

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

by *Conor Grennan*

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Reviewed by:

Christina Ujj, (christina.gillar@gmail.com), Community Director, NC State University

What started as a three-month stint in a yearlong round-the-world trip turned into a life changing adventure for Conor Grennan. *Little Princes* is a true story of one man's journey to reunite the orphan children of Nepal with their families. Through injury and danger, Grennan makes a journey he had no idea he would participate in before his experience in Nepal. The book begins with Grennan deciding one day that he wants to travel the world for a year before settling down. Since he realizes how self-indulgent this trip is, he adds three months of volunteering for an orphanage in Nepal to assuage the naysayers. When Grennan arrives in Nepal, it seems he has taken on more than he is capable of handling. He believed the civil war to be exaggerated in the brochure, but it turns out the accounts were completely true. He wanted his volunteer work to sound challenging to his friends, and it is definitely challenging. Grennan faces doubt when he arrives, unsure if he has the proper skills to work with children. Upon his arrival at the Little Princes orphanage, he is greeted by a mob of children who hang off of him as he walks to the front door. While Grennan questions his ability with children and has a few mishaps, the children bring happiness in the midst of war.

While working at the orphanage, Grennan meets Sandra, founder of Little Princes and a volunteer, and Farid, a volunteer from France. He also learns how the children came to Little Princes. Golkka, a child trafficker from Humla, would gather children who became orphans because of the war and walk them to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. There they ended up in Godawari. Golkka would use them as cheap labor. Soon, Golkka realized how lucrative his business was when volunteers would come to help, providing mattresses and clothing for the children. These donations were sold for money as soon as the volunteers would leave. Once Sandra realized this, she vowed to break the cycle of corruption. After fundraising and receiving help from the Child Welfare Board, Sandra formed Little Princes, and Golkka let the children go with her. Although Grennan never speaks to Golkka—he only sees him from a distance—Golkka is a major antagonist in the story because he is the reason the children ended up in the orphanage.

Before Grennan knows it, his three months in Nepal are over. Though he was hesitant when he arrived, he cannot bear to leave. Grennan ends up promising the children to return in one year, after his trip around the world. Grennan takes his year-long round-the-world trip, meeting up with some of his friends along the way. He returns to the United States with almost no savings left. After a couple of weeks, he finds himself missing Nepal and returns to Godawari almost exactly one year after he left. The children, of course, are overjoyed to see him. During his absence, the civil war in Nepal had gotten worse. A rumor circulates that the Maoists learned about Little Princes and may come to recruit the boys for their army. Even more shocking, Grennan and Farid meet the mother of two of the boys living at Little Princes. It is at that time Grennan, Farid, and Hari, the house manager, realize that not all of the children are orphans.

Most of the children have parents living in an area of Nepal called Humla. At this moment, Grennan realizes even more how the civil war has affected the lives of the children at Little Princes. The Humla area is where the rebels in the civil war, the Maoists, started and created one of their

first strongholds. In order to grow their army, the Maoists started recruiting boys in the villages. Some Nepali realized they could make money in this time of war; preying on the fear of the parents losing their children, child traffickers promised to provide the children with an education and safety from the Maoist army for large sums of money. Golkka had not gathered orphan children in Humla; he had parents pay him to save their children. Not only have the volunteers found two of the children's mother, but they soon find she is staying in Kathmandu with seven children Golkka dropped off to her. These seven children are the driving force for the rest of the story.

Grennan soon meets up with Gyan Bahadur, head of the Child Welfare Board and possibly the busiest man in Kathmandu, to find a home for these seven children. Bahadur, Viva Bell, and Jacky Buk, partners of the Umbrella Foundation, agree to take in the seven children. The Umbrella Foundation has four children's homes with more than 150 children total. As Grennan sets to depart Nepal for the second time, he believes his work with the seven children is complete.

