

Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal Study Guide

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

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Summary

This study guide is based on *Little Princes*, a work of nonfiction by Conor Grennan. The large print edition is published by Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning. It was published with an arrangement with William Morrow, and imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, in 2011.

The book narrates the changes in the lives of a volunteer taking care of children who were taken from their homes. A three month stay turned into a life-changing experience, where, even if he was not physically in Nepal anymore, his heart remained there.

The recent history of Nepal plagues the region. During a civil war, Maoist rebels drafted children into the war effort. To protect their children, parents went into debt to pay exorbitant fees to men who promised to transport them to another town. They were promised that their children would be safe and educated. These men were just opportunists taking advantage of the hopes of the parents. Instead of taking them to safety, where they would be cared for and educated, they were forced to become beggars. As a result of this war, and of Nepalis preying on each other, the already poor nation was struggling further. There were few people in a position to help the children. Outside intervention was necessary.

The author became one of the western volunteers who went to the area to fill that vacuum. “Little Princes” was the name of a home for displaced children in Nepal. Grennan stayed at Little Princes for just three months. It was supposed to be the beginning of a year traveling the world. He was hopelessly unsuited to work as a caregiver, and his foibles had hilarious results. Slowly, he got the hang of his job. The children grew to respect and understand this strange foreigner. Soon, it was his time to leave the kids and travel the world. However, he found that he could not stop thinking about the children. The first chance he could, he returned to help them. He and a friend, another volunteer named Farid, eventually ran the shelter. Much later, they even started a new one, called Dhaulagiri House.

Grennan was definitely an outsider. He knew very little about the culture of this new land. The children were amused by his ignorance. However, he continued to do the job because there really was not anyone else to do it. The shelters relied almost entirely on western volunteers and relief agencies. Even though Grennan had no experience with children, and in fact did not know what to do with them at all, he still felt responsible for them and took it upon himself to look out for them.

Much of the book concerns the day-to-day issues that the children face. They had to go to school, go to temple, and entertain themselves while the few adults looked after them. The quiet moments of the book were filled with descriptions of the children's days, and their funny ways of interacting with Grennan. The darker moments of the book showed just how much danger these children were really in.



There were several situations that showed how dire the children's situation was. When children got sick, they had to go to a hospital with blood-stained beds and hardly any staff. Medicine was more scarce than food. The village where they lived is sandwiched between two sides of a civil war. An army enforced a nation-wide strike, which shut off food supply to the shelter. One of the child traffickers, Golkka, was named as being responsible for the theft of most of the children that Grennan encounters. Golkka was never confronted, because he had political connections and was prone to threatening people who got involved in his affairs. By the end of the book, it was assumed that he was still at large, tricking families into giving him money and their children.

In a long mission, Grennan traveled back to the children's home villages to see if he could reconnect with their families. The family members had no idea that their children had, in fact, been kidnapped. They still believed that their children were safe somewhere, being educated. Additionally, some of the children had been told that their parents were dead and that they were truly orphans. This mission wound up being very dangerous. It was in a remote area of Nepal, accessible only by walking if the one airport was covered in snow. Therefore, as winter approached, Grennan and his group have limited time to meet up with the families. Meanwhile, they dealt with injury, soldiers, illness, and many other dangers along the journey.

They eventually made it to all the villages they needed to, and met up with families from every child, except for two who wound up to truly be orphans. It became the first of several trips to the villages to find the families. The children were wary, untrusting of their parents after having been away from them for so long. They had been beaten by their kidnapper if they ever mentioned having parents, so reuniting them is difficult. Plus, they lived so far away that traveling to them is dangerous. Ultimately, they were physically safer at the shelters run by volunteers than in the homes with their real families.

During the course of the narrative, a love story forms. Liz, a woman looking to volunteer at Grennan's shelter, eventually came over, and they fell in love. They built a life together back in the United States, where Grennan changed from the person who did the day-to-day work at the shelter, to the financial overseer who ran fundraisers in America to help Dhaulagiri House and other shelters in Nepal.

As for the children, they grew up in the protective custody of makeshift shelters set up by westerners. Some rejoined their families. Some stayed at the children's homes. Some did not have a home to go back to.

In the absence of a system that worked, others had to step up to help each other. Western volunteers and global relief agencies did much of the day-to-day work and provided food and medicine. Neighbors of the children's homes in the villages kept an eye on the children, making sure they did not become targets again. Older children took care of younger children. A new kind of family system was formed with all of these kids under one roof. These children had nothing except what they created themselves.



Part 1, a brief note, and the prologue

Summary

Author Conor Grennan begins his true story, *Little Princes*, with a brief overview of the civil war in Nepal, which stretched from 1996 to 2006 and claimed more than 13,000 lives. The legacy of the war was the lost children. Maoist rebels abducted children, forcing them into becoming child soldiers. Meanwhile, child traffickers tricked parents into trusting them, saying that their children would be safe if they paid them to take them to safety.

Grennan then opens his narrative with a prologue that takes place on Dec. 20, 2006. He and two porters were traveling through the mountains at night in winter. It was getting cold, they were low on supplies, he was hurt, and they were in the middle of a Maoist rebel stronghold. This prologue is left off on a cliffhanger as the first part of the book, entitled “*Little Princes*,” begins. The action in this part flashes back to two years before. The note in the beginning of the section states that the action took place between November of 2004 and January of 2005.

Grennan arrived in Nepal, where government buildings were covered in barbed wire, and soldiers with machine guns stopped cars to interrogate the drivers. He had come to Nepal because it looked interesting in a brochure. Even the part about the civil war looked interesting. In retrospect, he tells the reader wistfully how he had hoped this adventure would impress his friends back in the United States, particularly girls he chatted up in bars. But now, faced with real danger, he wished he had taken a different route.

Nepal was the first step in a journey around the world for him. He would be volunteering at an orphanage. A group called CERV Nepal would be his overseers. They taught him such things as how to use a toilet in this country. He was then handed over to a host family in the small village of Bistachhap to get acclimated to the area. It was an uphill climb, as he was clearly an awkward outsider. Not the least of his problems was that the little girl of the host family had decided to teach him Nepali. On the last day, he was trying to show off what he had learned, and he was saying everything wrong. It turned out that the little girl teaching him the language was deaf.

Grennan arrived at *Little Princes*, the orphanage he was assigned to. He met Sandra, a young French woman who started the orphanage. She had named it after “*Le Petit Prince*,” the famous children's book. He was there with other volunteers, including Farid, a French man of about the same age as Grennan, who helped him adjust to his new surroundings.

He was completely unprepared for the job. Much of this chapter details his hopelessness in dealing with children and Nepalese customs. Still, the children took to him. They were loud, rambunctious, and in a constant state of motion. Grennan



compared them to the running of the bulls in Spain. There were 18 children, aged 4-9. All but two were boys. They looked almost all alike to him, and so he had a hard time remembering names. He would associate them with their clothing, since they always wore the same thing. This did not work so well on bath day.

Sometimes, his mistakes were sad. For example, on his first day, recycling containers were being installed for the first time ever. He attempted to show the children how they were used by crumpling up a piece of paper and asking a boy to throw it in the right receptacle. The boy cried. It was not just a piece of paper. It was a drawing the boy had made for him.

Usually, his mistakes are recounted humorously. The children climbed on him, cheated against him with games, and generally just enjoyed his company, even if he did make mistakes. For example, providing one little boy too much shampoo caused the boy to excitedly over-sud his head into a giant, white afro in a temple's public bath.

A few days into his work, the Maoists called for a bandha. This was a strike, where no work would be done by anybody. Anyone who violated this could be the target of violence. The orphans' school was closed, so the staff taught at the orphanage. They broke the kids up into groups and taught them. Grennan, once again, fudged it to get by, barely squeaking out a science lesson.

Very quickly, Grennan started feeling parental toward these children. When one boy, Nishal, would go through temper tantrums every night for attention, he would recall his own tantrums as a boy. Dealing with Nishal felt soothing and karmic for him. At the end of the day, once the children were asleep, the volunteers would share stories of the day over tea. He compared it to the way parents swap stories about their own children.

The author explains the poverty of the children in the area, and how the desperation makes them work harder. One boy, Santosh, built a toy car for himself. He used an empty plastic bottle for the chassis. He used a flat rock to hammer four bottle cap wheels onto the body with rusty nails. After it was too wobbly, he learned he could stabilize it with putting water in the bottle.

About one month into Grennan's three month stay, the orphanage was visited by Golkka. Grennan saw him leaving and was concerned. Sandra sat Grennan down and explained who Golkka was and how Little Princes came to be. All the children came from Humla, an area surrounded by mountains. The only easy way in or out was by plane or helicopter. This made it a target for the Maoists, who grew their forces there. Golkka saw an opportunity there, and offered to bring children to safety for a price. He marched the children through the mountains and then took a bus to Kathmandu. There, he turned them into forced labor. They brought him money, and if they wanted to eat, they had to beg on the street for it. When tourists or aid workers took pity on them, and provided gifts, he would take the gifts or sell them. He realized that other people's sympathy could be used to make him money. They became beggars who would be forced to turn over their earnings, given by unsuspecting tourists, to him. Eventually, Sandra found them, and tried to have the children taken from him by law. The legal



system was weak, however. Instead, Sandra raised the money in France and used that money to start Little Princes. Golkka tried to sell the children to her at \$300 a head, but eventually government pressure was enough that he gave up and gave them to her. His 18 kids were now the 18 students at Little Princes. Soon after, he had another house full of refuge children. Sandra warned Grennan that anything he did in revenge would come back to the children, as Golkka had threatened the school in the past when another volunteer attempted to stop him from getting more children. They were helpless to stop him.

Grennan continued to have culture clash throughout this chapter. He couldn't understand the caste system, where people were assigned a station in life because of how they are born. He watched as the poorest of the poor, the dalits, were banned from most businesses, so they created their own second hand economy mirroring those of their more fortunate neighbors. On the other side, things went very poorly when he mentioned to the kids that Americans eat cow, the sacred animal of Hindu belief.

The first few months of Grennan's work went peacefully, with only a few times when the dangers of the outside world broke in. One of them was when Sandra traveled to an area that was near where the children grew up. She was trying to find their families. Instead, she was captured as a spy and held for two days. When it became clear that the soldiers could get no money out of her as a ransom or bribe, they took her supplies and let her trek back through the mountains. There were two instances where Grennan had to escort one boy, Santosh, to the local hospital. It was understaffed, undersupplied, and unclean.

