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Gifts from the Poor: What the World's Patients Taught One Doctor about Healing

Glenn W. Geelhoed
Patricia Edmonds
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"I will treat anyone anywhere any time, so long as they cannot pay." For over four decades this mantra has driven Dr. Glenn Geelhoed to lead medical missions to treat patients and train medical personnel throughout the developing world.

A surgeon and educator from solid, Midwestern beginnings, since the mid-60s Geelhoed has spent part of each year serving the neediest of people and training others to follow in his footsteps. *Gifts from the Poor: What the World's Patients Taught One Doctor about Healing* is based on his deep belief that he and his volunteer staff, wherever their mission takes them, are on the receiving end of lessons in human resilience that he calls "gifts from the poor."

This book tells the story of how young Geelhoed, a graduate of Michigan's Calvin College and the University of Michigan School of Medicine, felt compelled to travel to third-world countries to help their populations. His first trip, in 1965, was to San Domingo, the Dominican Republic, where he was met by submachine-gun-toting solders and escorted through the airport to a US embassy official who guided him through numerous police checkpoints waving UN papers. He stayed in the home of an evacuated missionary family for eight weeks while working at clinics to diagnose, treat ,and rehydrate patients who otherwise might not survive dysentery. This was the start of what would be a lifetime of humanitarian work.

Each chapter tells stories about his more than two hundred missions in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific, and South America. It tells of real people, like Dr. Jill Seaman, who works fighting infectious disease in a clinic in South Sudan and "Mr. Tembo," a medical orderly in the southern African nation of Malawi. Stories of poverty, illness, and often fascinating cultures are not only interesting, but heartwarming.

Geelhoed is on the staff at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He is an educator, writer, runner, and big game hunter.His many honors include the Medical Mission Hall of Fame Award for "selfless humanitarian efforts that heal and inspire."

PENNY HASTINGS (May / June 2011)

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