BOOK REVIEW

Little Princes
One Man’s Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal
Conor Grennan

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Have you ever felt the need to experience something different? Exploring the world may seem like a big step, but people decide to do these types of things every day. Conor Grennan, in his book Little Princes, takes the opportunity to travel and experience something much more than he could have ever imagined. Written light-heartedly and with humor, Little Princes chronicles years of Grennan’s life and the time he spent in Nepal trying to reunite lost children with their families.

Oftentimes I see news on television or online and ‘lose faith in humanity’ because of all the horrible things people are doing and what is happening around the world, including the child trafficking in Nepal. Reading this book has led me to believe that there are still people out there who care about people they’ve never met.

I enjoyed reading that other people experience the same feeling. Grennan writes in the book that an email from Liz during his journey read, “This morning, on the crowded train to New York, a man in the row in front of me sneezed. The woman in the row behind me said, ‘God bless you.’ He could not have heard her, since I barely heard her, and the train was packed. But the fact that she said it gave me a sense of the innate goodness of man.”

I believe the notion of hope is central to this book: the hope that the children’s parents will be found and that the families will be reunited one day, but also the hope that Grennan and fellow volunteers like Farid and Liz are making a noticeable difference in the lives of these kids and in Nepal. Little Princes is inspiring.

Broken into four parts, Little Princes covers many important issues. Mainly, it highlights one of the overlooked tragedies in a remote, faraway and removed part of the world. The book also talks about the rewards of volunteering, seizing opportunities when they present themselves (even if the outcome is different than you expected) and learning not to take the simple things you have for granted. Grennan has an interesting way of addressing these topics in each part of his book.
Part I: The Little Princes

At the start, Grennan was focused on seeing other parts of the world. After working for a few years, he had saved some money and decided to splurge on a trip, one that would cause envy from his friends. Nepal was experiencing a Civil War at the time, and Grennan assumed they were exaggerating, until he arrived and assessed the situation more thoroughly. Nepal was a place completely different than what he had known in the free United States.

Grennan does not realize how the volunteering at Little Princes will affect his life. Not until a bit later in the book does he begin to value the experiences he has with the children, the other volunteers at the home and the people of Nepal. Grennan created a bond with the kids, and he realizes later that he misses them and needs to go back to Nepal to help them.

Part II: Around the World and Back

The second part of the book begins when Grennan leaves the Little Princes Children’s Home after his two-month stint as a volunteer to travel the rest of the globe. He had the opportunity to experience 16 different countries while on this trip, all the while realizing he misses the kids at the Little Princes more and more.

Grennan returned to the States for a year, but ultimately decided to come back to Nepal for another volunteering adventure before he went back to the working world. While home, he had access to everything: hot water and showers, indoor plumbing, etc. When he returns to Nepal, Grennan writes, “I was returning to a country that offered me no personal space, that gave no thoughts to hygiene, that offered no decent food,” (page 63). Even with these “inconveniences,” he still felt compelled to go back to Nepal to help the kids. Grennan decided he will make the trek around Nepal to find the families of the children.

Part III: Seven Needles in a Haystack

Back in the United States, Grennan begins to organize the nonprofit organization that will eventually become Next Generation Nepal (NGN). Upon flying back to Kathmandu, Grennan begins another journey, looking for seven children in particular who initially began his quest for families. He also begins talking to Liz Flanagan more, a woman who is also involved in volunteering whom he eventually develops a relationship with.

Also in this part of the book, Grennan spends some time in the hospital with some of the children who are very sick. He describes the Nepali hospital, the dirt and the unkept nature of it. This is something else he needs to overcome for the health of the children. The hospital staff do they best they can, but the financial means to keep the hospital in good repair are, unfortunately, scarce.

Shortly before beginning to next part of the book, Grennan sets up a meeting with Liz. She will visit Nepal, the children and Grennan at the end of December.
Part IV: Into the Mountains

Although Liz’s visit is in place, Grennan still decides to leave Kathmandu in order to search for the families of the children at Little Princes and the other homes. Farid, a French volunteer, and Grennan have succeeded in opening their own children’s home and would like to do all that they can to reunite the kids with their families.

From here, Grennan sets out, leaving civilization behind, to search for the parents. The backpacking journey was dangerous, lacking many commonalities you would find on a tourists’ trip, for example. Mostly travelling on uncharted trails connecting small villages, Grennan and his team connect with the families of many of the kids at the children’s home, putting the rumors and trauma to rest.

Getting back to Kathmandu was a disaster. Delay by snow and a helicopter that did not show up, Grennan can’t wait any longer and decides to travel back on foot, lengthening his journey. He knows he can get back to Kathmandu from there if only the snow will keep away. Liz is visiting, and he is determined to finally meet her. Eventually, with filth gathered over weeks of traveling, Grennan makes it back to Kathmandu to meet up with his friends, Liz and the volunteers and children in the homes.

Part V: Liz

Liz began to play an important role in Grennan’s life (notice the final part of the book is named after her). As a Christian, she ultimately makes Grennan realize that he is doing things for the right reasons and that he is making the correct decisions, no matter how hard they may be. Although they are just now meeting face-to-face, the pair feel as though they have known each other for years because of their extensive email conversations.

Grennan is crazy about Liz. She returns to India where she is volunteering, but eventually comes back to Nepal to visit Grennan and the children many times. Liz and Grennan form a relationship, although distant. Ultimately, Liz helped Grennan to believe in himself through the hard times and to persevere, to make the NGN Children’s Home a reality.

Through this experience, Grennan came to realize that he doesn’t need the accommodations, the money or the commonalities, such as forever-present utilities and food variety, to be successful or to meet a goal. The volunteering in Nepal changed his life forever and brought him to many conclusions about the world. He seized an opportunity to do something different, something he never imagined. He had begun to hope that he could make a difference and he really did.