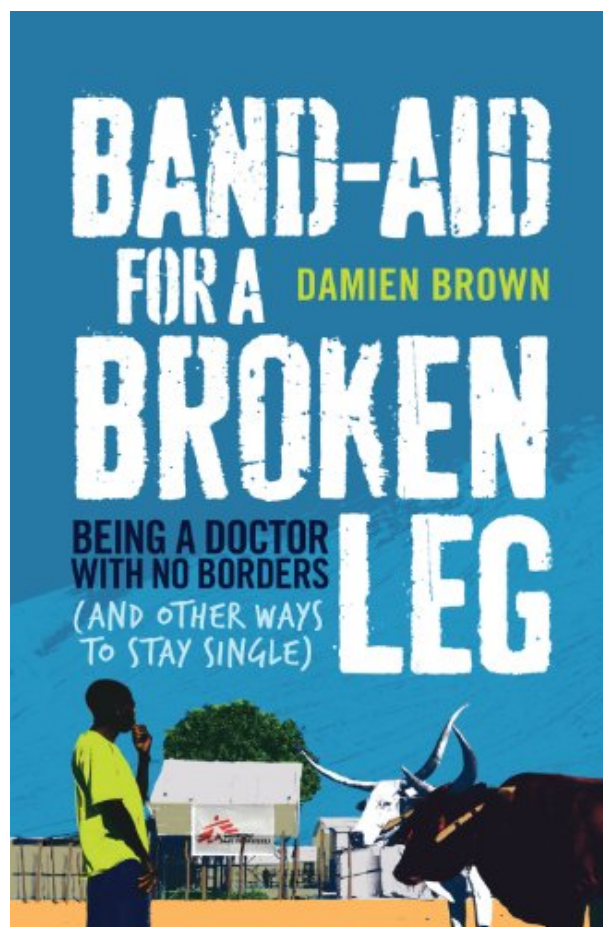
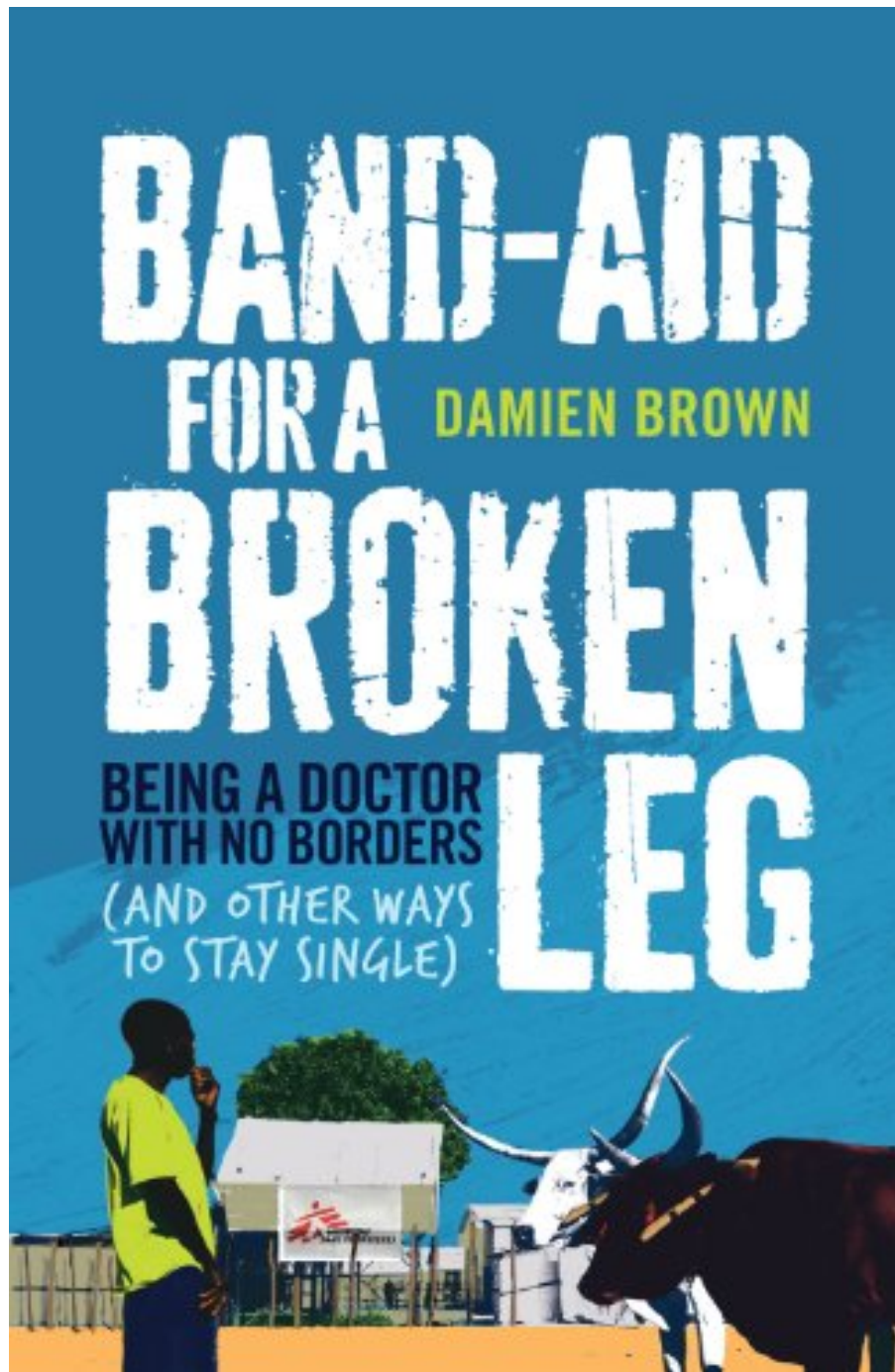