The first part of the book closes with the end of Grennan's three month stay at Little Princes. Grennan was just one of many volunteers that flowed into and then out of the children's lives. The children liked "Conor Brother," and wanted him to return, but didn't really expect him to. The CERV staff had instructed Grennan to be vague about any eventual return. When he promised he would "try" to return, some of the boys knew that he never would. He left the boys' room after saying good night to them. Then, he broke down in tears in his own room. It wasn't just leaving that was making him cry, it was the internal admission that he would be leaving those kids behind and going on to his normal life in America. He couldn't take it. So, he went back into the boys' bedroom and promised the children he'd be back in a year.

Analysis

Grennan's life before this grand adventure did not matter very much. The reader is thrown right into the world of the situation in Nepal. There is a brief historical overview, then a few pages about the danger of traveling the mountains, and then a flashback of Grennan arriving in the mountains. The reader is given very little of Grennan's life before this adventure. Perhaps Grennan himself did not think it mattered. Perhaps nothing of substance happened to him, at least in comparison to his around-the-world adventure. Occasionally, he will compare something that is happening in Nepal with something that happened in his past, such as the differences in food. So, the author



does not bother going through a long exposition explaining his western background, and instead chooses to explain his background after being exposed to how things are different. Sometimes, one does not realize how different something is until they are faced with it. Another option could be that the author wants the reader to feel the same disjointed chaos that he felt. He came from his upper middle class white upbringing to a world of monotone food, danger, and widespread poverty. The author would be safe to assume that the reader is coming from a western background as well. A small number of Nepali are reading this book. To recreate that dissociation, it is better to simply drop the reader into the mix without any background to soften the introduction. Besides, if the reader is assumed to be a westerner, then there is no reason for the author to describe his upbringing. The reader is probably pretty familiar with it.

The people in Nepal, and especially the children, made a lot out of a little. Grennan watched some people from the lower caste create a makeshift barber shop under a tree because they were forbidden from working in a real shop. This is how they survive. Stuck within this restrictive rules system, they have come up with ways to create jobs when they are not allowed to have them. The children were even more inventive. They created games that Grennan jokingly simplifies with names like “rubber band ball.” There is an entry where Santosh invented a toy car with nothing more than garbage lying around, and a rock. Really, this is some impressively inventive thinking. This train of thought would not come from a child buying a toy at a store. This theme shows up routinely throughout the book. Grennan, coming at it from a Western perspective, is continually amazed at how people manage to survive in this place.

The name “Brother” is more than just a nickname. This important word means a lot more than the reader is first lead to believe. Throughout the chapter, its full definition becomes clear. When Grennan began working with the children, he had no idea what their names were. He had to avoid this for two reasons. First, he wanted the children to know that they were important to him. Second, he wanted to avoid any racist notion that all the kids looked alike. So, he called them all “Brother” because that is what they called him. It worked quite well. There was a connotation to it he did not readily grasp, though. The term “Brother” was significant, because it was a term of endearment and respect. Not everyone was “Brother” to these kids. So, when they called him “Conor Brother” (mistakenly instead of “Brother Connor,” which would be grammatically correct for them), they were showing him respect. He had made a mistake of being too informal in the beginning, but the term turned out to be accurate, as, over time, they became like brothers.

One child, above the others, seemed to hold a special place in Grennan's heart. There were many children, and Grennan did not get to know too many of them at first. However, one of them, the smallest boy, a four-year-old named Raju, pops up time and time again. He appears to be mentioned by name more than the other children. There were 18 children in Little Princes. Some of them do not even appear by name in this first part. However, Raju is mentioned by name a few times. This shows how much the author had a soft spot for the boy.



Grennan was a stranger in a strange land. The author includes tons of anecdotes, both humorous and upsetting, to show how Nepal was like a different world to him. The first time he felt comfortable was in the overwhelmingly white tourist district of Thamel, which he likens to a version of Nepal if it had been a stop in Epcot. Here, the edges were rounded off, the poverty was shoved to the side, and the military was not as omnipresent. It was more comfortable to the traveler. When in the real villages of Nepal, however, there was no cushion. There was no touristy distance between himself and the problems of the area. The poverty was real; the danger was real. By the end of the three months, Grennan had still not acclimated to the different world. It is also important to note that to the people in Nepal, he was the stranger. The kids all know he was a bit of a rube. They cheated at games with him, and took advantage of the fact that Grennan let them get away with a lot more than the seasoned volunteers would. It would be like a child testing the limits of a new babysitter. They were horrified by the fact that he ate the sacred cow back in the United States. Grennan had to backtrack awkwardly, explaining that no, he never ate cow, he meant some of his friends might have eaten cow before. The trip to the hospital to take care of Santosh was a major eye-opener for him. The lack of staff, clean sheets, and medicine was staggering to him. Everyone else was simply used to it. Grennan had to try his best to advocate for the children, while not simply demanding that everyone do things the “right” way like they would in a western hospital.

Grennan was overwhelmed with guilt at the end of this first chapter. He realized how easy it would be to take these three months as a learning experience, and move on. It was heartbreaking to know that he could just follow the other volunteers, as they left in the past. It was so easy to leave, but so much harder to stay. All he had wanted was a good story, and to grow a bit. He did not expect to grow a lot.

Grennan's visit to the orphanage was self-indulgent, and perhaps the book is as well. The author is very clear, although embarrassed, about his intentions in volunteering at the orphanage. He wanted to have a story to tell. His journey was instigated by boredom. He did not want to carry on working in an office every day. He needed a change in scenery. The orphanage was just step one of a year-long journey that included travels all over the world. He expected a change in his life, but not in this way. He expected to come back home and tell cool stories and impress friends and attractive women. Right away, Grennan admits that his motives were less than honorable. However, by the end of the first part, he had decided that he would definitely come back. It remains to be seen, at this early in the book, what the purpose of his writing is. Many people write memoirs so they can talk about how wonderful they are. It could possibly be that writing the book is self-indulgent as well.

Vocabulary

porters, pockmarked, daal bhat, carrom, bandha



Part 2

Summary

Part II (also Chapter 2) encompasses January 2005 to January 2006. This part opens on Grennan's adventures traveling the globe. It was mid-January, 2005. When he had first started out, before hitting Nepal, he had thought of traveling the world as a party. Meeting up with Little Glenn, a friend of his, in Thailand, proved to be more of that kind of experience. They biked and boated through more than a dozen countries, catching up with another friend. They drank and impressed women in bars with their stories.

The countries in southeast Asia and South America were impoverished, and cherished the money that Grennan and his friends were flashing around. Sometimes friends and family would catch up to him. Sometimes he was alone. Sometimes he joined groups of backpackers doing the same things he was doing. He lived a variety of experiences in a relatively short amount of time. Every time he saw street children begging, he remembered the Little Princes. He knew that these street kids were probably forced to give their money over to someone, and that given a normal life, they would be normal kids.

Grennan's adventure ended in October, 2005, as he flew home to New York. Grennan had run through his savings and was living at a house belonging to his parents, who were both professors at Vassar College in New York. However, he missed the Nepali children. So, in January of 2006, roughly a year after he had left, Grennan returned to Nepal for another three-month volunteer position. He was welcomed back by a sea of children, thrilled to have him return. Farid had stayed the entire year Grennan had been away.

Some things had changed at Little Princes. Sandra was back in France, and had only visited twice in the year he was gone. Farid now ran the orphanage relatively alone. There were no other volunteers. A few adults from the village helped with meal preparation and other tasks. The older children were now able to take on some responsibilities as well.

Unfortunately, their isolated area was not as isolated as they thought. Hari, who managed the house within the volunteer network, had met Golkka's brother. Through him, Hari learned that the Maoists had found out about the orphanage. They knew how many children were there and where it was. Every household in Maoist territories were supposed to give one child to the Maoist army. The children were in danger of becoming soldiers. The children were to be returned to Humla, their original home, immediately. Hari told Farid and Grennan to go home, since they were not safe there. The three men - Hari, Farid, and Grennan - considered whether the children should be moved. There was slightly more of a chance that this was an idle threat, so they took their chances and stayed. It turned out, they were right.



Meanwhile, someone else found out about Little Princes. A woman appeared one day, during one of the bandha strikes. She had apparently walked from wherever she had come, because vehicles were not allowed on the road during the bandha. She saw the children playing, and they saw her. The children stopped and stared, not knowing what to do or say. The reason for all this was because of her face: she was obviously the mother of two of the boys. Farid and Grennan invited her in, and brought Hari in, as well. The mother of Nuraj, one of the youngest, and his protective seven-year-old brother, Krish, told her story.

The Maoists had descended upon Humla, destroying the road behind them so that the royal army could not follow. They recruited people, and taught them about how they were going to liberate the village and how everyone's lives would be better. The people supported the Maoist army voluntarily at first. Then, as the army's demands grew, the supply had to be threatened or beaten out of them. They demanded a conscription of one child from every family, as young as five, to work for the army and eventually become soldiers. Golkka was the brother of a local government official, and he was believed to be trustworthy. Nuraj's family went into debt and sold their home to pay for the passage of the two boys to a school where they would grow up safe. They were manipulated, of course. Golkka told the boys to tell everyone that their parents were dead. They were able to elicit more donations when begging that way. If they made a mistake, and said they had parents, Golkka would beat them.

Nuraj and Krish did not embrace their mother when she came. They kept their distance, afraid that Grennan and Farid would beat them, too. She told them where she was living, and left, saying she understood their fears. After she left, Farid took Krish aside and told him that they would be able to bring the brothers out to visit their mother from time to time, to build that relationship back up. In time, all the children began to trust Farid and Grennan. The children started sharing about their lives back home, and their families. They had walled up those memories and emotions, and they all came pouring out. Even though they now realized their parents were alive, there was no way to get to them safely.

Maoists were not their only concerns. King Gyanendra ruled the country as a dictator. Residents were often caught in the power play between the king and the Maoists. Grennan explains a little in this chapter about sham elections, lack of basic freedoms, and threats of violence from both sides.

Farid and Grennan would take Nuraj and Krish to visit their mother and the two-year-old brother they did not know they had. This boy had a deformity in his back. Soon, the mother had seven more children living with her: Navin, Madan, Samir, Dirgha, Amita, Kumar, and Bishnu. Golkka had acquired seven more children from Humla, took the money from the parents, and dumped them off on her. They were starving, living in a little hut. Little Princes had taken on two more children, younger brothers of boys already living there, and so they were at the legal limit for children.

