WE LOVE BOOKS

A Blue Sweater Changed Her Life… and Her Book Changed Mine

September 2, 2011

On Facebook, Twitter, at Better World Books events and even on this blog I have asked you if any book has ever completely changed your life. The answers that you’ve sent in have been fascinating and fruitful.

The Blue Sweater changed mine.

Out of Africa

"Like a volcano, Africa can stun you in an instant. It can throw floods and drought and disease at you, sometimes all at the same time. In the next moment, it will tease you with its magnificent beauty, so even if you don’t forget, you can find a way to forgive. Ultimately, it keeps you coming back for more," I read this sentence 125 pages into the book while still in my first sitting with it. I could not put the stories down.

Capitalism is a Good Thing

My intention in reading The Blue Sweater was to legitimize my feelings of hope, progress, and beauty across the African continent, the developing world and the “wrong side of the tracks” back home. The book achieved this for me – but also much, much more.

It jerked my world view out from under me. I saw compartmentalized circles working for the world and against one another. There was “the man” leading large corporations which cared solely about profit. There were well-intentioned non-profits that worked their bleeding hearts to the bone doing good in a broken world. There was an effective yet overly-politicized government in America, an idealistic utopia unable to enforce peace in the United Nations, and dictator after dictator looking out for themselves rather than their people in more developing nations than I could count on my fingers and toes.

Jacqueline, however, preached (and practiced) a new kind of circle which encompassed the good from each of the above. Her Patient Capital philosophy took the accountability, structure and success of the corporate world; the love, kindness, passion, courage and positive energy of the non-profit world; and the diplomacy, democracy and community-focus of global government.
Through *The Blue Sweater* I learned that the world is, indeed, gray. The circles can overlap to become the most engaging and effective groups and processes for positive change. I learned that there was such a thing as Social Enterprise in which companies held a triple-bottom-line for People, Plant and Profit. Most importantly, I learned that telling “good news” can make a difference and change a person for the better.

*The Blue Sweater* gave me much more than the glimpse of hope I had prayed for. It showed me the dignity that is possible when freedom of choice is given to someone.

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**Book Club**

I tried to soak it all in. There were 40 Atlantans animatedly discussing Social Enterprise, the genocide in Rwanda, Patient Capital, community service, words which resonated with them, meaning through doing good... it was delicious to my soul.

Better World Books and *Atlanta for Acumen* partnered for a Book Club celebration of Jacqueline’s great work through her founding of the Acumen Fund and her hope-in-action stories shared in *The Blue Sweater*. Hopefully you have had the chance to read *The Blue Sweater* this month and will engage in the conversation in comments below. At the end of the discussion questions is next month’s book club pick. I’m excited about and many of you book-into-movie lovers are going to be thrilled as well.

**About *The Blue Sweater***

*The Blue Sweater* is the inspiring story of a woman who left a career in international banking to spend her life on a quest to understand global poverty and find powerful new ways of tackling it. It all started back home in Virginia, with the blue sweater, a gift that quickly became her prized possession—until the day she outgrew it and gave it away to Goodwill. Eleven years later in Africa, she spotted a young boy wearing that very sweater, with her name still on the tag inside.

**About the Author**

Jacqueline Novogratz is the founder and CEO of *Acumen Fund*, a non-profit global venture fund that uses entrepreneurial approaches to solve the problems of global poverty. Acumen Fund invests patient capital to identify, strengthen and scale business models that effectively serve the poor and champions this approach as an effective complement to traditional aid.

Acumen Fund currently manages more than $60 million in investments in South Asia and East Africa, all focused on delivering affordable health-care, water, housing and energy to the poor in Pakistan, India and Kenya.

Prior to Acumen Fund, Jacqueline founded and directed The Philanthropy Workshop and The Next Generation Leadership programs at the *Rockefeller Foundation*. She also founded Duterrimbe, a micro-finance institution in Rwanda.

