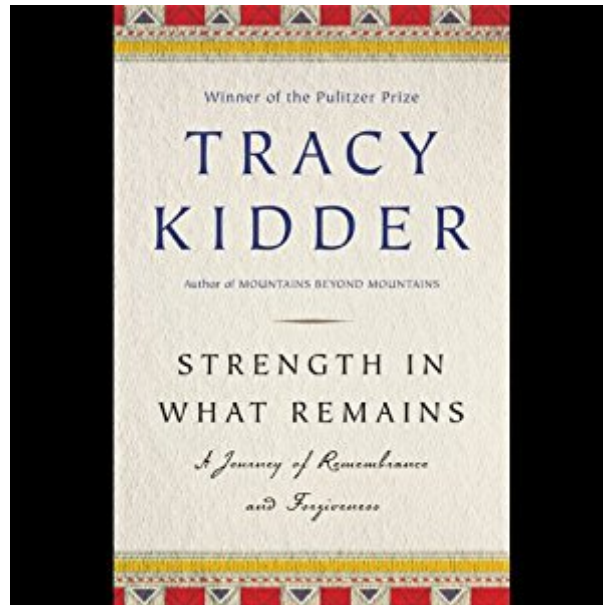


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# Strength In What Remains: A Journey Of Remembrance And Forgetting



## Synopsis

In *Strength in What Remains*, Tracy Kidder gives us the story of one man's inspiring American journey and of the ordinary people who helped him, providing brilliant testament to the power of second chances. Deo arrives in the United States from Burundi in search of a new life. Having survived a civil war and genocide, he lands at JFK airport with two hundred dollars, no English, and no contacts. He ekes out a precarious existence delivering groceries, living in Central Park, and learning English by reading dictionaries in bookstores. Then Deo begins to meet the strangers who will change his life, pointing him eventually in the direction of Columbia University, medical school, and a life devoted to healing. Kidder breaks new ground in telling this unforgettable story as he travels with Deo back over a turbulent life and shows us what it means to be fully human. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
William Wordsworth  
Rarely does an introductory quote capture the essence of a book as well as Tracy Kidder's choice of the above poem, and rarely does irony reach the intensity of genocide survivor Deo's name (Thanks be to God, in Latin). The star rating system for books can be frustrating and misleading. Does a five star rating mean a new Jane Austen is on the loose? Does a four star rating mean a merely decent read? In the case of Kidder's *Strength in What Remains Behind*, my four star rating means a fascinating, thought-provoking, big-hit-with-your-book-club read. With serious books, and this is one, sometimes

I get the sensation that I've put myself in harness, and in the effort to get the fruits of my labor I will be forced to trudge forward until the job is done. Strength in What Remains Behind is the opposite: once attached to the book by the first few pages, it will draw you wide-eyed and enthralled rapidly towards its conclusion. Tracy Kidder's book, briefly, is the non-fiction tale of Deogratias. Raised in Burundi (neighbor to Rwanda), Deo lives a nearly idyllic life until the outbreak of ethnic violence in his country replaces Wordsworth's "of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower" with a living hell that makes Dante's Inferno look like a pleasant winter destination resort. Deo, a Tutsi third year medical student, flees Burundi, arriving at age 24 in New York City with \$200 in his pocket, the clothes on his back, and his will to survive.

Tracy Kidder's latest triumph follows in the footsteps of his masterwork, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. The true story of Deogratias from Burundi to New York and beyond is for everybody, not for any particular special interest. The title, *Strength in What Remains*, is from Wordsworth's romantic "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood". There are many other good reviews if you want to hear more of the particulars, so I want to instead introduce the author to those unacquainted. Mr. Tracy, like John McPhee and precious few others, is at the tiny top tier of journalistic authors of books, as opposed to articles of immediacy. Two years he spent listening to Deogratias tell his story and spent in other research. Years ago at the beginning of my technology career I read his "Soul of a New Machine", the story of the skunkworks of Data General Corp. at the dawn of mini-computers and client-server architecture. From then on I learned just to buy whatever he wrote. You teachers might start with his "Among Schoolchildren". Mr. Kidder is the selfless writer. He does not choose topics to sell books. He has no ideological drum (or horse) to beat. He is not attracted to fads or celebrity, power or the rich. Those are left for the sycophantic, the mediocre, those unencumbered by talent and skill. He uses some sort of dowsing rod for profundity. He is also something of a phenomenologist, letting the truth bubble up from his uncompromising observation of people and circumstances. He does not editorialize or advocate. He does not pretend to understand more than he can show. But he introduces you to all the best people, besides his central figures, taking time to capture them fully. In "Strength in what Remains, Mr.

This is the story of Deo, a survivor of the Tutsi-Hutu genocide in Burundi and Rwanda and how he fared after escaping to America. Even though he was a medical student in Burundi, he started life in America as a homeless person living in New York's Central Park, who made a subsistence living

delivering groceries. Through a series of almost miraculous encounters, he was able to lift himself up, graduate from Columbia University, and build a medical clinic in his native Burundi. Deo's is a life still in progress, and although his clinic is a triumph, we know he still has great things ahead of him. This is to some extent a sequel to Kidder's earlier book *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*, about Dr. Paul Farmer and Partners in Health. Farmer is one of the people who Deo meets, and Deo begins working with PIH. Kidder's writing is very vivid and immediate, and is told from Deo's point of view, so you feel as if you are traveling and experiencing all this with Deo. In particular you feel that he's not much better off as a homeless person in America than he was on the run in Africa, except that in America no one is trying to kill him. On the other hand, because events are presented out of sequence, the vivid writing does not build much tension--the narrative starts in 2006 with Deo's return to Burundi, so we know that he has survived all the events that are detailed later and has prospered in his new country.

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