The violence was escalating around Nepal, although it had not yet reached Godawari, where they were living. There was a several-day bandha being issued. When people



were forced to go on strike, the staff at Little Princes could not buy food for the children. Most hoped the strike would only last a few days, but there was talk that if the government did not comply with the Maoists who ordered the strike, the strike would go on indefinitely. Foreign nationals were being told to leave the country because soon it won't be safe for them. Grennan's three month tour was coming to a close in three days.

Farid and Grennan met with Gyan Bahadur, the head of the Child Welfare Board in Nepal. He listened to their concern about the seven children. He said he had been trying to stop Gokka for quite some time. The man was responsible for the displacement of about 400 children. Unfortunately, he was politically connected, so the most jail time he would ever served was three days. The stories of the abuse the children were threatened with added another possible charge to arrest him on. But, in the meantime, Gyan promised to find a spot for the children before Grennan left. He made good on his word. Little Princes received a call from the Umbrella Foundation, which ran a string of orphanages totaling 150 children. It was run by a Northern Irish woman named Viva Bell and a French man named Jacky Buk.

Grennan flew home at the end of his tour. This time, he told the children it might be a few years until he could come back. Farid was trying to arrange his own way home. Hari, who worked for CERV, and Bagwati and Nanu, two women who lived in the village, were to oversee Little Princes in their leave. The village itself always looked after the kids when they could.

Analysis

The threat in which the Maoists learned about Little Princes signifies that they were in constant danger, whether they knew it or not. Ultimately, they determined that the Maoist threat was nothing more than a threat. This worked out for them this time. Since the threat really had no change on the day-to-day operations in Little Princes, the author includes it to demonstrate that there was a threat of danger, even when there was no soldier knocking on the door. The children, thankfully, were relatively oblivious. They felt that they were at a safe place, for the moment. They were, however, always expecting that this safe time could end at any moment. They were perhaps more realistic than Grennan and Farid. The two westerners had not had to grow up with danger all around, so they were not expecting it. The news came as a bit of a shock to them.

The incident with Nuraj and Krish's mother proves that the Little Princes orphanage actually was not an orphanage but a shelter. All this time, Grennan and Farid had been working under the illusion that these children did not have families. Now that they knew differently, it did not make anything easier. They could not bring the children home, because it was not safe enough. The children had to stay longer.

The author demonstrates how untrusting the children were, and how good they were at hiding their fears. Grennan and Farid assumed the kids feel safe. They watched as the kids acted like normal kids. As children, they fibbed, but did not tell any big lies. They assumed that the children trusted them and were open to them. The appearance of



Nuraj's mother revealed just how little they really knew. The children were still trying to protect themselves, and were still expecting the adults caring for them to beat them if they said the wrong thing. The children had been keeping secrets from the people who were taking care of them. Deep down, the children did not trust Grennan. Nuraj and Krish did not even trust their own mother when she came. All adults were suspect.

The village took care of its own whenever it could. That is one thing that Grennan notes several times in the book. If there was a hole in the security net for the children, others would reach in to help. In this case, it took the form of the few people living in the village who helped cook and look after the children. These people wound up being lifesavers, after Farid and Grennan have to leave the country due to violence escalating and the terms of their stints as volunteers finishing. The children were the weakest, most helpless people in the village, and it was heartening that the other adults in the area looked after them.

When the locals could not do it, then westerners stepped in. Nepal had a child trafficking epidemic. One man alone was responsible for 400 displaced children. There were some people who worked very hard to help the children, such as Gyan Bahadur, the head of the Child Welfare Board in Nepal. He was a rare government employee who actually wanted to help the children and was not corrupt. However, there were only so many people, and so many resources, to be able to help. Little Princes was funded entirely by donations. They bought all their food. This money mostly came from western sources. The people helping out were also western. Grennan is American. Farid, Sandra, and Jacky are French. Viva is Northern Irish. These people stepped in when no one else in the area was able to help.

The relief efforts will never end. Grennan took on two three-month stints as a volunteer. Farid worked for a year. Nothing significantly changed during those times. The author mentions some minor changes: The children got a little older. There were a few threats from the outside. Supplies continued to be scarce. This was all a natural progression of things, however, that had already happened for years. The youngest child was four at the start of the book. Although children tended to be independent much earlier in third world countries, there would be at least a decade to go before the youngest children would be able to take care of themselves. That could be a never-ending train of volunteers on three-month shifts. There would be little consistency for the children. There would just be a sea of western faces of people who came in and out of their lives. Although the author does not spell it out, the implication is clear: this problem will not go away.

Finding seven more of Golkka's children proved that not only will the relief efforts never end, but they might just continue to get worse. Child traffickers were still at work, and more and more children were still getting displaced. Gyan was overwhelmed at his office, which was described as being filled with angry people yelling at him all the time. Little Princes was at capacity. And yet there were more children in need. The author continues to build up the problem, without showing any solution on the horizon.

Vocabulary

destitution, mantra, lucrative, corrugated, ubiquitous, despondent, clamoring, tikkas

Part 3

Summary

Part III is a relatively brief interlude that details what happened when Grennan came back to the United States. It takes place during the months of April through November of 2006. As Chapter 3 begins, he was living in his parents' house in Jersey City, New Jersey. He tried to find a job, and realized that his life-changing experiences with Little Princes amounted to just one sentence on a resume. He reconnected with friends and savored the ease and variety of things he used to take for granted, like toilets and hamburgers.

Farid managed to get out, and the two men kept in touch via e-mail. They watched the situation in Nepal on the news, as it spiraled into worse violence. On April 24, 2006, the king was overthrown. But just because one side won the war, it did not mean anyone was safer.

Grennan received an e-mail from Viva Bell. Due to fighting in the streets, it had taken weeks to get to the seven children left with Nuraj's mother. By the time Umbrella had got there, the children were gone. Two days earlier, Golkka had come and stolen them. He had heard that the children were to be moved, and had heard of the interference of someone named "Conor," and he could not risk the children serving as witnesses against him. Grennan e-mailed Farid and updated him, and then said "I'm going back to Nepal." Farid responded immediately: "I'm coming with you" (184).

It was weeks before they could go. Grennan had no money, and no plan. All he knew was that something had to be done. However, even if he flew over to Nepal, he had no way of finding the children and no way of supporting them if he did. He researched how to start a nonprofit organization, to lend some credence and funding to the mission. Eventually, he hit upon a plan: Find the families of the children, starting with the Little Princes. There was a window of opportunity since there was a calm in the fighting after the overthrow of the king. Farid said he was on board.

Grennan and Farid both raised funds for nonprofits they both started. Grennan called his Next Generation Nepal. Farid called his Karya, which meant "work" in Nepali. During Grennan's work in creating his mission, he reached out to old contacts and met new ones. One of these was Anna Howe. She had lived in Nepal for about 15 years and knew the issues very well. She was doing much the same work, rescuing children who had been trafficked. Her organization had the unfortunate acronym ISIS. She and Golkka even know each other - he had threatened her in the past.

Chapter 4 begins with Grennan's return, yet again, to Godawari. There were far fewer soldiers on the streets of Kathmandu. When the children saw him, they became a swarm of energy barreling into him. So, some things did not change. Farid had yet to arrive, but Grennan spent time planning with Viva and Jacky from the Umbrella



Foundation, and Gyan Bahadur, from the Child Welfare Board. All of them were upset at what happened to the seven children they tried to rescue.

Feeling frustrated with his lack of ability to get anything done, Grennan vented at Gyan. He yelled about how hopeless the whole situation was. Gyan responded by leaving his office while people were waiting to speak to him. They got on Gyan's motorcycle and sped through a monsoon. They visited half a dozen houses where children were being held near starvation. The owners of the houses were turning the children into slaves begging for money and then making the children hand the money over to the homeowners. Grennan and Gyan saw at least a hundred children. Grennan could not believe that Gyan knew about these children but could not help them. Gyan replied that the government, and even the volunteers, had run out of room in boarding homes. Gyan offered to perhaps find homes for the children in the future, but at that time all he could do was threaten the owners. This bought them some time and assured the kids ate better for a few days. Grennan and Gyan did not find any of the seven children, but some kids recognized pictures of four of them. They had been at one house and then had gone; Golkka had split them up.

An attorney from the same college Grennan had graduated from saw an article about Grennan's work and e-mailed him. Liz Flanagan had a similar entry to underprivileged youth. She had taken time to travel the world to see what was out there before taking a job as a corporate attorney. She stumbled upon an orphanage for disabled children in Vietnam. This was soon followed by a summer in Zambia with kids who had HIV. Other trips followed. Liz and Grennan admitted, in a series of e-mails to each other, their fears and complete ignorance when it came to working with kids. "I liked Liz immediately" (221), Grennan wrote.

One day, Anna called Grennan with a tip. Someone matching the description of Amita, the one girl of the seven missing children, had been seen in Thangkot. It was enough of a lead to follow. Grennan took the trip to the small village without any plan on how to get her out. As it turned out, he did not need one. Amita was just walking down the street, trying to get water. She recognized him, and he took her to a tea shop nearby. He called Gyan and he sent a car for her. She was taken to Umbrella immediately. Shortly thereafter, Gyan said four of the boys were found as well. However, two of them were half starved and their health was in jeopardy.

Grennan took the two boys, Navin and Dirgha, to a hospital, where there was an entire ward for malnutrition. They spent a night there, and Dirgha was finally strong enough to sit up on his own. While staying there, awake at night, Grennan had time to think. He realized what a long journey he had taken from backpacking around the world to being in a malnutrition ward taking care of two boys who were little more than strangers. He decided he would not have it any other way.

Umbrella took the boys in, and Grennan gratefully handed them over to Jagrit, a teenager who had grown up in one of the homes and now had a position of authority. Meanwhile, Gyan found out the location of another boy, Kumar. Golkka had sold him to someone as a slave. Because of delicate political situations, Gyan said they could not



just go there and grab him. After long days had passed, Viva called Grennan and said Gyan had just dropped Kumar off. It was never revealed how Gyan had rescued Kumar.

Viva and Jacky found a house that Grennan could rent and turn into the shelter that he had wanted. Jagrit acted as translator as he negotiated the deal. Then, he sent photos of the house to Farid and Liz. They both loved it.

Farid arrived on November 21. They had the unfortunate news that they would be leaving Little Princes to set up this new orphanage. The older boys were starting to take care of the younger ones anyway, and the other staff took care of anything else. The new home would be called Dhaulagiri House, named after one of the highest mountains in the Himalayas. When it was done, it could hold 25 children. They beamed with pride over finally achieving their dream. Then, Farid went and gathered the six missing children they had recovered. They were told this was their house. The children asked over and over if it was really theirs.

