

Kieryn: I'm Kieryn.

Eve: And I'm Eve. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn: Where two Quiverfull escapees talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.

Hey, Eve.

Eve: Hey, Kieryn. Guess what?

Kieryn: What?

Eve: The first one to heaven wins.

Kieryn: Oooh, shit.

Eve: I guess we were losers, but we're going to have all the good partying in hell.

Kieryn: I mean, obviously.

Eve: Yeah, it's great.

Kieryn: Yeah. I feel like I'm already automatically disqualified from this.

Eve: It's fine. Hi, listeners. We want to talk to you about the insane, flaming hubris and audacity of white men.

Kieryn: I mean... Which isn't really that different than what we usually talk about, but this one in specific is about the ones who go to other countries to evangelize people and expose them to diseases and shit.

Eve: So, what do you think the Venn diagram for colonialist missionaries and anti-vaxxers is?

Kieryn: Not quite a circle, but pretty close.

Eve: Yeah.

Kieryn: Because there are some who are like, "No, I should not bring my germs into the other environment..."

Eve: Well, yeah. There's medical missionaries who seem to do some good.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: But that's, like... They're usually cleaning up a mess that one of these crappy missionaries have made.

Kieryn: That's true [crosstalk]:

Eve: - by bringing smallpox in or whatever.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: In case you haven't figured it out we want to talk to you about John Chau and his stupid and unnecessary death on North Sentinel Island. We want to talk to you about missionary culture.

Kieryn: Yeah. Why... why did he feel like this is something that he should do? Or, could do? Or, what lead him to do this anyway to begin with? Why would you go find people who don't want to be found?

Eve: Well, don't you know that Jesus said we have to go and conquer nations with our white-people diseases and when they're on their deathbeds, convert them to believe in Him? [crosstalk]: Oh, wait. That's not how that works, is it?

Kieryn: Yeah, that's not how I –

Eve: How does it –

Kieryn: No. Forgot about that part.

Eve: I mean, that's how it actually works.

Kieryn: That is how it actually works.

Eve: Okay, so...

Kieryn: If we're being honest.

Eve: I believe the phrase is "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all men." This is the phrase that Jesus says when he is literally, physically ascending into heaven.

Kieryn: Right.

Eve: Like, heaven's opened and he...

Kieryn: He is actually floating for real.

Eve: ... into the clouds to sit at the right hand of God. You know, maybe the new Mars probe will find him.

Kieryn: That would be amazing.

Eve: That would be amazing.

Kieryn: That would be amazing.

Eve: Find his bones. So, the Asension is this piece of, you know, whack-a-doodle theology that... They believe that Jesus' body, because it was sinless, gets to go to heaven in total. But, all the rest of us have to get new bodies because, you know, we're sinful.

Kieryn: Right. Like, our mortal flesh bodies are tainted by...

Eve: And, since God inhabited that body, that body gets to go to heaven.

Kieryn: Right.

Eve: But, that command is called... Oh, God. I've forgotten the name of it. It's the Great Commission.

Kieryn: Yes.

Eve: So, it's this concept of... the disciples are to go spread this religion and proselytize throughout the entire world. When the verse says, "go make disciples of all men," it's meant incredibly literally.

Kieryn: I mean, this is why the Crusades happened. This is so much of [crosstalk]:

Eve: Oh, I thought that was just racism.

Kieryn: I mean, I always learned it as it was meant to evangelize.

Eve: Oh, okay. I think that was the cover story.

Kieryn: I think it was, like... But, is that different now?

Eve: Yeah. So, we should talk about Jim Elliot because I feel like he's super relevant and he's kind of like the climax of western white missionary culture.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Yeah. In the 1950s there's this segment of jungle in Ecuador that had some tribes that had never been contacted. A whole bunch of missionary boys who'd gone to Wheaton College decided that they were going to train and study local languages, learn the terrain, and try to make contact with this people group to proselytize to them and bring them to the Lord. The tribe's name is... They're the Huaorani people, but they were called at that point The Auca. The Auca is a word from... I can't remember if it's from Wao or if it's from Quechua, but it's a word that means "savage." So, it's a... It's basically a racial slur. When you hear this story, they always talk about the Auca people, which is incorrect.

