girl who played in the mud. I was infatuated with searching for worms, building little structures for snails and yelling at the other kids who were stomping a little too close to caterpillars trying to make their way across the road.

My love for the earth carried into elementary school as I started to learn about plants. I learned how they are fed by the sun, how water enriches the earth, and how it's one big cycle that repeats and continues to nourish itself.

In high school, I first felt pain and sorrow for the earth, as I learned how people hurt our planet, polluting it selfishly and leaving the problems to be solved by generations ahead.

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I wanted to apologize to the earth, as I felt guilty for all the atrocities humans had committed against our planet. I wanted to reverse the harm but also help people to understand what they were doing. I wanted to show them that there was still time to prevent long-term damage.

This is the moment that I discovered my purpose and began my journey. My career began at the University of Delaware where I studied plant sciences. I was really able to get into the nitty-gritty biology of plants when I moved on to get my master's degree in horticulture at North Carolina State University.

Through my studies, I was able to go back to doing what I loved: delving deep into the dirt and learning how to cultivate life in the soil. I took this knowledge into the wine industry for a few years, trying to make money in an industry similar to my interests.

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I did this for many years, but something was always missing. I had deviated from my purpose without even realizing it. My head was so stuck in the mud, trying to establish myself in a career, that I had forgotten what drove me towards the earth in the first place.

This is when I decided to go back to my roots. I wanted to have my hands in the soil all the time. I loved the muck and the mud, the birds and the bees, the insects and the trees. I knew I needed to find an organization that valued the same things. This is when I encountered Keep Durham Beautiful.

Keep Durham Beautiful, or KDB, is a Durham-based nonprofit with a mission of inspiring individuals to take greater responsibility for their community environments. I began volunteering at KDB and immediately fell in love with their vision. They spoke about how it could be daunting trying to solve the issues challenging our environment on your own, but how they are there to make helping easier.

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Fast forward to nine years later, I am now the executive director of this organization. My daily tasks involve cleaning up community spaces, planting new life, and bringing people together to take ownership of their environment. In other words, I am mitigating the harm done, helping people to understand what they are doing, and showing them that there is still time to prevent long-term damage.

Now here I am, 34 years later. I'm still that little girl playing in the mud, yelling at the other kids for not caring as much as I do, but now helping those kids learn to care. So if you see yourself in any part of my story, I would love for you to join our organization. KDB allows you to unleash that inner kid and help our city, and I think that's pretty cool.

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Questions to Anticipate

1. How can I as a volunteer get involved and make a difference within the organization?

Locals can get involved through activities centering around three focus areas: litter prevention, waste reduction, and community greening. Within these focus areas, people can go out in the community and physically volunteer, pool resources with other people in tool lending programs, or participate in educational programs.

2. How do you know how successful your efforts are? Have you quantified the results of your programs?

In the last year, over 2,500 people volunteered over 6,000 hours in the Durham community. These efforts allowed us to remove nearly 60,000 pounds of litter! We also have smaller campaigns each year like Big Sweep, where groups volunteer to pick up litter in local neighborhoods during September and October. This year's Big Sweep event had nearly 700 volunteers who collected about 16,500 pounds of litter. These are just some of the statistics we use to determine the success of our efforts and ensure that we're on the right track.

3. What other ideas do you have for the company moving forward?

We are planning on increasing our previous efforts, along with launching new initiatives soon. I'm excited to announce that we have a new partnership with Litterati, which will allow us to track and categorize the litter we collectively pick up. We will have ongoing challenges to meet community goals on the platform to get people excited and motivated to get involved throughout the year.