From as early as I could remember, I traveled the world. Some nights I swear I could fall asleep in Austria and wake up in Australia. Like any army brat, the reason for my travels was my parents’ occupation. When they met, Frank Desmond and Juliet Winfield were both renowned scholars who shared a similar goal, to educate the children of the world. They began their journey as teachers without borders, traveling to whatever town they felt needed it and would stay a week or two teaching simple math or reading to the under-educated children there.

However, this wasn‘t enough for them. The second they left the town, there were no more qualified teachers to continue the education of the children. So they struck upon a plan and proposed it to the U.N. After a short period of deliberation, the U.N. approved and named it the Desmond education reform program, after my newly married parents’ name. This program no longer focused on the children, but on the teachers. My parents would travel from town to town and train every teacher in town until they all were up to the standards which were stated in the program.

After they trained their first town, my parents took a break. My father wanted to wait and see if their program was a raving success or if they had failed in what they wanted. A year passed, and during that time, I was born. When I reached six months old, we returned to the village and my father began to quiz the children in the town. Much to his surprise, every student scored above a 70% on what he thought was a fairly difficult examination. The Desmond Program was a success, and with that we set off for the next town to train.

As I continued to grow in years, so did the program. My parents continued from town to town, raising the quality of education around the world until, finally, 10 years in, we reached Africa. My mother had always said “Africa was where the heart is” and told me legends upon legends taken from African lore. The idea of it made me fall in love with what I would see next. I couldn’t wait to see the lions, tigers, bears, and most of all elephants! As our plane skidded to a stop, I just about bolted out of my seat and ran out the door. But the Africa I saw outside was not what I had dreamed of.

The town we had stopped in was under strict rule of a notorious war lord who controlled the food supply and flow of money in and out. The streets were littered with people with bloated stomachs from malnutrition, most half naked, most half dead.

I remember my eyes welling up with tears but my father grabbed my shoulder and whispered in my ear, “Don’t cry, Sam. They’re doing their best to stay strong, and we have to do the same.”

We stayed in the town a few months, raising their teacher’s ability to acceptable levels under the warlord’s careful watch. Anything my parents said about ethics or rights was quickly corrected and adjusted. At the end of the training, my parents decided to hit the road and move towards a U.N. protected town miles away.

My mind submerged in images of suffering and oppressed people, I couldn’t keep my composure and cried for the first time in months. My mother looked back at me and smiled her beautiful smile as my father laughed. My mother looked back to my father and spoke proudly, “We’ve raised a caring son, haven’t we?”

I cried and cried until my father finally stopped the jeep . We exited the car and looked around. There wasn’t a town anywhere but I quickly understood why we were here. Just out of range of us was a huge family of elephants drinking from a lake. My eyes lit up as I watched the most beautiful sight I had seen since we had landed in Africa.

After a few minutes, we receded back into the jeep and started down the trail again. After a few moments, I noticed my father constantly checking his rear view mirror, obviously afraid of something. I looked through the back window to try and see what was going on and noticed the three jeeps following us. One of the drivers, I recognized as the warlord from the town before. I could see the barrels of guns flash in the sunlight as my father picked up speed. The U.N. protected town wasn’t too far off now but the jeeps were gaining fast.

My father shouted for me to put my head down as we could finally see the town in the distance. A group of blue uniformed men were right outside, but it was easily ten miles out. Suddenly, a large impact rocked the jeep as the warlords rammed into us from the right side. My father was able to keep control and continued to punch it. A second impact on that same side rolled through my body as my view went upside down and the car crumpled on itself, rolling over and over throwing glass and metal everywhere. As the sound of crunching metal ended, I remember the sounds of cheers and jeeps driving away before I lost consciousness.

I awoke in a hospital and felt a presence at the foot of my bed. Much to my dismay, my mother and father’s smiling faces didn’t meet my own, but rather a grey bearded old man in a white doctor’s coat stared back at me. Over the course of the next few minutes, he used words like “lucky”, “accident” and “survived”. When I asked about my parents he used words like, “unlucky”, “fatal”, and “tried their best.” I would like to say I remembered what happened after that, but the following year was a blur.

I sped through the year, jumping from event to event. I remember staring at two slabs of stone buried into the ground emblazoned with the names of my parents across them. There were hundreds of people from different nationalities all around me, but all wearing the same black.. I remember tearing apart every pillow in the bedroom at my new house, scattering their feathery entrails across the room. I remember standing in front of a group of men as they discussed something under their breaths, before one of them smiled and pointed at who would now be in charge of taking care of me. I remember being taken to a village full of life to live with my surrogate family. I remember being embraced by the first woman who wasn’t my mother who was finally able to slow my world down again.

For the first time in a long time, I was able to see the beauty around me. For the next seven years, I was raised by the greatest teachers the U.N. had to offer in Africa. But they weren’t the only people who taught me, I made friends and comrades with the residents there. Each person more interesting than the last. Each telling me tales of how they came to be where they were and how I could become something great. More importantly, the people there didn’t see the difference between me or their own kin. To them I was their brother and to me they were my family. I finally reached the age of seventeen and was ready to head out of Africa to view the world and its many wonders. I had become the poster child of the U.N., a child who had truly been raised by a village, so they were willing to fund anything I wished to do with the rest of my life.

I decided to being my journey by visiting my father’s place of birth and set off to the airport. As I climbed aboard the plane, I looked back to see not one soul waiting to see me off. My heart filled with remorse and perhaps a bit sadly. I retreated into the plane alone. The pilot handled the final check off and began to taxi out as I stared out of the window. Suddenly, an ocean of people ran across the strip to the side. Everyone from the village had come to see me off, most visibly crying and some cheering with huge smiles on their faces. I stared at the people who I had come to call my family and couldn’t help but tear up a bit. As the plane lifted off, I continued to stare back a the true beauty of Africa.

Teaser

Biographer: We’ve seen that you’ve done many great things for the nation of Africa, including raising the status of many countries from 3rd to top rate. But what most of our readers, as well as I am curious about is what drove you to begin on, what some may call, such a long and hard road?

Sam: After returning to Africa, I traveled to the village that had graciously taken me in. To my horror, it had become a place of poverty, malnutrition and violence. This place, my home, had been destroyed. I couldn’t bare the sight of this once proud city and vowed to return it to its former beauty. No, to make it a place where its people would never have to live this way again.

Anything worth having requires lots of hard work and dedication, bringing cities into a new status is no different. Each town I visited required clean food, water, better schools and a place for the sick to receive medical care. Above all else, by the time we had established these provisions for the town, we had to be sure that they were able to sustain this lifestyle. Regrettably, this was no easy task. Along the way we were forced into conflict against greedy warlords and plagued with thunderstorms, pestilence as well as other natural disasters. However, even when things seemed bleak, we persevered. I can hear the heart of Africa beginning to beat louder and louder, but this is just the beginning.