

Little Miss Flint

How one girl is speaking out for safe water
—and saving her city **By Allison Friedman**



Unclean drinking water isn't a problem just in faraway countries. Here in the U.S., 27 million people—about 1 in 12 of us—live in places where the tap water might be unsafe, according to a 2015 study.

One of those places is Flint, Michigan. In 2014, the city's tap water was found to be polluted with lead, a metal that can cause serious health problems—especially in children. Thousands were left without drinkable water, including a girl named Mari Copeny and her family. To raise awareness about the **crisis**, Mari sent a letter to then President Barack Obama. He not only wrote back, but he also came to Flint to see how he could help.

Since then, Mari, now 10, has become famous for continuing to fight for clean water in her city, earning the nickname “Little Miss Flint.” Here, she explains why and how she took action.

How did you and your family first realize your tap water was unsafe?

The water started giving my family terrible rashes. Especially my baby sister—her rashes got so bad that she needed special medicine.

During this water emergency, what have you had to do to get clean water?

We drive to pick up bottled water at special water stations. For showering, we have a water **filter** that allows us to shower for a couple of minutes. (Any longer, and the water starts to burn our skin and eyes.)

Why did you decide to help solve the crisis?

I couldn't sit back and watch my family suffer anymore. Nobody was listening to the adults, so I decided to use my voice and speak out for kids here—especially my younger brother

and sister. I wanted us to be able to take bubble baths, play in the sprinkler, and make lemonade using tap water.

What action did you take to help?

I started going to protests, I wrote letters, and I spoke to anyone who would listen to me.

How did you feel when President Obama came to Flint to meet with you?

It was amazing. I couldn't believe that he came to Flint to see the water crisis firsthand. I am extremely proud to have brought him here.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to help solve big problems?

Never give up, even if people don't take you seriously at first. Keep on fighting. You can change the world as a kid, just like I am doing. ■

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

Write an imaginary conversation between Natalia and Mari in which they compare and contrast the water problems in their communities, how the problems affected them personally, and what they did to help their families and neighbors.

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