She began her career in international banking with Chase Manhattan Bank. She is currently on the advisory boards of *Stanford Graduate School of Business, MIT’s Legatum Center*, and *Innovations Journal* published by MIT Press. Jacqueline serves on the *Aspen Institute* Board of Trustees and the board of *IDEO.org*, as well as a member of the *Council on Foreign Relations* and the *World Economic Forum* Global Agenda Council for Social Innovation. She was recently named to Foreign Policy’s list of Top 100 Global Thinkers and The Daily Beast’s 25 Smartest People of the Decade. Jacqueline is a frequent speaker at the *Clinton Global Initiative* and *TED*.

She has an MBA from Stanford and a BA in Economics/International Relations from the University of Virginia. Her best-selling memoir *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*, released in paperback in February 2010, chronicles her quest to understand poverty and challenges readers to grant dignity to the poor and to rethink their engagement with the world.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Who were the sources of Jacqueline’s inspiration in *The Blue Sweater*? How did they inspire her?
2. What particular attributes or connections did Jacqueline possess that helped her accomplish her objectives? What particular attributes or connections do you possess that you can use to help end poverty?

3. Discuss the philosophy behind the concept of “patient capital.” Does this seem like a viable solution to solving the problems of poverty? What other instruments exist for poverty alleviation? How does patient capital compare?

4. In Chapter 5, The Blue Bakery, why is it important for the Rwandan women who work at the bakery to feel that the bakery is their own?

5. A close friend tells Jacqueline to “Just start. Don’t wait for perfection. Just start and let the work teach you.” Discuss this idea of overcoming mental barriers fearlessly. What other qualities or traits might you need to start something new?

6. What is the difference between seeing the poor as customers and seeing them as recipients of charity?

7. When do you think Acumen’s ‘patient capital’ approach is most effective? What types of conditions call for more traditional aid and charity?

Reading Companion

Presented by Atlanta for Acumen

PART ONE

Prologue – Chapter 7

Suggested Reading


PART TWO

Chapter 8 – Chapter 12

Suggested Reading


Laurie Goering, “In Africa, women are vanguard of progress,” Chicago Tribune, August 9, 2006.

Madeleine Bunting, “Corruption has to be confronted from the grassroots,” The Guardian, May 6, 2011.

http://www.cfr.org/foreign-aid/effectiveness-foreign-aid/p12077

PART THREE
Chapter 13 – Chapter 16
Suggested Reading

http://www.fastcompany.com/1727145/re-booting-valentine-s-day-for-good

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203946904574301802684947732.html

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/february-4-2011/pakistan-microfinance/ 8072


http://blog.acumenfund.org/2011/04/02/acumen-funds-10th-year/

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jacqueline-novogratz/thoughts-from-pakistan_b_914831.html


http://blog.acumenfund.org/2011/03/24/five-market-imperfections-facing-the-bottom-of-the-pyramid/


http://blog.acumenfund.org/2011/02/14/generosity-day/
Next Month

I am so excited about the September book club!

The Help by Kathryn Stockett is going to be full of fruitful discussion as we read, re-read or watch together this month.

About the Book

In pitch-perfect voices, Kathryn Stockett creates three extraordinary women whose determination to start a movement of their own forever changes a town, and the way women, mothers, daughters, caregivers and friends view one another. A deeply moving novel filled with poignancy, humor, and hope, The Help is a timeless and universal story about the lines we abide by, and the ones we don’t.

Tags: Social Enterprise

Written by Better World Books

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Going Even Greener – Happy St. Patrick’s Day!
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RECENT COMMENTS

Anastasia: Hi! Is there going to be a 2018 reading challenge? Oh, pleas...

Polly Karis: You absolutely MUST HAVE "The Language of Baklava" by Diana ...

Lashonda Beauregard: I would like to recommend my books The Mirror In My Dorm Ro...

Martha: You have this titled Arkansas, but then say Today, we're o...

Teresa Sotelo: Yes I want to be challenged...