

EXTREME GRACE

Take a Trip!

by Dick Duerksen

You don't have to go to BookaBookaVille to get the benefits of a mission trip. But it helps.

Send a teenager to build a church in Guatemala, to lead a Vacation Bible School in the Dominican Republic, to help at a clinic in P.N.G., or to participate in one of a thousand other short-term mission options. Almost every kid will say the same thing when they get off the plane. "This trip changed my life!"

Maybe it's the water. Maybe it's the culture collisions, the warm winter weather, or living without showers. Maybe it's just getting the kids out of their safety zones and away from TV that makes the difference. Regardless of the cause, mission trips make teenagers more vulnerable to the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is as if three days of sweat and beans make the human mind a lightning rod for God's love.

Mission trips do change lives. This issue of the *Herald* is packed with such stories, tales similar to the ones I've seen come to life around the world.

I've watched academy students weep with joy as they read Bible stories to orphans in Guatemala. I've heard them mispronounce Spanish

hymns from the pews of a church they have just built in Nicaragua. I've watched them play soccer with new friends in the Dominican, eat foul-smelling durian in a Borneo long-house, and sleep in thatch huts in Kenya. Everywhere, they make new friends, bridging differences with relationships that will last forever.

They come home different. Deeper. Safer. Send them to some far-off place with a trowel, and they come home more in touch with themselves and with God. While giving themselves to meet the needs of others, they discover meaning far beyond anything Sarah Jessica Parker has ever dreamed of.

But, you don't have to go to BookaBookaVille to get the benefits of a mission trip! Volunteer for two weeks at an AIDS clinic in the inner city of Detroit for a life-changing adventure. Join the staff of your county library and read stories to kids every Thursday afternoon. Tutor sixth-graders in math. Sign on with Bart Campolo as a missionary to Oakland, California. Help Maranatha Volunteers International build a free medical clinic in Summersville, West Virginia.

It would be easy to insert five paragraphs of U.S.A. volunteer options right here. Instead, I've chosen to ask you to call the library, Adventist Volunteer Services, the Red Cross, ADRA, a local homeless

shelter, or Maranatha Volunteers International and say, "Hi, my name is _____, and I'd like a life-changing volunteer experience. When can I go to work?"

Most of us can only afford to go on a short-term mission trip to Guyana once in a lifetime. All of us can afford to volunteer at a local food bank once a week.

Do local mission trips transform lives? Yes.

Do local mission trips offer moments of wild shock? Yes.

Life-changing experiences are not dependent upon geography. They are dependent upon a willingness to serve, to give, to reach outside of self, and love without limitation.

If you can afford the trip, go to Kenya. If you have the time, pack your gear and head for the airport.

However, if you're short on time or money, take a short-distance, short-term mission trip. Pack a toothbrush, a Bible, and a willingness to be transformed. When you get home, your first words may well be, "Today has changed my life!"



Photo by Donny Abraham.