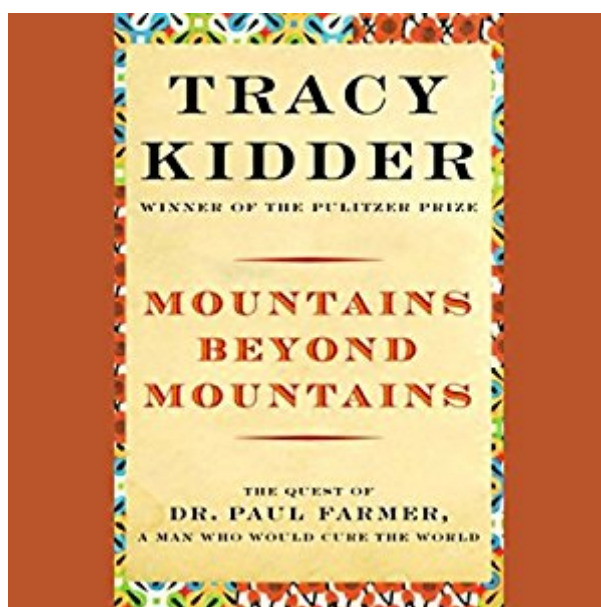


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# Mountains Beyond Mountains



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize-winner Tracy Kidder introduces us to a remarkable man who tackles some of the world's most frightening medical and social problems through principled actions. Harvard Medical School graduate and MacArthur "genius" fellow Paul Farmer spent much of his med school years in Haiti, where he created a health care system and clinic in one of the most grindingly poor places in the world. Owning only one suit and living part of each year in a house without hot water, he travels widely and takes a global approach to the interaction between politics, wealth, social problems, and disease. Farmer makes a difference quietly, using his intellectual gifts and his charisma to further his philosophy that "the only real nation is humanity."

## Book Information

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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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