

# Courtney

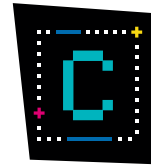
1986



## Friendship Superhero

## Hands Across America

⚡ CHAPTER 1 ⚡



Courtney Moore was usually at the Orange Valley Mall on the weekend, and it was usually busy. But on the last Sunday in May, it was absolutely packed. People streamed around her outside the mall's main entrance, where she stood below a banner that read "Hands Across America." Courtney was trying to hand out buttons, but no one seemed to notice her.

Courtney's best friend, Sarah Barrett, on the other hand, didn't have any trouble getting people's attention. "Check-in for the event is right inside the main door," Sarah called out in her firm, clear voice as she handed out buttons and answered questions.

Courtney had been looking forward to Hands Across America for months. Millions of people were going to hold hands in a human chain that would stretch from one end of the country to the other. The event was raising awareness of hunger and homelessness—and the money to fight them. Courtney and Sarah had each saved ten dollars of their allowance to pay for their places in line. Now they both wore a white T-shirt with the Hands Across America

logo—a red and blue outline of the United States with silhouettes of people holding hands from coast to coast.

Sarah’s mom was one of the main organizers in Orange Valley, and she’d asked Sarah and Courtney if they’d help on the day of the event. Both girls had said yes immediately. Courtney knew it was her chance to do something important—just like space explorer Crystal Starshooter. Ever since Courtney had invented the video game hero, she’d been looking for ways to be like Crystal in the real world. Crystal was brave and bold, and her mission was to make the world a better place.

As Courtney offered a button to an elderly woman, she pictured herself as Crystal Starshooter, organizer of “Energy Across the Galaxy,” an epic event to join forces with beings throughout the universe. Crystal had created a floppy disk that would generate intergalactic energy to sustain all planets. She was delivering the last disk to the outer reaches of the cosmos. On her signal, all the disks would activate, connecting power and assuring that all life forms would have the energy they needed to feed their populations. “It’s time,” Crystal Starshooter announced over the galacticom. “Raise your disks in three, two—”

“Courtney? Courtney!” It was Sarah. “Didn’t you hear the announcement? It’s time to get in line.”

Courtney blushed. “Um, yeah. Let’s go.”

Courtney and Sarah hurried around the building and found Courtney’s family at their meeting spot outside the entrance to JCPenney.

Courtney’s stepsister Tina was sitting on a curb under a tree, looking at earrings from a Claire’s bag in her lap.

“Did you go *shopping*?” Courtney asked in disbelief.

“Duh,” Tina sighed. “I’m not going to come to the mall and just stand around.”

Mike, Tina’s dad, laughed. “The stores appreciate your dedication.” He rolled a ball across the sidewalk to Rafi, Courtney’s and Tina’s two-year-old half brother.

Courtney’s mom pulled a thermos out of the basket under Rafi’s stroller. “How did volunteering go?” she asked. “Are you thirsty? I have water.”

Courtney took a long drink, not wanting to admit that she didn’t really do much to help. “I’m glad there’s such a great turnout,” she finally said.

“Courtney! Sarah!”

Courtney spotted their friend Kip Tomatsu hurrying down the sidewalk.

“What’s he carrying?” Sarah asked Courtney.

“It looks like a Betacam,” Mike said, squinting into the sun.

“A video recorder,” Courtney explained when Sarah looked confused.

Kip joined them, dropping his backpack to the ground. “Isn’t this cool?” he said, setting the bulky camera down gently. “My dad let me borrow it to record the event. I already got footage of you two in front of the building.”

“That’s awesome,” Sarah said. “I can’t wait to see it.”

Courtney grimaced at the thought of watching herself hand out buttons.

Sarah’s mom’s voice came over a loudspeaker. She announced that it was 11:58 a.m. “We’ll begin in two minutes. Please take the hands of the people beside you!”

As Courtney took Sarah’s and Rafi’s hands, she couldn’t help but think about her dad. He’d planned to be there, but something had come up at work. Dad had gotten a new job at the beginning of the year and now lived three hours away. It wasn’t as easy for him to just meet Courtney at the mall anymore. Courtney was sad that he wasn’t standing next to her.

“Check this out,” Kip said, aiming his camera down the sidewalk. Hundreds of people stretched down the block, holding hands as far as the eye could see, like stars in an endless galaxy. *Wow*, Courtney thought, her stomach doing an excited flip. *I may not have done much, but I’m still part of something important.*

For fifteen minutes, everyone held hands. Some people sang along to the songs playing over the loudspeaker:

“America the Beautiful,” “We Are the World,” and “Hands Across America”—the song that had been written especially for the event. Courtney and Sarah belted out the words together. When she sang, “united we stand,” Courtney really did feel united with the millions of other people who were taking part in the event across the country.

Tina swayed to the music. “This video has been playing constantly on MTV,” she said.

Rafi tugged on Courtney’s arm, chanting, “Hands, hands, hands.”

When the music ended, everyone in the chain burst into applause. Mom hugged Courtney. “Thanks for getting us all involved in a historic event.”

Tina nodded. “We, like, made history at the mall. That’s so tubular.”

“Totally tubular,” Mike agreed.



After the event, Courtney’s group made their way back inside the mall. Mike headed to his store, D’Amico’s Electronics, on the third level. Sarah went to meet her mom at the registration desk, and Kip was on his way to Smiley’s Arcade. “Want to come?” he asked Courtney.

For the first time ever, Courtney said no to the arcade. She’d been at the mall since nine o’clock that morning and was ready to go home.

Rafi yawned in his stroller as Courtney and Tina followed Mom to the underground parking garage. While they waited for the elevator, a woman recognized Mom. "You're Maureen D'Amico, aren't you? I voted for you for mayor."

"Thank you," Mom replied, turning to shake the woman's hand. "That means a lot."

Mom chatted with the woman all the way down the elevator and across the parking lot. As they talked, Courtney thought about how hard her mom had worked on her campaign.

When they got in their car, Courtney said, "I wish you'd won the mayor's race."

"Me, too," Tina agreed.

"Thanks, guys," Mom replied, navigating their car out of the crowded ramp. "Luckily, we don't need to win elections to do something good for the world. Look at Hands Across America. Millions of people took part in it, and together we raised money to fight hunger and homelessness all over the country. Awareness is the first step to solving a problem."

"The main thing *I'm* aware of is summer," Tina said. "When school's out we can relax and do nothing."

"Speak for yourself," Mom laughed.

"I'm going to spend every day watching MTV and hitting the mall," Tina said dreamily.

"How is that different from what you do now?" Courtney teased.

"Ha ha," Tina smirked. "No homework."

"It will be fun," Courtney admitted, looking out at the clear blue sky and the mountains in the distance. She started thinking about vacation with her dad, swimming every day, and playing video games nonstop. But she also thought about Hands Across America and how good it had felt to help other people. *There's no reason I can't have a fun summer and make the world a better place*, Courtney thought. *That's what Crystal Starshooter would do.*

When they got home, Courtney went to her room and pulled out her Crystal Starshooter notebook. It was full of details about each level of game play, character descriptions, and pencil sketches. Courtney wrote down her Energy Across the Galaxy idea. Then she turned to a clean page and started a list. *I'll have seventy days of summer vacation*, she told herself, looking at a calendar. *That's seventy chances to have an epic summer being brave and bold, just like Crystal.*

## ADVERTISEMENT

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