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A young man's boldness is accompanied by a lack of sentimentality and a genuinely questing spirit, and these keep you turning the pages, wondering, as in all the best books, what is going to happen next. Daily Mail He writes with empathy and energy, pulling no punches about African cultural anomalies and social animosities, while fear and farce, seasoned with humour and humanity, give a mouth-drying edge of adrenaline to the entertainment value of his stories. Saga An honest, unpretentious account... capturing the moments of sublime joy that living and working in such extremities can provide. Sunday Herald Sun A pleasure to read. Sunday Telegraph (Sydney) An honest, sometimes funny and insightful account of the rewards and heartbreak of life in extreme circumstances Herald Sun

## About the Author

Damien Brown is an Australian doctor who began writing seriously after his last humanitarian posting, encouraged by readers of a blog he kept while working in Africa.

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A powerful, surprisingly funny, and ultimately uplifting account of life on the medical frontline, and a moving testimony of the work done by Medecins Sans Frontieres Damien Brown, a young doctor, thinks he's ready when he arrives for his first posting with Medecins Sans Frontieres in Africa. But the town he's sent to is an isolated outpost of mud huts, surrounded by landmines; the hospital, for which he's to be the only doctor, is filled with malnourished children and conditions he's never seen; and the health workers—Angolan war veterans twice his age who speak no English—walk out on him following an altercation on his first shift. In the months that follow, Damien confronts these challenges all the while dealing with the social absurdities of living with only three other volunteers for company. The medical calamities pile up—including a leopard attack, a landmine explosion, and having to perform surgery using tools cleaned on the fire—but it's through Damien's evolving friendships with the local people that his passion for the work grows. This heartbreaking and honest account of life on the medical frontline in Angola, Mozambique, and South Sudan is a moving testimony of the work done by medical humanitarian groups and the extraordinary and sometimes eccentric people who work for them.

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encouraged by readers of a blog he kept while working in Africa.

#### Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A must read for anyone who has ever heard of aid work

By Fifi Blanchot

From the thought-provoking but quirky title to the last (very, very last page), Damien Brown's book is that rare find: a read that strikes the perfect balance between challenging situations while still managing to convey a sense of beauty, purpose and even humour. There were many touching moments in this story but the reader is never left with a sense of futility. Once, as I was quietly shedding a few tears, I unexpectedly found myself laughing. And this I found to be one of the real strengths of this book: the reader follows Damien's emotional journey with the same sense of honesty and insight that he brings to his characters.

I enjoyed this book on many levels: as a supporter of aid organisations, I often wondered exactly what they did; as someone enjoying the luxury of First World living, what kind of person actually does volunteer and at what personal cost? There are so many questions and this book certainly does give us a very real insight into the many-faceted world of volunteering.

This book should become de rigueur for anyone who has ever heard of aid work. A very moving, honest and informative read.