Grennan rented an apartment within view of Dhaulagiri House. His e-mails with Liz had become more and more frequent. She was going to be traveling to India shortly. She was inspired by Mother Teresa and wanted to work where she had worked. Despite everyone (from the person who owned the apartment to some of the older children) noticing that he was single, Grennan really did not have time or opportunity to date. However, through these e-mail exchanges, he had found a kindred spirit. He longed for a chance to meet in person, especially after she sent a picture of herself working with children and he saw what she looked like.

Analysis

Grennan shows how his goals change drastically because of working with the children. When Grennan returned to the states, he was living in comfort in his parents' home. He was away from the constant struggle of caring for 18 or more children. After pages and pages of complaining about how out of place he was, he was surprised that he missed Nepal. Now that he was home, he was trying to figure out what to do with the next stage in his life. Grennan had a list of goals he was working on. These include jobs he was looking at, careers and skills he wanted to acquire. When he ripped those pages out, he replaced them with the names of the seven children who had been kidnapped. This demonstrates his change in goals. He thought he would be able to have this experience and then move on. It did not happen. This scene shows how he took the children with him in his heart.

Trust was a difficult commodity to find in Nepal. Grennan was upset because the last thing he had told the seven children was that someone was going to come for them, and that this person was someone they could trust. The person who came for them was Golkka. So, Grennan felt like he had betrayed the children. He also temporarily lost some trust in Gyan. He stopped short of openly accusing him, but he definitely felt that Gyan might be incompetent, being unable to help the children. Although Grennan lost some trust in Gyan, it was restored by the end of the day after Gyan took him on a tour



of at least 100 other children who also needed help. Grennan learned that the problem was larger than he realized and that people like Gyan were doing the best he can. The author includes this information to show two things: first, he was having trouble trusting others; second, despite creating a nonprofit and doing all this work, he was still an outsider looking in.

The incident with Gyan also shows that Grennan responded to problems with a Western mentality: just fix the problem. This is tied in to a few of the themes explored in this book. One of them is about how Grennan grew up isolated from the real problems of the world. The other is culture shock. Both of these themes are expressed in this conflict with Gyan. He lacked the understanding that there were serious issues that have been going on for decades before his arrival, and will likely be going on for decades after he leaves. Grennan was an outsider looking in on the issues. They seemed simple to him: If children were suffering, save them. If children were hungry, feed them. People who had been dealing with these issues for years, like Gyan or Viva, knew that these issues were delicate and could not be fixed through force or the wave of a magic wand. They understood that baby steps were sometimes all that could be done, and that any step in the right direction should be applauded. They did not judge that if someone did not solve a problem immediately, they were not doing a good enough job.

Grennan put a face to the problem of child trafficking. More specifically, seven faces. The world was generally aware that this problem exists on some level. Again, this was something the author probably did not consciously think about on a daily basis before stepping foot in Nepal for the first time. Since Grennan had seen those seven faces, and learned their names, they came to represent the problem as a whole for him. The seven were a symbolic number. Many of the children in rural Nepal were at risk. Grennan felt personally responsible for those seven. After his tour with Gyan, he saw more than 100 who were in the same situation. There could have been hundreds more they did not know about. These seven names were put on Grennan's to-do list of goals. Although Grennan did not explicitly say it, the reader can infer that even if all seven of the children get saved, that the mission will not end there. This is only the beginning.

Grennan continued to feel like a fraud. This was a feeling he had quite a bit. Grennan always feeling like he is inexperienced at this job is a recurring theme in the book. This time, though, he felt that there were real consequences. He felt like he was to blame for the seven kids going missing. If he had stayed in Nepal, he would have been able to help. Instead, he went home to a comfortable house. He felt particularly guilty that he was living in relative ease while the children he knew were suffering half a world away. Their greatest struggle was living from day-to-day. His greatest struggle was figuring out what he was going to do for a career. He also felt like he was not being honest with the people supporting him in his nonprofit. He needed money, but he was not saying how some of this was his fault. He felt responsible for the seven going missing but he could not tell his supporters that. He had no idea how to accomplish his goals. If he were to tell the financial backers that he had no real plan, his funding would dry up. To admit that he had no plan would cause his nonprofit to fail. It would also mean he would have to admit that he might fail as well.



In Nepal, those who can help, sometimes do. This was the case of Gyan and Jagrit. Gyan proved himself to be one of the good guys. In a corrupt government that was in the middle of a civil war, he still tried his best to help kids. Jagrit was a teenager in one of the other shelters. Because he was more independent, he did not need to be cared for the same way as many of the children. Additionally, he could help with the day-to-day care of the children. He had a position of responsibility. Even at Little Princes, a year had passed since Grennan first met them, and the older children were able to help take care of the younger ones.

Vocabulary

autocratic, refute, euphoric, stewed, re trafficking, leveraging, hepped-up, assuaging, solemnly, implored, hellacious, epicenter, enamored, veracity, stupas

Part 4

Summary

Part IV, and Chapter Five, takes place over the short span of time between November 2006 through December 2006. This time period encompasses Grennan's trip to Humla to find the families of the children.

Grennan started assembling information about the six rescued children and the Little Princes in advance of his secret trip to Humla. He wanted to know names, locations, and anything else that could help him find their families. It had to be secret, however. If the children found out, they might get too excited and be let down if he failed. Also, if news traveled back to Golkka, Grennan and the children's safety would be threatened.

Grennan's guide through the area was D.B., a Buddhist native of Humla who was assisting the ISIS Foundation. D.B. had his own list of families that he was seeking. Grennan and D.B. assembled a group of six other men to undertake this mission, including Rinjin and Min Bahadur. They met with other aid workers, but they also had to meet with the Maoist leaders of the area in order to ask their permission. After a two-hour conversation in Nepali, D.B. had secured not only the permission from the local Maoist leader, but a letter from him indicating that any other Maoist officer should help them in any way on their journey. The Maoist leader was from Humla, and he apparently wanted to help the children.

The march to Humla was grueling. There were very few settlements. Instead, they trekked through mountainous land, over rivers, and past stampedes of goats. Grennan's knee could not take the stress, and he slowed the rest of the men down. Finally, they made it to Ripa, where at least one of the children was from. As Grennan took in the scene, there was unbelievable poverty, no medicine of any kind, and snow on the mountains. This last part meant that winter had already come. They had been hoping to be able to get to the airport and fly out, but snow meant that flight was impossible, and they would have to walk back.

In Humla, the village elder sent a couple over to them. Grennan could tell by looking at them they were Anish's parents. After an interview, in which Rinjin translated, this was confirmed. At the end of the conversation Grennan chastised the parents for what they did and warned them never to do it with any other children. Grennan felt guilty for being so harsh, but they needed to know that Golkka – or any other trafficker – abandoned children. It was through luck that Anish did wind up healthy and educated like Golkka had promised. Grennan would later find the families of Hriteek and Bikash from the Little Princes home, and Navin and Madan, from Dhaulagiri House.

The group traveled on to Tumcha, another village, where they found the mother of one of their boys, “Crazy” Rohan, named so because he was full of imagination. Soon after, they found the mother of Amita, the one girl from the seven missing children. This



interaction made Grennan feel homesick, seeing such a nurturing woman reminding him of his own mother. They stumbled upon a postman who knew the village of Jaira, where Jagrit was from. Grennan asked if he could find anyone who knew his parents, since Jagrit was an orphan. The postman said the parents were alive; he had known Jagrit's father since he was a boy. The death certificates were fake. Jagrit had no idea his parents were alive. Jagrit's father was found and informed him of what had happened since Jagrit was taken. After seeing his own fake death certificate, Jagrit's father was overwhelmed. The last time he saw Jagrit was nine years earlier. Jagrit's father asked if Grennan would tell his son that he was alive. Instead, Grennan had the village schoolteacher help the man write a letter to his son. As the father left, Grennan had Rinjin tell him how great Jagrit was, and how everyone loved him.

There was less luck with the parents of Raju and Priya. They had fallen ill and died four years earlier, so the children truly were orphans.

At the end of a three week journey, the team found the family of the last boy, an eight-year-old from Little Princes named Ram. Grennan split off from the rest of the team. They had a secondary mission to find families for Anna Howe, and some of the men lived in Humla so they stayed. For five days, he waited for the helicopter to take him back to Kathmandu. The helicopter never came. He and Dhananjaya, who ran the local food donations, ventured to another village to try to catch the helicopter at another stop, and watched it fly overhead, missing it. Grennan parted ways with Dhananjaya, and took two porters with him to another village, hoping to walk out. They went the wrong way. The journey came to an end after nine hours without food, at 10 p.m. in a valley with no shelter. Then, impossibly, a Scottish man named David wandered into the area with a troop of men working for a Danish anti-hunger organization. They had food and access to shelter. The Danish group had saved Grennan's group's lives.

Finally, Grennan managed to make it to an airport. He was awaiting his trip home, when another chance encounter took place. He ran into Navin and Madan, two of the Dhaulagiri House missing boys. They were there with their father. After Grennan had found him in Humla, he went out to bring his boys home.

There had been a pressing need to get back to Kathmandu that was beyond survival; it was social. Grennan had, rather optimistically, arranged for three people to meet him a few days after he was scheduled to return. He managed to make it back just in time. After coming back to Kathmandu, he met up with Kelly and Beth, college friends who had agreed to meet him there. After a cold beer with his college friends, Grennan called Farid to say he was safe. Farid said that Dhaulagiri House had gone from six kids to 26 since Grennan had left. Farid and the Umbrella Foundation took 29 children from a trafficker who had been using them for years. Some went to Umbrella, and Dhaulagiri kept the rest. Then, Farid said he was picking up Liz Flanagan. She was the third visitor, and had arrived a day early. Grennan, who had not even been home since he was in the mountains, hustled his friends back to his apartment so he could finally shower, shave, and make himself look presentable to this woman. She knocked on his door, and he opened it and hugged her before she could introduce herself.



