

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

By Tracy Kidder

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Tracy Kidder is a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the author of the bestsellers **The Soul of a New Machine**, **House, Among Schoolchildren**, and **Home Town**. He has been described by the *Baltimore Sun* as the “master of the non-fiction narrative.” This powerful and inspiring new book shows how one person can make a difference, as Kidder tells the true story of a gifted man who is in love with the world and has set out to do all he can to cure it.

At the center of **Mountains Beyond Mountains** stands Paul Farmer. Doctor, Harvard professor, renowned infectious-disease specialist, anthropologist, the recipient of a MacArthur “genius” grant, world-class Robin Hood, Farmer was brought up in a bus and on a boat, and in medical school found his life’s calling: to diagnose and cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them most. This magnificent book shows how radical change can be fostered in situations that seem insurmountable, and it also shows how a meaningful life can be created, as Farmer—brilliant, charismatic, charming, both a leader in international health and a doctor who finds time to make house calls in Boston and the mountains of Haiti—blasts through convention to get results.

Mountains Beyond Mountains takes us from Harvard to Haiti, Peru, Cuba, and Russia as Farmer changes minds and practices through his dedication to the philosophy that “the only real nation is humanity” - a philosophy that is embodied in the small public charity he founded, Partners In Health. He enlists the help of the Gates Foundation, George Soros, the U.N.’s World Health Organization, and others in his quest to cure the world. At the heart of this book is the example of a life based on hope, and on an understanding of the truth of the Haitian proverb “Beyond mountains there are mountains”: as you solve one problem, another problem presents itself, and so you go on and try to solve that one too.

“**Mountains Beyond Mountains** unfolds with the force of a gathering revelation,” says Annie Dillard, and Jonathan Harr says, “[Farmer] wants to

change the world. Certainly this luminous and powerful book will change the way you see it.”

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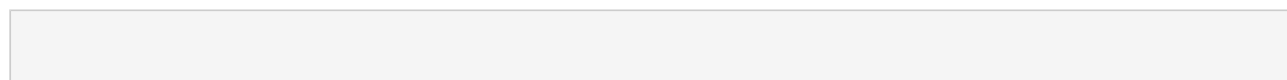
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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Thought-provoking and profoundly satisfying, this book will inspire feelings of humility, admiration, and disquietude; in some readers, it may sow the seeds of humanitarian activism. As a specialist in infectious diseases, Farmer's goal is nothing less than redressing the "steep gradient of inequality" in medical service to the desperately poor. His work establishing a complex of public health facilities on the central plateau of Haiti forms the keystone to efforts that now encompass initiatives on three continents. Farmer and a trio of friends began in the 1980s by creating a charitable foundation called Partners in Health (PIH, or Zanmi Lasante in Creole), armed with passionate conviction and \$1 million in seed money from a Boston philanthropist. Kidder provides anecdotal evidence that their early approach to acquiring resources for the Haitian project at times involved a Robin Hood type of "redistributive justice" by liberating medical equipment from the "rich" (Harvard) and giving to the "poor" (the PIH clinic). Yet even as PIH has grown in size and sophistication, gaining the ability to influence and collaborate with major international organizations because of the founders' energy, professional credentials, and successful outcomes, their dedicated vision of doctoring to the poor remains unaltered. Farmer's conduct is offered as a "road map to decency," albeit an uncompromising model that nearly defies replication. This story is remarkable, and Kidder's skill in sequencing both dramatic and understated elements into a reflective commentary is unsurpassed.

Lynn Nutwell, Fairfax City Regional Library, VA

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From The New England Journal of Medicine

Paul Farmer is a 44-year-old specialist in infectious diseases and an attending physician at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. His biographer, Tracy Kidder, read his book on the connections between poverty and disease -- *Infections and Inequalities* -- and wrote to him, "I'm reading your oeuvre." "Ah, but that's not my oeuvre," Farmer replied. "To see my oeuvre you have to come to Haiti." Indeed, Farmer founded a hospital and health center, Zanmi Lasante, in Cange, Haiti, hours from the capital and at the end of a gutted road in a region destitute even by Haiti's standards, as part of an extensive community-based health network linked to a hospital, Clinique Bon Sauveur (see Figure). For more than 20 years, Farmer has spent many months every year there, often taking care of patients himself and continually improving the treatments offered by the clinic. These now include antiretroviral drugs. Lasante is supported by a foundation based in Boston called Partners in Health, which is headed by Ophelia Dahl and largely financed by Tom White, the philanthropic owner of a large Boston construction firm. There is more. Through his patients in Cange, Farmer became interested in multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. From Haiti, he exported treatment of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis to Peru and then to Siberia, achieving cure rates comparable to those in the United States. Through the Institute for Health and Social Justice (the research and education division of Partners in Health) and his associate Jim Yong Kim, he started a movement to lower prices for the second-line drugs necessary to treat resistant tuberculosis and successfully lobbied the World Health Organization for changes in treatment recommendations for tuberculosis. Readers may have heard some of this story before (Farmer has received a MacArthur award and the American Medical Association's Dr. Nathan Davis Award) and may have wondered, as I did, where he came from and how one man could accomplish so much. Kidder traces Farmer's trajectory, starting with his unconventional childhood, which included living in a bus and on a leaky boat. He was given a scholarship to Duke, where he majored in anthropology and worked alongside poor Haitian farm workers in North Carolina's tobacco fields. After graduation he spent a year in Haiti, where he met Ophelia Dahl, and then went to Harvard Medical School. While in medical school and during his residencies and fellowships, he spent more time in Cange than in Boston. How does Farmer do it?

Kidder provides some explanations: he works nonstop, hardly sleeps, sees his wife and child for a day or so every few months, inspires an uncommon degree of devotion and enthusiasm among collaborators and potential donors, and tolerates planes and airports for days on end. In addition, the Boston medical establishment has bent rules and regulations to accommodate his needs. Convincing? Maybe. There remains something miraculous about Paul Farmer. Should one go out and buy *Mountains beyond Mountains*? By all means. Not only it is an enjoyable book, but it is also very likely that a part of the \$25.95 spent in purchasing it will find its way back to Haiti. That is more than can be said about many books. In addition, readers looking for a worthwhile charity to support may be inspired to send some money to Partners in Health. *Bernard Hirschel, M.D.*

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From [Booklist](#)

Kidder, a master documentarian, has primarily practiced his art on his home turf, Massachusetts, proving that one small place abounds in amazing stories. Now, in his most compelling chronicle to date, this Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner investigates a far harsher world in the company of Paul Farmer, a radical public health reformer devoted to providing medical care to the poor, mainly in Haiti. A Harvard-educated medical anthropologist, TB expert, and MacArthur "genius" gifted with an unshakable moral imperative, an ardent imagination, and limitless energy, compassion, and chutzpah, Farmer created Partners in Health, a renegade yet hugely influential organization. A powerful presence, this uncompromising visionary is too spectacularly impressive not to be disconcerting, and Kidder shares his puzzlement over and occasional discomfort with this charismatic and tirelessly giving man who eschews personal comfort to care for the "underdogs of the underdogs." As Kidder accompanies Farmer on his exhausting and risky daily routines and epic travels, he parses the cruel realities of deep poverty and the maddening politics of international health care. Most importantly, Kidder portrays a genuinely inspired and heroic individual, whose quest for justice will make every reader examine her or his life in a new light. *Donna Seaman*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Zola Campbell:

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open as well as read a book titled *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have different opinion?

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