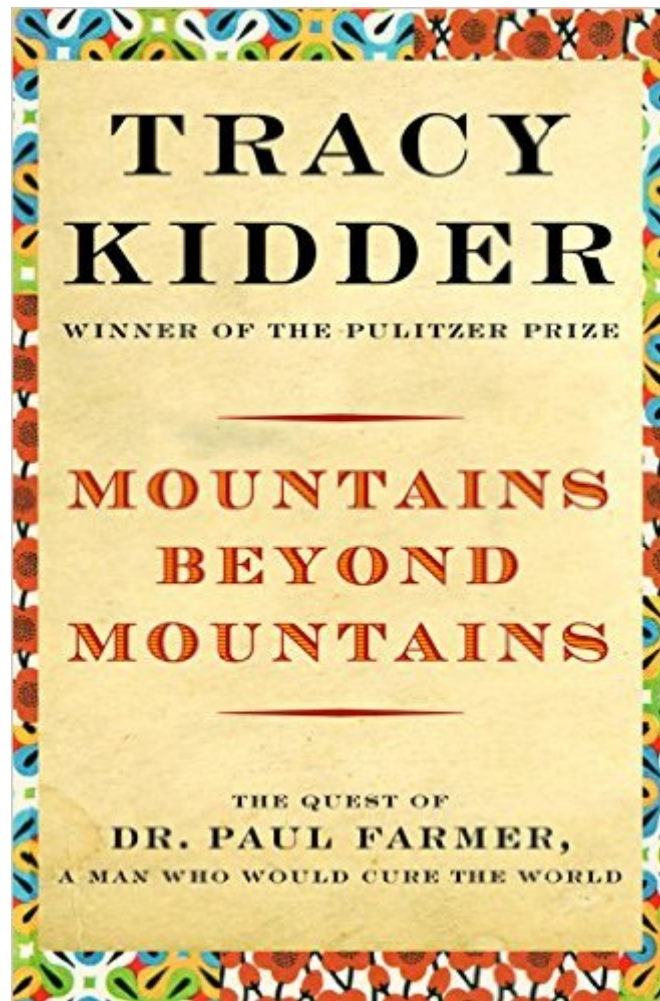


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Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest Of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure The World



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

Trace Kidder has written an excellent book about an extraordinary man. My one critique would be that Kidder has immersed himself so thoroughly in Farmer's life that I think he is at times incapable of believing that Farmer can make a mistake. The section with Farmer describing the virtues of the Cuban system of health care was accepted too uncritically for my taste. By the end, Farmer was even acting as a de facto cardiology consultant for Kidder during strenuous climbs in the Haitian mountains. Farmer must have an incredible personality, and I think it would be natural for this to happen to anyone who spent as much time with him. Still, it strikes an occasionally awkward tone. Please don't construe this to mean that the book is not enjoyable and worthwhile. It really is both. As a physician myself, I probably read this book with less objectivity than most readers. On a certain level, a doctor like Paul Farmer is an indictment of the way most physicians in this country practice. Paul Farmer could, if he chose, be one of the highest paid consultant in the country. He has demonstrated the intellect and the force of will to succeed at any branch of medicine. And yet, he chose infectious disease and epidemiology as his twin callings, two of the lower-paying specialties within the field. Furthermore, he chose not just to dedicate superhuman effort to this profession, but to practice in one of the poorest of poor regions of the world, Haiti, where every newcomer is "blan" (white), even African Americans from the US. It's hard to read about such a man and not feel at times inadequate. After all, what have I done with my education that comes anywhere near what Farmer has accomplished? I think even non-physicians might have this initial reaction.

"Mountains Beyond Mountains" is no exception to Tracy Kidder's excellent body of work. I have been a fan since he wrote "Soul of a New Machine." Kidder impressed me then, as he does now,

with his upfront investment of time before putting pen to paper. Fortunately for us, his hard work translates to first class storytelling. The title "Mountains Beyond Mountains" is a metaphor for life - once you have scaled one mountain (challenge), there are more to come. This is especially true for Paul Farmer, MD, who has devoted his life to what most people call "the impossible." He has faced mountain after mountain in his quest to help mankind. Farmer starts out devoting his life to providing the most rudimentary medical care to impoverished Haitians (the shafted of the shafted). By age 27, he had treated more illnesses than most doctors would see in a lifetime. With time, he finds himself on the world stage trying to find a cure for drug resistant tuberculosis, undertaking the difficult role of a global fundraiser, and fighting big pharma for lower drug prices. He is a modern day medical hero. For me, Farmer serves as a startling contrast to Robert K. Maloney, MD, the well known Los Angeles ophthalmologist who has been featured on TV's "Extreme Make-over." Maloney, who was profiled October 26, 2004 in the Wall Street Journal, said that after he completed his medical training, he came to a disquieting conclusion: "I really didn't like sick people." Maloney has since specialized in LASIK refractive surgery (considered cosmetic surgery) and pampers his patients with 25 person staff, and a suit-and-tie concierge who serves pastries and coffee in the waiting room.

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