Analysis

Once again, Grennan took on more than he felt he was capable of doing. This section of the book is not written like an adventure, with a hero who is competent and handles every challenge. This section is written with the author remembering his fear of dying and regret of letting people down. This trek throughout the mountains to find the children was filled with real danger. There were enemy soldiers, and there was no guarantee that they would be peaceful despite promises from a leader and a supposed ceasefire. Throughout the book, Grennan has thrown himself into situations regardless of whether he was actually able to do them or not. In this case, he was definitely the weakest link of all the people going on this expedition. He hurt himself. He got food poisoning. He did not speak the language. There were other people in the group who could make a fire with ease, and Grennan could only sit back and watch. Really, the only thing he had was determination, and the money to hire the other workers and pay for food.

Another way Grennan felt unqualified was when he spoke to the families of the children. This was more of an interpersonal failing than a physical one. Throughout the book, he had been a kind of surrogate, taking care of these kids in the absences of their families. Grennan did not really have any say in their lives, technically. Even though he had been caring for their basic needs for months, it did not make him their father. He did feel protective of them, and he can not hide his indignation when he chastised the parents for giving their children to traffickers. During each interaction, Grennan still felt like an outsider. This has not changed throughout the book. He felt like the families should not be hearing news about their children through someone like him. He considered himself a mix between a messenger and the person he really had been: a caretaker. Only, the parents did not realize the extent of how he had been taking care of their children. This was intimately personal news, coming from a stranger. Grennan felt like he was injecting himself into these families.

This time, however, Grennan had not only plunged headfirst into this adventure alone, but he had taken other people with him. Throughout this book, he had taken on challenges with a sink or swim mentality. Taking care of the kids at the shelter, for instance. He jumped right in, with the hopes that he could make a difference in these children's lives and care for them. Even though he made several mistakes, ultimately, he swam. This adventure, however, endangered the lives of the other people in the group. Grennan had created a timeline to get the job done before winter set in. This created an unnecessary danger. The rest of the team was in danger because the mission was not put off until spring. However, it is unknown if spring and summer created their own dangers in the region. It could have been true that the summer was just as deadly as the winter. Also, the relative amount of peace that they enjoyed could have been gone in just a few short months.

Grennan was more worried about meeting up with his friends than the impending winter. The winter was mentioned several times. He writes that when he first saw the white tops of the mountains, his hope sank. However, he writes far more often about wanting to get



back to Kathmandu before Kelly, Beth, and Liz. arrived. The fact that Grennan arranged everyone coming to meet him at the same time, with only a few days to spare for anything to go wrong, was reckless. If his friends had arrived in the region and had to spend the entire trip without him, they would have been very angry with him. It was a long shot that Grennan took that he was lucky enough for it to pan out.

For perhaps the first time in the book, the author refers to Kathmandu as “home.” He was waiting for the helicopter to arrive, to take him “home.” This shows just how different his perception had become. Home used to be the east coast of the United States. Now, it is a village in the mountains half a world away.

The children might be better off at the shelter than at their homes. The children were taken from a poor and dangerous area where hunger was common. They wound up at an orphanage where they were cared for and educated. True, it was not Golkka's intent to feed and clothe these children, yet that is what eventually happened. Through luck and the intervention of Samaritans, the children received exactly what the traffickers promised. Some could say their standard of living was better at the shelter. Their caretakers were protecting them from traffickers and soldiers. They went to school; they went to temple; they had clean clothes, and were clean themselves. They did not have to worry about food or drinkable water. They even watched four-hour Bollywood kung fu movies on Grennan's laptop. On the other hand, they were not with their family. These adults running the shelter loved them very much, and the other children were like brothers and sisters, but there is no substitute for real family. It is a delicate question: “Are these children better off at the shelter?” It is unclear if there would ever be a correct answer.

The children left behind at the shelter must have been full of hope when Navin and Madan's father arrived for them. Grennan had gathered all the information about the families as quietly as possible. He did not want the children to get their hopes up. If they thought he was coming back with stories about their families, they would have been on a high the entire time he was gone. Then, they would have crashed if he failed. The fact that one of the fathers came and took two of the children home must have had an empowering effect on the children. Every child in an orphanage then held out hope that their real parents would come and take them home. When Krish and Nuraj's mother appeared at the shelter, it sent shockwaves through the children. Suddenly, they were all talking about their families and their home villages. The same thing probably happened here, too. As soon as Navin and Madan's father arrived, the rest of the children must have started talking about their parents and hoping they would come and get them as well. The reader never knows for sure, since the book follows Grennan's experiences, and he was not there.

Although it is not clearly stated, the mission that takes place during this part of the book is the one alluded to in the prologue. The author started off the story during the most dangerous part of his time in Nepal. It is his way of telling the reader right away that this was a dangerous place. Now, after having read this part, the reader can conclude that the prologue takes place at the time when Grennan had split off with two porters and had gone the wrong way. He was in a valley with no food or shelter, and night was



falling. The prologue was right before the Scotsman named David miraculously comes by and saves Grennan. This was probably the moment that Grennan felt the most vulnerable. There was no way that he could see to survive the night. As an author, he probably considered this a strong starting spot because it illustrates all the danger he was in.

Vocabulary

preternatural, forbearance, discomfiting, omission, virulent, berth, stimuli, appropos, panniers



Part 5 and afterword

Summary

Part V of the book contains the final two chapters, and takes place from December 2006 to September 2007. It is entitled "Liz."

In Chapter 6, Grennan welcomed Liz, and his friends Kelly and Beth, into his home. It was hard for him to adjust to the relatively quick pace of Thamel and the neighborhoods and the children. On top of that, he had this girl to impress and his friends to host. They went to Dhaulagiri House and Farid introduced them to the children they took from a child trafficker while he was away on his mission. The trafficker had convinced the children and his neighbors that Farid, Jacky and Anna had come to steal the children, so it did not go easily. The children took a while to trust them once they were at the house.

Then, Grennan took Jagrit aside. He did not have a gentle way to say it, so he simply told Jagrit that his family was alive. Then, he showed him a series of photographs, and handed him the letter from his father. Jagrit broke down in tears. For a long time, they went through the papers, the photos, and everything about his hometown and his family. Finally, Jagrit asked to be left alone with it all.

At the end of a visit of less than three days, Liz left, flying on to India to do charity work.

Grennan went to Godawari to visit the Little Princes. Word had spread among them of his trip, and the kids were falling over themselves to get word of their families. He showed them a slideshow of images on his laptop, and gave the children pictures of their family and letters from their parents. Sadly, Raju and his sister Priya did not join in this. They knew their parents were dead. Some of the parents of Dhaulagiri kids came to visit or called. They did not have the resources to take their children home yet, though.

Liz came for another visit, this time for a week. She and Grennan started a relationship, albeit a long distance one: two people from America, one living in Nepal and one in India. They would talk for a few hours a day, despite the time zones and a wiring system besieged by power outages and even rampant monkeys.

Meanwhile, Gyan found Bishnu, the last of the seven children that were stolen twice by Golkka. Gyan had learned that Golkka had sold him to a hotel, where he worked 12-hour shifts washing dishes. Then, a bank manager found out about him and bought him from the hotel. The boy became a servant in the bank manager's home. Gyan had managed to get Bishnu and the bank manager to his office, but the manager was not giving Bishnu up without a fight. Grennan and Jacky went to negotiate and figure out a plan. They could not tell if Bishnu was being treated well or not. It was possible that the bank manager rescued him from the hotel, and that he was living quite comfortably. The



fact that the man refused to give him up until he saw the living conditions of the orphanages made Grennan and Jacky think that he did have the boy's best interests at heart. While getting into a cab, some random homeless child got in with them. Grennan confirmed with Gyan that this boy was, in fact, an orphan, and not visiting with someone, so they took this kid back to the orphanage as well.

Back at Dhaulagiri House, Bishnu met up with the four remaining kids that he had known about a year ago. The bank manager was shown the house, but in the end, he refused to give up Bishnu. He was a large, strong man, and when it came to blows he easily overpowered Grennan and Jacky. Jacky pulled free of the fight and made a call on his cell phone. Grennan wrestled with the man, trying to keep him from running out the door, grabbing Bishnu, and fleeing. Jacky had a quick, friendly conversation and then handed the phone to the bank manager, stating "Sir, the mayor would like to speak to you." After the bank manager, who was never named in the book, spoke to the mayor, he left without a word and without Bishnu.

Chapter 7 is an extremely brief chapter summing up some of the feelings Grennan had been having. A week-long visit by Liz receives just a few sentences. In May, 2007, Grennan went on another expedition to find families, and wound up finding 17 of them. That is just a paragraph. Generally, this chapter was dedicated to doubts of what he was doing, because his heart was in Washington, D.C. with Liz. He asked Farid if his friend would be all right without him for six weeks, and Farid said he would. Grennan said he wanted to head back to the U.S., help out with some fundraisers, and, he snuck into the conversation, propose to Liz.

The author does not talk about the visit. Instead, he describes his return to Nepal, the way he told the children how he proposed and how she said yes.

Farid and Grennan were finding the families of children, but having trouble reuniting them. Sometimes there was suspicion of abuse in the home. Sometimes, a parent had remarried, and the stepparent refused the child from the previous marriage. Often, the families could not afford to take the child in. Paying the family a stipend to feed the child resulted in neighbors selling their children to traffickers in the hope that they would get a stipend down the road, too.

Eventually, Grennan started to realize that he needed to come back to the U.S. He would be able to raise funds better in the West. And, of course, that was where Liz was. However, leaving would create a huge vacancy. He worried about leaving Farid alone to handle all that work. However, it just so happened that Anna was planning on leaving ISIS Foundation, but did not want to leave Nepal. So, she took Grennan's place.

The children and staff gave Grennan a leaving ceremony. It was a bittersweet event. It had been three years since he first came there. In the book's Afterward, during the months that followed, Farid had taken some of the children back to Humla. They reconnected with their families, awkwardly at first. Then, they became accustomed to village life. It was only a brief trip, and then they went back to Little Princes. They had a renewed eagerness to study harder and become doctors, teachers, or leaders in their



villages. Farid said that since the area was safer now, the orphanage could be moved closer to their home village, so it would not take a plane to visit their families. Farid had filled Grennan in on all of this by phone, as Grennan was in a New York City apartment he shared with Liz and their newborn son.

In a final part of the book entitled “About Next Generation Nepal,” the author explains that with the funds from publishing this book, the nonprofit was able to open a children's home in Humla, closer to the home villages of all the children.

