

AMERICAN WOMEN'S BIG MISTAKE

BY
**DEBORA
SPAR**

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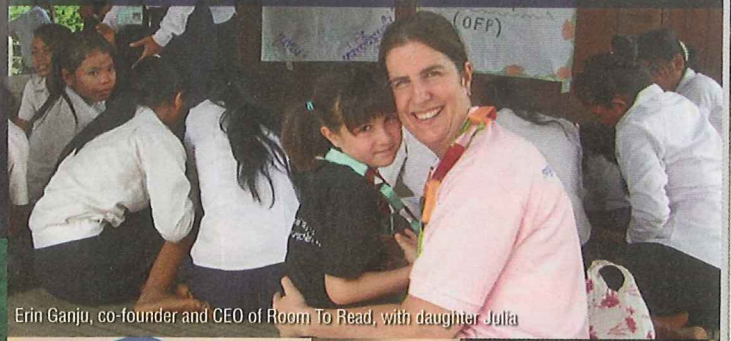
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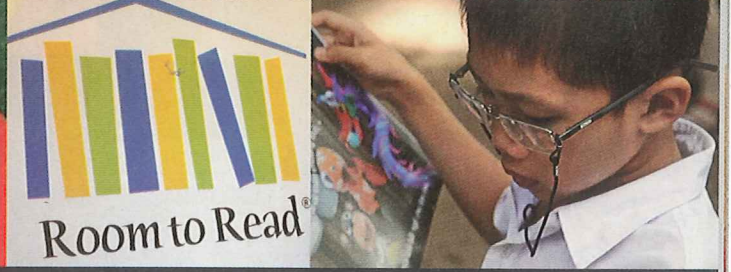


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Erin Ganju, co-founder and CEO of Room to Read, with daughter Julia

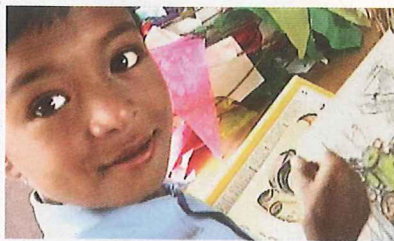


The Responsibility Project:

World Change Starts With Educated Children

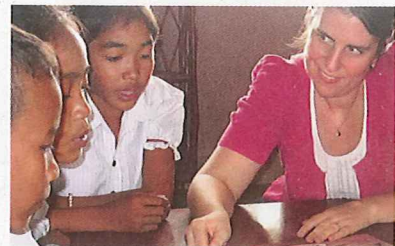
Erin Ganju, CEO and co-founder of Room to Read, recalls how her mom and dad were impassioned about exploring other cultures. "From a young age I had this wanderlust instilled in me." And with many favorite childhood books that made reading exciting and fun, Ganju was further encouraged to be adventuresome. Now her six-and-a-half year-old daughter Julia, also a voracious reader, is similarly inspired.

It's her childhood influences that helped to create the global organization that in its twelve years has been dedicated to promoting programs focused on literacy, gender equality, and giving children in developing countries access



to an education. Says Ganju, Room to Read "works in ten countries as well as Asia and Africa, has established more than 13,000 libraries in schools, and published more than 700 books in children's local languages."

As a mother, Ganju admits how being on the road for Room to Read a third of the year presents a challenge. But whenever she has found ways to bring her daughter with her the side benefits have been many. "Seeing my work and the schools we visit through Julia's eyes can be an invaluable lesson in perspective. She'll go in and say, 'I don't think there are enough books in that library' or 'I didn't like the puzzles there.' One of my best memories traveling with her was the day we did an exercise with the girls focusing on what they wanted to be when they grew up. The first girl who stood up said, 'You know, this is the first time anyone has asked me (that question).'" One of the girls wanted to be a teacher, recalled Ganju. "And I remember Julia whispered in my ear, 'Mom, that's what



I want to be. I want to be a teacher, too.' It's a special moment when I get to hear Julia's dreams and what she's observing."

"There are so many communities that have huge needs," Ganju says. "But what I hear many times is that education brings hope. It'd be a better world if every child grew up empowered, educated, and able to be fully productive citizens." And with Room to Read's goal to improve literacy for ten million children by 2015, Ganju says, "we'll be able to create that world for everyone—not just for my daughter, but for every child." ■

Erin's story continues with an exclusive video on
RESPONSIBILITYPROJECT.COM

Erin Ganju is the CEO and co-founder of Room to Read. Neither Erin Ganju nor the Room to Read organization is affiliated with Liberty Mutual Insurance.



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