I loved it!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A poignant struggle in Africa between the head and the heart

By Raghu Nathan

The title of the book pretty much sums up beautifully the nature of the work that Dr.Damien Brown does in Africa as a volunteer doctor with MSF - Doctors without Borders. It is a book that evokes multiple emotions in you as you read it - at times breaking your heart, at times making you laugh, at times feeling despondent about Africa and volunteer work, at times feeling inspired, at times completely upbeat and optimistic about the future. The thing that strikes me most about the author is his honesty and openness in evaluating his time as a doctor with MSF in Africa and not losing his perspective even under trying and testing conditions. The book also brings out the essential goodness of the 'ordinary man' in the street, or 'hospital' so to speak.

Dr.Damien Brown, as a young 29-year old from Australia, offers himself as a volunteer doctor to serve in Angola with MSF. He is sent as the only 'resident doctor' to Mavinga, an outpost in SE Angola consisting of only mud huts in an area surrounded by scores of landmines - remnants of a long civil war. He has for company three other expatriate medical practitioners and a few Angolan health workers, who are actually veterans of the long civil war. Dr.Brown goes in there speaking little Portuguese, the local language. His six-month stint, to say the least, was eventful. He attends to a man mauled by a leopard, wrestles with cultural conflict with Angolan health workers,

treats severely malnourished children, assists a surgery by 'cleaning' the instruments by holding them up to the fire, argues with relatives of patients who insist on their patient being 'operated upon' because that is what is seen as the 'Rolls Royce' of medical care, is shocked by his own Angolan colleague who, after having cut open the stomach of a patient, challenges Dr.Brown to decide as to which organ to remove.....

However, it is not all gloom and disease and death either. The lighter side of life in Mavinga is brought out in the context of the four expatriate volunteer workers - three of them men and one , a blonde young German woman named Andrea. Unfortunately for Dr.Brown and Pascal and Tim, she happens to be a born-again Christian and so any casual fling was out of the question. The narrative also spells out in the end that many aid workers eventually end up being partners or spouses of other aid workers. Dr.Brown humorously refers to it as 'double the baggage in one relationship'!

In the author's own words, his Angolan experience is summed up as follows:

"...the reality of medicine in developing countries is that people die of preventable conditions that are easy to treat or even prevent. Of the millions of children who won't survive the year, most will succumb to one of six things : poor nutrition, pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, measles or lack of basic neonatal or maternal health care, all of which are easily managed or prevented. "

As for his own time in Mavinga, it is " a confusing, intoxicating, frustrating, heartbreaking, inspiring, disillusioning and life-affirming blend of all the best and worst things. Of Angolans, he says, "...no one mopes, or says 'Poor us'. They just get on with it".

After six months in Angola, he returns home to Melbourne, Australia, but feels alienated by the trivialities of the 'problems' in the Australian context of total security and affluence. His mother talks about an anxiety disorder that the family dog is undergoing and the need for anxiety pills for the dog; at the supermarket, he watches an overweight kid throwing a tantrum because his mom bought him 'that' chocolate bar instead of the twenty other varieties he wanted....It is all too much to handle for Dr.Brown and he takes off again to Africa with MSF to regain his balance.

He serves a short stint in Mozambique and then six more months in Nasir, South Sudan - a place as far off from civilization as one would want. In Nasir, in addition to the expected malnutrition, diarrhoea and malaria, he deals with clans of people with gunshot wounds in the fight for 'cattle' which is often valued more than human lives in Nasir. As if this is not enough, he finds himself in a heartbreaking situation where a dying pregnant woman needs to be operated upon urgently but her husband forbids it by refusing permission - result of a strong patriarchal culture where even the woman's life is in the hands of her husband. This was the last straw for Dr.Brown and he decides to return home to Australia.

In the final chapter, the author asks the question, " ...So, is there really any point to this line of work? Is there any lasting benefit to the people that MSF tries to help? Or does the aid industry just bumble on blindly, patting itself on the back for 'at least trying' , all the while perpetuating its own existence?"

Dr.Brown resolves this dilemma in the following words:

My head says it is futile. My heart knows differently. I hope to be in the field again sometime soon.

The book is simply brilliant.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Gripping, real, tragic but inspiring book

By Nic

Thoroughly enjoyed the book. Kept me entertained late at night whilst feeding twins. The book is well written, the author very modest and the story real but entertaining. Highly recommend, especially for any health professional considering overseas volunteer work..

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