Analysis

The author speeds up the ending of the book because the most important parts of the book have past. The book proceeds at a nice pace for most of time. Each part takes up a distinct section of time. An entire part of the book might take up just a few months. Here, a few months breeze by in less than a page. It is anticlimactic because that is how the story is. Nothing happens that is more emotional than staying up all night in a hospital with two boys dying of malnutrition. Nothing is more dangerous than the trek through the mountains. Nothing is more awkward than Grennan's first few months. There is no other closure than meeting the families of the children. The seven children that Grennan feels most responsible for are finally recovered. The villain – child traffickers personified by Golkka – is never caught. The most emotional parts of the story of the children are past.

Wisely, the author downplays his relationship with Liz. Although Part V is called “Liz,” and she is a major reason for his staying in the United States, her visits are mostly given a highlight reel. The children are told how he proposed to her. The reader is not present at the event, however. This book is called *Little Princes*, and it focuses mostly on them. Liz is in the author's thoughts a lot, but this is not the main story. He does not want to take the attention away from the children. After all, he knows that this is the whole reason he is writing this book. He wants to show the world the issues that these children face and that they need funding. That mission would be obscured if he spent too much time on the romantic subplot. The author realizes that not every story needs the love story to take center stage.

The author rushes through earlier chapters as well. In Part II, he rushes through his journey around the world. There certainly could have been stories to tell in Thailand and other countries. The author rightly acknowledges that the reader is here because she wants to know more about the trouble in Nepal and the fate of the children. The travel through the world is shown only to give some contrast to the area in Nepal. The touristy areas Grennan explores, with bars and other young westerners doing the same thing, are shown in sharp relief to the harsh mountains of Nepal. It is important to note that these other countries are not entirely different than Nepal: the author points out poverty in these nations. Since he has lived among the world's poor, he is more able to recognize it in other nations.



Part V serves as a transition time, giving a rough idea of what will happen with the children in the future. The book ends in 2007, and it had been published in 2011. Most of these children are still children as the book goes to print. Also, there was not much hope for a wide breadth of careers for the children. They were probably going to continue living the way their parents lived. There might not be a happy ending. This transition is more for the reader. It is designed to edge the reader out of the month-to-month life that the book described and show that they are still there. They are still in Nepal. They are still facing poverty. The child traffickers are still at large. The story does not end.

With the closure of the book, the reader learns that the main purpose of the book is fundraising. The main purpose of this book being written is as a fundraiser for Next Generation Nepal. The organization relies entirely on the kindness of strangers. Purchasing this book allows proceeds to go to the organization. Presumably, this is one of the fundraisers that Grennan is able to focus on upon his return to America. The second reason Grennan wrote this book is to share the stories of the children so that other people in the world will know of the troubles in the area. When Grennan first arrived in Nepal, he was oblivious to the struggles that the children suffered. Even after spending months living there, he had to climb a learning curve. The western world is pretty well cut off from the strife in Nepal. Many people would not be able to find the country on a map. The author uses this book to explain the issues first hand. He names the children and describes them so that they are not just a statistic.

Vocabulary

lecherous, hawkers, rudderless, scrum, brogue, regale



Important People

Conor Grennan

Conor Grennan is the narrator of the book, telling about his experiences. He comes from a childhood of comfort. His parents are professors at Vassar College in New York. They have a vacation home that they let him live in. He is the first to admit that he is ill-prepared to take care of a house full of orphans in a third world country.

He worked for 8 years at the EastWest Institute trying to affect humanitarian policy issues in foreign countries. He left in 2004 to travel the world and volunteer in Nepal. This turns out to be a life-changing experience for him.

While many people travel the world to find themselves, Grennan did not expect it to happen to him. He expected that he would return with some great stories to impress women at the bars back in his home town. He expected to take the experiences with him. Instead, the experiences were so strong that they kept him there.

Even after his three-month stint was over, his thoughts keep lingering on the kids he left behind. Eventually, he creates a nonprofit organization with the intent of opening another house for children in Nepal. He and Farid track down the families of the “orphans,” and realize that they were not really orphans. They reunite some of the children and their families. They also work with other people in the region who are also looking out for children. They become part of a network of people who are creating a safety net for the children that fall through the cracks of Nepal's very broken welfare system.

By the end of the book, Grennan has accomplished most of what he set out to do. He has found the families of children, even if reconnecting the children proves more difficult than imagined. Ultimately, he decides that his true role is to be home in the United States, a comfortably married family man. From the U.S., he can organize fundraisers with business and political connections which would be impossible from Nepal. The funds raised are then used to support the childrens' homes he helped create.

Farid

Farid is another volunteer at Little Princes. Grennan meets Farid as an equal, another worker at the orphanage. He is a Frenchman of about the same age with long dreadlocks. Within a year, Farid is running the orphanage. A foster child, he now took care of orphans. During the course of his time in Nepal, he becomes a Buddhist, the lack of desires in that religion a perfect fit with the simple lifestyle they had. Grennan and Farid both start out as volunteers. Both of them make this their life's mission after their volunteer time is over.



Sandra

Sandra is a French woman who runs the orphanage Little Princes, named after the book *The Little Prince*. She is a volunteer who, like the others, stumbled into her vocation quite by accident. She went off the beaten path and found children who needed help. She creates Little Princes but eventually leaves it in the hands of Grennan and Farid and the other volunteers.

Maoists

The Maoists create the conflict that causes most of the issues in the book. The civil war spread throughout Nepal, as Maoist revolutionaries recruited people from the poor villages promising prosperity in exchange for support. Soon, they were drafting children. This caused the villagers to pay exorbitant fees to people to escort their children out of the area. These escorts wound up being child traffickers who basically kidnapped the children. The Maoists feature in a few sections of the book. There are times when open combat, or threats of combat, make basic things, like food or transportation, difficult to get. By the end of the book, the Maoists are mostly toothless, but they are still armed and seeking to control things by force.

Anna Howe

Anna Howe's story runs parallel to Grennan's. She started the unfortunately named ISIS Foundation, which has similar goals to helping children in the area. She is more street tough and experienced than Grennan, though. Once, she told a story of how she was captured by Maoists to be ransomed. She managed to shame the teenage fighters into letting her go. By the end of the book, she leaves ISIS, wanting to be in a smaller organization. She takes over for Grennan as he goes back to the U.S.

Gyan Bahadur

Gyan Bahadur is a Child Welfare Board official who helps the children in various ways throughout the book. He helps locate some of the missing children. He tries to make himself available to Grennan and Farid, despite the constant demands on his office. He is known by many in social services as someone who can get things done. In a widespread bureaucracy full of corrupt government officials, Gyan is one of the good guys.

Raju

Raju is a very young boy at the Little Princes orphanage. While most of the children are named in the book, few stand out. The author takes the time to describe him more than others. Perhaps it is because he is the youngest that the author has a soft spot for him.



He is a typical little kid, full of energy and with no focus. Raju painstakingly retells his whole day at bedtime to draw it out. He shouts about professional wrestlers and climbs all over the adults.

Jagrit

Jagrit is a 14-year-old boy who lives at one of the Umbrella Foundation homes. He has a position of authority there, since he is one of the oldest. Unlike the other children, he truly is an orphan. His file contained his parents' death certificates. Later, Grennan discovers that these certificates are forged and that Jagrit is not an orphan. Jagrit represents children who take care of other children. Once they have been in the system long enough, and they do not need adults to care for all their needs, they become more independent. Some, like Jagrit, become leaders and helpers, taking on the responsibility to oversee the younger ones.

Golkka

The man known only as Golkka is a child trafficker. He took the children from Humla, a district in the northwest corner of Nepal. When the Maoists took Humla, he told the families he would bring them to safety, for a price. He marched them through the mountains to a road, and took the bus to Kathmandu. There, he employed them as slaves, forcing them to beg in the streets and then collecting the money they scrounged. He is connected politically, so charging him with a crime has always been elusive. Although it is his scheming that creates Grennan's life mission, the reader never meets Golkka. He is seen from afar one time, but that is all. He is always one step ahead of the people looking out for the children.

Liz

Liz Flanagan is an alumni of the same college Grennan attended. She read about his nonprofit in a local paper, and reached out to him. Soon, they were e-mailing several times a day. This forges a long-distance relationship that stands the test of time. She is a positive thinker, good with the children, and dedicated to following in the footsteps of Christians that came before her, such as Mother Teresa.



Objects/Places

Nepal

The bulk of the story takes place in Nepal, where recent history of a civil war taints everything that happens. It is a nation with a serious problem with poverty, particularly in the remote areas. What separates Nepal from other countries with poverty problems is the child trafficking issue that stems directly from the civil war. In other words, the events of this book could only happen in Nepal.

Little Princes Children's Home

The Little Princes Children's Home is situated on the southern border of the Kathmandu Valley. There is just a ridge of hills separating their valley from Maoist forces. It is in the small village of Godawari.

Like all homes in Godawari, there is a flat roof. People spend a lot of time up there. It is a playground for the children, and there is a low wall built around it to keep them safe. Farid and Grennan also use the roof as a lookout. They keep an eye on the children all over the property, and keep an eye out for any strangers approaching the place.

toilet

The author actually spends some words on toilets a few times. There are not any at Little Princes. It has become something that represents the western world to him. Any time there is modern plumbing, he is happy.

the toy car

One of the boys, Santosh, builds a toy car out of a discarded plastic bottle, some nails, and bottle caps. With some trial and error, he discovers that it rides better with a little water in it. This kind of ingenuity symbolizes how the people in Nepal have to make something from nothing. It also shows that these kids can be quite bright, and could have a great future if their basic needs are met.

Daal Bhat

daal bhat is a traditional meal in Nepal, and the kids eat it twice a day. It is unclear if there is a third meal at all. It is made of lentils and rice. If Grennan is lucky, it comes with spices. If he is unlucky, it comes with a lot of spices. Being Hindu, they do not eat beef, and meat in general is hard to come by. This meal is mentioned many times by the author, who is an American used to high calorie foods and lots of variety. It represents



the simplicity in Nepal that is not by choice, but by necessity. The children, fed a steady diet of it throughout their lives, do not know what they are missing.

Dhaulagiri House

This is the house that Grennan and Farid rent and turn into an orphanage for the seven children that had been lost. It is large enough to house 25 children. It has its own well, which is rare indeed for this area. It is near other orphanages run by the Umbrella Foundation.

Laptop

Throughout the book, Grennan's laptop is vitally important to him. It serves as a lifeline to the outside world when he is feeling cut off. Of course, the internet connection has to be available, and not cut off by a myriad of possible problems: weather, power outage, a nation-wide strike, or even monkeys messing with the wires. Through e-mail, he is able to communicate with Farid when he is done with his first three-month stint. They write to each other about their desires to start something in Nepal like what they had seen. Also, the e-mails are what connects him to Liz. Without that, he never would have found his future wife. The story would have been impossible 15 or so years earlier, when e-mail was not as prevalent. The laptop is also a source of entertainment, like when Farid sneaks it out of Grennan's office so the kids can watch a four hour Bollywood kung fu movie.