Kieryn: Oh, my God.

Eve: Nobody uses that term anymore.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: But, you know. American Christian culture, it's a big deal. So, they went down in the late 50s, I think it was. They learned Quechua. They learned Spanish and stayed in the jungle and taught themselves the region. They were funded by... I believe Shell Oil was the one who was supplying all their planes. And, they were staying at Shell Oil stations in the jungle. So, they were...

Kieryn: Oh, wow.

Eve: - deeply tied with Big Oil.

Kieryn: Shocked.

Eve: Which actually comes in later, because when they did get in touch with civilization they lost a lot of their land because Shell Oil wanted to drill under it.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm. Yep.

Eve: So, these five guys...

Kieryn: Shocking.

Eve: - fly in. They've learned a couple phrases from the Wao language. They're like... because there was a woman who had been kidnapped from that tribe who still spoke it and they learned from her. So, they had some stock phrases like, "We're friends. We have gifts for you." They dropped gifts... They did flyovers and dropped things into the village for a little bit.

Then, they came in and were camping on this sandbar in the river. Some of the Wao people, Huaorani people came out to talk to them and then went back into the jungle. Then in the evening, a bunch more came back and killed them all. They're this... The story is legend in American Christian circles. What do you remember about Jim Elliot growing up?

Kieryn: I don't remember a whole lot of details besides that he was held up as sort of like one of those missionaries who died for the cause, so he was revered a bit. I think he was used in examples as how you should approach being a missionary.

Eve: Mm-hmm. He had written these journals and his wife, Elisabeth, who later contributed heavily to courtship culture with her book... Oh, God. What is that book called?

Kieryn: I don't remember, but we can find out.

Eve: Yeah, we can find out. I'm really happy I've forgotten it.

Kieryn: I know, me too.

Eve: I used to read it twice a year. Like, deliberately blocked it out. So, Jim Elliot wrote these journals, and the book where they're collected is called, "In the Shadow of the Almighty." He's basically this super-messiah-complex, super-martyr-complex, "God has called me," and "If I die it, will bring Him glory," and, "You have to just, like, completely give yourself over to this kind of mission work." There

was this phrase that he's famous for that you hear in... Christian high school graduates using a lot where it's like, "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt."

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: Which... Do you remember that story from... I feel like it's the Book of Judges, where the king is being super disrespectful to God, so God sends a prophet to go murder him? Ehud?

Kieryn: Yes.

Eve: The left-handed? They didn't expect that he would have a weapon on him because he was left-handed, and he killed this guy. He plunged the sword into this man's belly so far, and the guy was so fat, that the fat exploded and covered the hilt.

Kieryn: Oh, my God. I forgot that detail.

Eve: I loved that detail. I still love that detail. It's just such a, like... You have this story of this book of history. It's super dry. Then, you have "Ehud, the Left-Handed, stabbed this guy so hard that, like, all the fat exploded and covered his hand and, like, swallowed up the sword." That's image that I always had in mind when I read that Jim Elliot quote. You're supposed to thrust yourself into whatever situation you are so far that the fat swallows the hilt.

Kieryn: Wow.

Eve: My brain is a really fun place.

Kieryn: I appreciate that that's how your brain took it. Yes, that's what it came up with.

Eve: Yeah. So, Jim Elliot's kind of held up as this ideal example of how you are supposed to do... And be... I have a classmate here at Hollins who has spent a lot of time in that same region of Ecuador. She is very, very concerned with how the oil companies are destroying the rainforest. It's a direct result of Jim Elliot and his buddies coming in.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: These indigenous people have been disenfranchised. They're not getting the money from the oil or for their land. They've gotten sick. Diseases. And, had to integrate into larger Ecuadorean society and really... it's just destroyed their entire culture and way of life.

Kieryn: Meanwhile, they all... All the missionaries and whatever come back to the U.S., or wherever their home is, and are heralded as God's chosen people doing good, great work preaching the gospel to these lost sinners.

