Book Review

Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World

Tracy Kidder

New York: Random House,
hardcover 2003, paperback 2004
US \$18, 336 pages, paperback

Tracy Kidder begins the story in Haiti with the introduction of Paul Farmer, at the time a witty medical student from Harvard dedicated to serving the poor. Years later we travel to Farmer's new compound in the impoverished regions of Haiti, Zanmi Lasante, the first project of his grassroots organization, Partners in Health (PIH). We then follow PIH as it expands to Peru and Russia.

Mountains Beyond Mountains has several themes, primarily that the poor deserve equal opportunities for basic health and sanitation. Another is that the wealthy people of this world have turned their backs on the poor and needy, thus the perpetuation of disease and poverty. Throughout the book, Kidder impresses on his reader that Farmer's work is not only amazing in scale and success, but also an inevitable "long defeat," as there will always be more poor people living in substandard conditions.

This book is inspirational and subtly instructive, if not offensive. Although narrated through the experiences of Tracy Kidder, Dr Farmer's work is a call to action for those with similar ideas and values. The far reaches of Haiti are an austere environment with few resources, unpredictable electricity, and poor water quality. Those interested in international, disaster, and tropical medicine

will find this book a tasteful blend of remote medicine and public health.

This book is divided into 5 parts and further subdivided into a total of 26 short chapters. Each section journeys through various stages in Farmer's life from 1982 to 2003, taking place in Cambridge, Haiti, Peru, Siberia, and France.

There have been no new editions of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, but it is available in hardcover, paperback and electronic versions for the Kindle and iPad.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* is an intriguing and inspiring book for any audience. It is especially instructive to those interested in international medicine or public health. Although well published himself, Dr Farmer's works have been described as difficult to read at times. Tracy Kidder has elegantly embodied the principles of Farmer in a thoroughly readable and enjoyable book.

With the recent events in Haiti, this book is particularly relevant as it underscores the ever-present curse of poverty and political instability of the country. Communities all over the world suffer similar conditions, demanding the action and attention of others. Those interested in helping, whether through healthcare, public health, politics, or education, will be inspired and motivated by this book. As stated by Dr Farmer, "it is simple—they are sick, and I am a doctor. They need my help."

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