While in the United States, Grennan learns that Bell and Buk were delayed in picking up the children because of a strike. During the strike, Golkka finds out the plan to save the children, and he takes them before Bell and Buk's team arrive to pick them up. Grennan contacts Farid about the situation, and both decide they will be returning to Nepal to find the children. All they need is a plan. While thinking of what steps he is going to take before flying to Nepal, Grennan comes up with the idea of forming a non-profit organization to raise money in order to track down the children. Next Generation Nepal, NGN, is born. The mission of NGN is to rescue the trafficked children and try to find their families. Grennan and Farid will start with the Little Princes and the seven children, if they are found.

During the beginning phases of NGN, Grennan meets Anna Howe, the country director for ISIS that helps rescue children who have been trafficked from Humla. Anna becomes a mentor for Grennan and helps him brainstorm ideas for how he is going to find the families of the trafficked children. After raising a goal of \$5,000, Grennan embarks for Nepal. When Grennan arrives, he sees Nepal is different from when he left it. It is like the entire war had disappeared.

Over the course of a year, a children's home for NGN is established, all seven children are found, families are tracked down, Liz and Grennan grow closer, eventually marrying, and even more children are rescued and placed in the NGN home. The journey Grennan takes through Humla to locate the families is dangerous and exhausting. Grennan's body is not used to walking all day over mountainous terrain, but there is no other mode of transportation for him to travel village to village. Through Grennan's adventure, it becomes evident that one man really can make a difference. Grennan was not trained for this line of work; his passion and perseverance guided him the whole way.

Little Princes can be used in new student programming in a couple of ways. It can be chosen as the first-year or common reader for incoming new students. Institutions with convocations can also see about bringing in Conor Grennan to speak about his story directly. This book is particularly good for institutions that focus on service learning. With millennials focusing more on service, this story will likely resonate with the students. The book can also be read through a First-Year Experience (FYE) type course. Also, it may be of interest to religious-affiliated institutions that Grennan finds his way back to religion through his journey. While Grennan's journey leads him to Christianity, Farid's path leads him to Buddhism.

The journey Grennan goes through is almost the same length of time it takes students to go through college. Before he arrives in Nepal, he is boasting about his trip and informing everyone about his good deed. When he arrives in Nepal, he starts to have second thoughts about his choice

and briefly looks at the other volunteer options he did not choose. This experience mirrors what some college students go through. First, there is excitement for the college adventure; once students arrive at the institution and are away from friends and family, they often start to question their choice and their readiness. Grennan will make an impression on students. Although he does not think he is good with kids, the kids still fall in love with him. Grennan realized he just needed to be himself and do what he could. This is a positive example for college students.

Grennan's journey takes him into a role of servant leadership. He realizes the impact the children have made in his life and cannot turn his back on them. When he returns to the United States, he starts job searching like he is expected to. He realizes his path is going a different way—it is leading him back to Nepal to help the children. This is similar to when students come to college with expectations for one major and end up changing their minds because they find something they are more passionate about. Grennan also changes his way of thinking in order to accomplish his goal. He says he is usually a spontaneous individual and wanted to fly to Nepal right after the news of the disappearance of the seven children. He realized this would not help the children; he needed a plan. He worked hard and he created it.

Discussion topics for this book include comparing Grennan's journey to the journey of the college student and talking about the differences and similarities between Nepal and the United States. Grennan mentions how outraged he is at the system in Nepal. He compares the situation to one in the United States when a child goes missing. In the United States, information is all over the news, the authorities get involved to help, and millions of dollars are used to find the child. In Nepal, when every family seems to struggle to make it, it is hard for them to have time to care for children they do not know. It is just one of the differences between lifestyles in Nepal and the United States.

Little Princes takes the reader on a journey to Nepal and back again. It is an inspirational story about what can be done by one man. One event can change the course of a person's life, whether it is a life-changing journey to Nepal, going through college, taking an alternative service break trip, or working for a local philanthropic organization. Grennan's adventure leaves the reader with a sense of empowerment that one person can do anything if he or she puts his or her mind to it.