The camera

Grennan's digital camera is a vital tool in reconnecting the children with their families. He is able to take pictures of the kids to show their families. As well, he takes pictures of the parents to show the kids. When the kids see pictures of their home villages, and the people they know, it awakens so much emotion in them. There are also a lot of kids who do not have any experience with this technology. They do not even realize they are getting their picture taken, which leads to some very candid shots. Or, they have never seen a digital camera, so they have no idea that they can see their picture immediately.

Humla

Humla is where it all begins. It is a poor, rural region, where the farmers have no choice but to trust the people who turn out to be child traffickers. Cut off from civilization by mountain ranges, and because the Maoists blew up bridges, the Humla region is a prime target for victimization by first the rebels and by the traffickers.

New York City

When the author leaves Nepal, he comes back to the United States. He settles in New York City with Liz and starts a family. The fact that it is New York City is significant. That city is like a mecca of western civilization. People from other countries could probably mistake it for the nation's capital. It has all the bustle, modern conveniences, and choices that Grennan missed while living in Nepal.



Themes

Culture shock is what you make it

Grennan paints a picture of himself as an outsider in Nepal. It is not only the instances he describes how he physically stands out from the native population, it is part of every decision he makes. Sometimes, these are described as very funny; sometimes, they are a source of real conflict.

The different worlds collide repeatedly throughout the book, resulting in a culture shock that Grennan never really adjusts to. Grennan comes from a world of relative luxury. The kids were one step away from poverty. Many of the people they visit in the villages, such as the families of the children, were living in poverty. A world where poverty was the status quo was a lot different than a world where the people who live in poverty were mostly invisible.

It took Grennan a great deal of time to adjust to the way things were in Nepal. Coming from a country where a mistake in a hospital would spur lawsuits and tons of media coverage, he was aghast at the horrifying conditions at the hospital in Nepal. There were scores of people crammed into large rooms, staying up at night in case the person in the next bed is a thief or rapist. Sheets were still stained with blood from the last patient. There was a lack of medicine, and a lack of staff to prescribe it. He was too much in shock to really deal with the anger he felt about it. He just accepted it because he had to.

When Gyan told Grennan he was doing his best to find the missing children, Grennan let his entitlement show. If something like this happened in America, there would be protests. So, Grennan gets angry and took Gyan to task for not finding the children. In response, Gyan took Grennan around on his motorcycle to a bunch of houses where trafficked children were being kept. Grennan got angrier that all these children were slipping through the cracks. Gyan explained that there was no one able to help the children and no room to keep them. In America, "We're doing the best we can" was usually a cop-out. Here, when Gyan told him, in so many words, "We're doing the best we can," he was telling the truth.

Food was a daily reminder of how different things were in Nepal. There were two meals of daal bhat every day. It was made up of rice and lentils. It gave a no-frills sustenance. Every time they made this, it was pretty much the same. The kids devoured it. They did not know what they were missing. In western nations, friends would go out to get drinks, fill up on unhealthy appetizers and pore over a menu full of choices. He and Farid had long talks describing the foods they missed, described in exquisite detail. It was a major difference because in Nepal, food was a necessity.

Although Grennan had traveled the world, he had managed to avoid militias until now. The Maoist army was a constant threat, even though it waxes and wanes throughout



the book. At its worst, it was shutting down entire towns, searching vehicles, and shooting people who did not follow their orders. At its weakest, it was a loosely governed group of men who do not have any skills to earn a living, but they had guns. Grennan had to learn quickly that he had to be careful with everything he did, not just for him but for the children.

As Grennan was wrapping up his work in Nepal, he was mostly adjusted to the differences, but he was still an outsider. He knew his way around the villages, and he had a working knowledge of the language, but up until the end of the book, he was still being surprised. For example, he came to realize that “Nepal time” was a real thing. If someone told him that a delivery would be made at 4 p.m., it might come the next day. He would joke with Farid that “next day” means “4 p.m. Nepal time.” Grennan had attributed that to laziness or inefficiency. He learned toward the end that because of the broken down infrastructure everywhere in the region, things just take longer to do. Even as he was leaving, the country was still finding ways to surprise him.

Guilt influences how you act

Grennan shows how guilt can influence how someone acts. Grennan felt guilty about a number of things that he was not aware of until he met the Little Princes. He felt guilty for wasted food, wasted time, and wasted possessions. He felt guilty about his relatively stress-free life.

There was a lot of waste the western world took for granted. One example he gives is of a western grocery store double bagging a can of soda when these kids carried around all of their clothes in a single plastic bag. When their bags ripped, they were taped. They had to be. Those bags contained the entirety of their possessions. A child could make a toy car out of a discarded plastic bottle. They did not have a ball, they had a rubber band ball. There are a lot of possessions that westerners take for granted that Nepali children do not have.

When Grennan sat down to eat, he had to finish his plate. This was a cultural difference that he had to become accustomed to. Leaving food on your plate was looked down upon. These people had so little, that wasting it was horrible. It was also considered impolite to share food. So, whatever was on the plate had to be finished.

Grennan thinks about all the downtime he used to have. Flipping through the channels used to be an acceptable mode of passing the time. He never had to worry about where his next meal was coming from. When he was working at Little Princes, and later Doulagiri House, he had very little free time. Even after the kids went to bed, the adults stayed up and talked about the kids.

But what he felt the most guilty about was his station in life. He was born to parents who were both professors at Vassar College in New York, and who owned a second home on the New Jersey shore. He had the flexibility to travel the world for a year after working in a quasi-governmental office job. He was one of the only people who could



simply leave Nepal. He could get on a plane, fly back to the United States, and never have to want for anything again. That disparity sickened him. He was wracked with guilt and broke down in tears at the end of his first three months over the realization that his life would never be the same again. He felt guilty for wanting to leave these kids behind. He knew it would be easier for him if he walked away. He just was not able to.

Inexperience should not stop you

Throughout the book, the author explains that you have to do something, even if you are the person who is the least qualified. There were a lot of situations in the book where Grennan took on a challenge even though he was completely unqualified to do it. By going through the motions, he was able to “fake it until he makes it.” He started out as an inexperienced newbie, but this was just a growth period. Instead of looking at it and saying he could not do it, he looked at it as a learning curve to overcome.

The most obvious example of this was becoming responsible for the 18 boys and girls of Little Princes. He knew children, but had never been directly responsible for their care. He was thrown into the pool of children, and it was time to sink or swim. Thankfully, he swam. He was not without mistakes, and he continued to make them even after he had been there for a few months. However, if a volunteer was not there to help the children, nothing would get done.

His first shift with the Little Princes lasted three months. At the end, after he said goodbye to the children, he was wracked with guilt because he knew just how easy it was to walk out of their lives forever. It would certainly be easier for him to do so. However, he knew that the children needed support, and if he left, another untrained newbie would take his place. It was better for the children to have someone with at least a little training than none at all. They needed consistency. They needed care from someone who knew them. So, he became that person.

Grennan was not the only person who stepped up and filled a void. Farid, the other volunteer at Little Princes, probably spent more time with the kids than Grennan did. Additionally, there were other aid workers, like Anna, Jacky, Sandra, and some people from CERV-Nepal. They all made room in their lives for the children, because they were needed.

Staying in a bubble has its benefits

There are several times throughout Little Princes that shows how keeping insulated from problems protects people, physically as well as emotionally. People are fortunate if they are apart from the dangerous places in the world. They never have to deal with the troubles in that area. This insulation takes many forms.

Grennan grew up in the United States, and never had to worry about poverty. Poverty was something that happened to other people. He was not “the other,” so he did not have to think about it. He took the plunge and volunteered in Nepal, and this allowed



him to cross over into another world. In this world, poverty had a face. It had a name. It was something he could not ignore, or hide from.

When Grennan did go back to the U.S., to start a family in New York, he did finally insulate himself. He distanced himself from the day-to-day action of Little Princes and Dhoulagiri House. The actual work was still going on in Nepal. However, Grennan was at home, away from the daily difficulties.

The children were kept relatively safe in their shelters. They never saw Maoist forces, or the government army. The soldiers were phantasms – always present but never an immediate threat. The people in the village also kept an eye on the children without ever being asked to do so. There was a collective community that had taken it upon itself to protect these children and keep them acting like children as long as possible. If they had been back in their home villages, they would have been struggling for food and medicine, even moreso than at the shelters.

Insulation also takes the form of mental blocks. The children had put up a mental block to protect themselves. They had been through so much, that it is hard to go through a day without blocking out some of the pain they suffered. This was evident when it was revealed that they were not orphans, but that their families were still alive, just far away. The children cried as the floodgates opened, and memories of their home villages were finally allowed to surface. They also built a wall between themselves and their caretakers. The caretakers did not even know that there was this wall until they learned about it: the children had been ordered to tell tourists that their parents were dead. If they did not, they would get beaten. The children still distanced themselves from the caretakers because they did not want to get hurt by them.

When there is no foundation, it is easy to build up

The author shows time and again how the people in Nepal have to make something from nothing. They lived in poverty and had no support for those who fell through the cracks. People had to step forward.

Most of the volunteers named in the book were westerners, whether they hailed from the U.S., France, Northern Ireland or elsewhere. There was nobody in Nepal who was able to help their fellows, especially on a full-time volunteer basis. There were people in the village around Little Princes who helped look out for the kids when they were outside with them. There was a school and a temple. There were porters and explorers who could be paid. But for the year-round overseeing of a dozen or more children, there was a vacuum that needed to be filled.

Gyan was part of the system, but a part that works. The government was corrupt and made constant mistakes. However, there were a few people like Gyan who stepped up to the task and tried to maintain order for the sake of those who needed it. Without him, Grennan and the others would have certainly been lacking in connections and



assistance to get things done. He had the local's knowledge of how the towns and governments work (or do not work).

Even the children knew that they had to make something from nothing. The author goes into detail explaining their rudimentary games that seemed to be made up on the fly. They were simple and yet they kept the kids entertained for hours a day, and for weeks on end. Additionally, there were the toys that the kids created for themselves. There were rubber band balls, cars made from bottles, and all sorts of fun stuff that can only happen when kids were forced to make do.

