

In his global travels, Perrinjaquet has been known to give away the shoes on his feet to villagers he meets.

// LOCAL HEROES //

Benevolence

For Craig Perrinjaquet, MD, giving is as close to grace as it gets.

Darfur. South Sudan. Nepal during the Maoist insurgency. Haiti after 2010's catastrophic earthquake. Honduras after 1998's Hurricane Mitch.

The passport stamps which Breckenridge physician C. Louis Perrinjaquet, MD, has collected over two decades of volunteer physician stints across the globe read like a shorthand code for human tragedy. Asked to explain his penchant for small-scale, medical projects in communities often overlooked by larger aid groups in these devastated regions, Perrinjaquet, known to locals simply as "Doc PJ," relates a story about a lecture he once heard years ago by the inventor and futurist Buckminster Fuller. Fuller had said that if somebody was already doing something, there really was no need for him (Fuller) to be there, doing it too.

Fuller's thoughts resonated with Perrinjaquet, and filling in the missing gaps with his own grassroots service work has since become his modus operandi. Though his work in far-off places and his spartan lifestyle are familiar to many Breck locals, less known is the work he's done to fill in the gaps right here at home.

It's a list that includes many well-known local non-profits the local family physician helped in their infancy, including the Community Care Clinic and the Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center. He also moonlights as a bass player in a local band called The Pine Beetles that entertains at innumerable non-profit fundraisers each year.

He recalls that his volunteer work with local agencies was the result of a simple human calculus. "We recognized there were needs, and wanted to do something about it. This was around 1988, and there were just a lot of poor people here who couldn't afford medical care." The tiny clinic staffed by volunteers eventually evolved to become the Community Care Clinic, a vital non-profit that now serves thousands of underinsured Summit County residents annually with full physician services.

Perrinjaquet's involvement with the local hospice came about in a similar fashion, as did the work he still does simply "stopping by" to visit a half-dozen elderly locals several times a month. He finds the work with patients at the end of their lives especially profound and moving.

"You get to know the family, you sit and cry with them, you help work through the decisions they have to make about how to live and die," he says. "It's always felt like an honor to me to be involved in people's lives in that way, helping with those decisions."

Whether he's at home with patients he's known for decades, or in a tense situation abroad, Perrinjaquet's ability to give freely of his skills is work he feels profoundly lucky to be in a position to give. He's been known to give away the shoes on his feet to local villagers while traveling, and describes any opportunity to give to people in need as a gift of grace.

"As a doctor," he explains, "you have the ability to connect with people in a profound way. There's a great responsibility that comes with that level of emotional intimacy. The volume is turned up in some situations I've been in, and I've always felt it's an honor to be able to share at that level of people's lives. That sincere look of gratitude from someone's eyes is far better payment than anything else. It truly is more gracious to give than to receive." — KATE LAPIDES