The children took care of each other. When Grennan returned after a year away, he saw that the older children had started to accept more responsibility for the younger ones. Jagrit, at one of the other shelters, was a teenager and seemed like he pretty much took care of himself, as well as practically working there. In the absence of their real families, they had created a makeshift family of their own.

Styles

Structure

The book opens with a brief few pages of background called “A Note on the Crisis in Nepal.” It gives a quick overview of what is causing the issues. The book then leads into a prologue set in Dec. 20, 2006, in which the narrator is holding out with two porters in the mountains in winter, wishing that things had gone differently. It is the equivalent of a Hollywood movie “opening on action.” In this technique, a movie's first scene has some kind of action that serves to hook the viewer. Background information can wait. First, show that there is a real risk involved. The author shows that there is real risk involved right from the beginning, which is key, because the regular narrative starts off as humorous. The reader knows that the lighthearted parts are going to be limited because that danger is right around the corner.

The rest of the narrative is pretty straightforward. It is divided up into segments of time. Each section describes a portion of Grennan's work in Nepal. Sometimes, it is broken up with things that are happening in his life. Part I details the first 3 months of his volunteer work in Nepal. Part II concerns his trip around the world, as well as building up a nonprofit to fund his return to Nepal. Part III is about setting up a system of care in Nepal for the children that they found, and that are already at Little Princes. Part IV is about the quest into the mountains to find the children's families. Part V is about connecting the world of Nepal with his old, familiar western world.

It ends with an afterword explaining the future of his nonprofit, Next Generation Nepal.

Perspective

The book is told exclusively from the author's perspective. It is told in first person point of view. There is nothing that the reader learns before the author. For example, when the author realizes that the children at Little Princes are not truly orphans, it is new information for the reader as well. The reader never really knows what is going on in the minds of the children, or the other adults in the book.

Tone

The author's tone is usually lighthearted. When showing his mistakes, or the craziness of the kids, it is done so with a knowing nod and a wink. These are the times when the book is very funny. The culture shock makes for some entertaining interactions between Grennan and pretty much everyone around him. For example, he accidentally admits he eats beef in front of the Hindu children, and then has to backpedal, ridiculously making up a story that maybe his friends eat beef, but not him.



This tone changes as the emotions change in the story. When there are other emotions to feel, there is less humor. That is not to say the humor disappears altogether. When they are crossing the mountains, there is real dread, but he makes light of his own food poisoning and other problems. When Grennan is wrestling the bank manager, he is losing. The author pokes fun at himself for losing. However, when a child is sick in the hospital, throwing up a tapeworm, there are no jokes. The author has no problem joking about his own foibles, but the children are never kicked when they are down. When Jagrit is told his family is alive, and is shown their pictures, there are no jokes. It is a quiet, tender moment.

Occasionally, Grennan speaks to the reader as if he is speaking to a friend. Or, perhaps, like older books where the narrator would often speak to “dear reader.” For example, when Grennan is faced with eating a frightening meal at a Hindu festival, he implores the reader to be cautious of such foods. When one student says it is a “kind of potato,” the author tells the reader “I’m half Irish – I’ve eaten hundreds of potatoes in my life. My friends, this was no potato (123).”



Quotes

What I wanted was to tell people I had volunteered in an orphanage. Now that I was actually here, the whole idea of my volunteering in this country seemed ludicrous.

-- Conor (Part I, chapter 1 paragraph paragraph 56)

Importance: Here, Grennan admits to the reader that he does not have the best motives at heart when starting out. Deep down, this experience is for him, not the children. He wants to improve himself, but is not really thinking much of the people he is supposed to be helping.

They are very resourceful, these children. You will find they do very much with very little.”

-- Farid (Part I, chapter 1 paragraph paragraph 128)

Importance: This quote sums up much of what the book is about. The children make up games with nothing more than a rubber band ball. They eat nothing but rice and lentils. Their lives are very simple. If there is something lacking, they make up for it in other ways.

It was stupid to go. This war, these Maoists – they are real. It is too easy to forget that.”

-- Sandra (Part I, chapter 1)

Importance: Here, Sandra is talking about her attempt to get in touch with the children's families. This quote also serves as foreshadowing, since the reader knows that Grennan would eventually take a trek through the mountains as well.

This is Nepal, Conor. I take what it gives me.”

-- Farid (Part II, chapter 2)

Importance: Farid is talking about how he might not be able to get out of the country before violence erupts. His quote shows his willingness to accept whatever blessings he gets as well as take on whatever challenges are sent his way. Farid slowly turns toward Buddhism through the course of the book, and this quote evokes this. Additionally, it speaks more about the theme of making something from nothing. Farid knows that in order to survive, you must be able to take what Nepal gives you and build upon it.

This was all a charade. Everything I had said I could do could not be done. The children were gone. That was life in Nepal. This packed room of distressed parents told that story every single day.”

-- Conor (narration) (Part III, Chapter 4 paragraph 33)

Importance: Grennan's optimism comes slamming up against the wall of reality here. It is easy for Grennan, a westerner who grew up in the lap of luxury, to think that good things should happen to children and bad people should be punished. He wants quick



solutions to centuries-old problems. He wants these situations to be fixed because they did not exist on that scale in the U.S.

That's Nepal. Children take care of one another.

-- Conor (Narration) (Part III, Chapter 4)

Importance: This is said when Jagrit, a teenager, oversees the recuperation of two boys who were starving and brought to the Umbrella Foundation. In a country where caretakers are absent, older children look after younger ones. Jagrit is a smart aleck who likes to tease Grennan, so they get along very well.

I wasn't meant for this, I thought. I pretended I was, but I wasn't. I was meant for heated apartments and new car smells and high-caloric appetizers and friends with beers in their hands, inviting me over to watch college football.”

-- Conor (narration) (Part IV, Chapter 5)

Importance: Grennan is having a crisis of confidence. Throughout the book, he has been joking about how ill-prepared for this job he is. Here, the jokes are gone and he judges himself coldly.

Once you gained their trust they had no inhibition around you. The children used me as furniture, as a jungle gym, as a horse. And also as a surrogate parent, until the real one showed up.”

-- Conor (narration) (Part IV, Chapter 5)

Importance: The author writes this after a chance encounter with two of the orphans, newly reunited with their father, in an airport. He had done his job in that he took care of the kids until their real parents were found.

I had the good sense to take note that, in that exact moment, with no money, no clean clothes, no electricity, no good food – just Liz and twenty-six children – I was as happy as I had ever been in my life.

-- Conor (narration) (Part V, Chapter 6)

Importance: Grennan's dawning on the realization that all he really needs are the simple things. The trappings of the western society that he grew up in are exactly that – traps. Stripped away, there are just the best things left behind.

I'm not saying I proposed to this girl I just met. But I am saying that I understand now why people get married: it's because they meet Liz Flanagan.”

-- Conor, in an e-mail to a friend (Part V, Chapter 6)

Importance: This bit of foreshadowing makes the eventual marriage to Liz a given. It is also significant that it is in an e-mail. Except for Farid, the only communication he has with people his own age is via e-mail. There is a major difference between communicating by phone versus communicating by e-mail. When one speaks, one has less time to formulate thoughts. During the course of an e-mail, the words can be



crafted several different ways before getting them perfect. This hinting statement is exactly what he wanted to say.

Every parent was overjoyed to find their son or daughter again. But when they learned that their child was being well taken care of, they were suddenly reluctant to take him or her home.”

-- Conor (narration) (Part V, Chapter 8)

Importance: The children came from very poor, and potentially dangerous, villages. The shelters were a safe haven. The families had paid a stranger to take their child, keep them safe, and educate them far away. Even though the stranger pocketed the money, their child still wound up safe, educated, and cared for by a stranger far away.

Everything just moves more slowly than we are used to, Conor. We cannot see the progress sometimes, I think. Maybe 'Nepali time' is a real thing.”

-- Farid (Part V, Chapter 8)

Importance: Grennan and Farid are sulking about their lack of progress in reuniting children with their families. “Nepali time” is something that the locals tell foreigners whenever the foreigner asks why something was not done by a deadline that was given. Things just move more slowly in Nepal. After this realization, the men decide to stop forcing the families together and let them move at their own pace.

Because we are fun, Brother! You not have much fun in America I think.”

-- Santosh (Part V, Chapter 8)

Importance: This is said after the children at Little Princes smothered Grennan's face with tikka for good luck. It is supposed to only be a little bit, but they really heaped it on him. This is another foreshadowing because Grennan cannot stay away from this place.



Topics for Discussion

Inexperience

Throughout the book, Conor points out that he is hopelessly inexperienced. Do you think it matters? Do you think he has to be an expert in doing this to volunteer? Would his work be easier if he had more experience with children?

The status of the children

Do you think the children were better off at home with their families or at one of the shelters? At home in Humla, they would be with their families, but would be struggling to survive. At the shelters, the children were clothed and educated, but were apart from their families. Which situation is better?

Names

Some of the names of people in the book are obscured. One of the guides is D.B., for example. Other people are not named at all. And yet, Golkka is named. Given that this is a true story, why did the author give names to some people in the book but not to others?

Are all people the same?

Are people the same no matter what country you are in? The author describes a lot of people and their cultures that are different. Religious, political, and geographic boundaries create factions within the human race. What characteristics do they all share? In what ways are they so different that they become a separate culture?

The U.S. vs Nepal

Did Grennan do the right thing in going back to the U.S. at the end? Throughout the book, people step in when they have to, in order to fill a void. That is how Grennan got involved to begin with. Would Next Generation Nepal be better off with him running one of the shelters, or in New York City fundraising?

Western wants and western needs

Throughout the book, Conor talks about things he misses from the western world. How many of these things are needs and how many are wants?



What Conor brought to the children

What did the children get from Grennan that they did not get from any other volunteer? CERV-Nepal set up volunteers on a three month basis, and the children had gone through a lot of them. What do you think set Grennan apart from the others? In what ways was he the same?

Conor communicating

How would Grennan's time in Nepal be different if he did not have other westerners to talk to? He had Farid most of the time. There were also other people from other aid agencies, such as Anna, Jacky, Sandra, and Viva. They came from European nations, but they spoke English. What experiences did they share? Did it give him comfort or make him miss his home country more?

Makeshift families

The children had formed a makeshift family while living there. Do you think they maintained that connection as they grew older? When they go back to their villages, do you think they would seek each other out?

Liz

Liz and Grennan started a relationship through communicating via e-mail. They did not meet for some time. What was it about Liz and Grennan that drew them to each other?