Eve: Did you used to have little photos of missionary families that your family was supporting on your fridge?

Kieryn: Yeah, yeah.

Eve: What's that all about? Talk about how missionary culture is seen on the other side.

Kieryn: Yeah. Well, it's like... Because going forth and making disciples of men is the Great Commission, it's heralded as... The highest calling for a Christian, really, if you can swing it, is to be a missionary. Everyone is also like, "This is only something that some people can do." It's this really elite thing, like being pastor.

Eve: Yeah, it's a calling.

Kieryn: Yeah. But, a lot of churches will sponsor missionaries and send groups of people... Sometimes there'll be people who are missionaries full-time, they go to different churches and different churches sponsor them. So, then they send out a postcard with their family on it. They're like, "Hey, Church! Support this family!" then the people who donate to sponsor the family get the picture.

Eve: Yeah. Then, there's... You can sponsor children in orphanages that missionaries are running.  
[crosstalk]:

Kieryn: Yeah, we did that, too.

Eve: Yeah, there's this whole consumerist culture that's created around it.

Kieryn: Oh, yeah.

Eve: It's like before GoFundMe was a thing, Christians had invented it.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Long-form.

Kieryn: Yeah. It was going to churches, giving presentations, saying, "Hey, here! Help these orphan kids!" We did... We sponsored a child as part of... What was it called? It was, like, the biggest one. It was like World something...

Eve: World Vision?

Kieryn: Yeah, it was World Vision. Yeah. So, we sponsored a child through World Vision for several years  
[crosstalk]

Eve: Then, there's Compassion International... All of these groups, by the way... If you look into them, they all have scandals where the children are taken from their families to be put in these communities. They're reputedly orphans, but they're not actually. You have this in Christian adoption settings, too, where kids will... there's so many stories of kids being literally sold to Americans when they have families that want them back home. A lot of them will be indoctrinated with religious teaching and not actually educated or equipped to have a career or build a life after they go through whatever program they're in.

Kieryn: And they're like, "Look! We're taking care of these people! We're giving them food, shelter, medicine. We're teaching them how to read." And it's like, "Well, you're really separating them from their families and only teaching them very limited things. Everything is extremely whitewashed."

Eve: Yeah. I really, really wanted to be a missionary growing up, but I always saw the short-term missions stuff as being super sketchy. So, I aspired to be that kind of person that went and lived somewhere and did work. Part of the reason I wanted to be a midwife at some point was I wanted to go and do medical missions work. I wanted to go help somewhere.

Which is that idea of... that impulse of, "I want to go help somewhere" is so naïve and misguided and assumes that you know better than these people about how they should live their lives, and that you have this secret knowledge that they can't get along without you, even though they existed for thousands and thousands of years just fine. [crosstalk]:

Kieryn: Right. Well before you were born.

Eve: Oh, yeah.

Kieryn: It's like Elon Musk.

Eve: Mm-hmm. And honestly, I will say I think part of the reason I had this impulse was not necessarily just to help, but also it was the only sanctioned method for a woman to not be under the authority of men. You could be a single woman called to missions work and run your life the way you wanted. Nobody could tell you no. You have stories of Mary Slessor in central Africa who was the... collecting... there's a... the tribe she was working with had a belief about twins where one of them was possessed with an evil spirit so they'd leave it to die in the jungle.

Kieryn: Oh, no.

Eve: And so, she would go collect them and adopted them and created an orphanage and helped them. Amy Carmichael in India, she was working in Calcutta and she would take children that had been sold to the temples for sex work. She would kidnap them and then keep them in her orphanage, which is so presumptuous and such a white lady thing to do. But, these were women who were fierce and independent and living their own lives and doing their own shit. That was something I wanted. That was the only form that that was socially acceptable.

Kieryn: Yeah. My parents really wanted to do missions work and my dad, I think, went on at least one, maybe two mission trips.

Eve: How does a short-term missions trip work?

Kieryn: So, your church organizes it, or organizes it in tandem with an organization that helps. You get a bunch of people who are interested. I think they do... Or at least, the that churches I was in... I think they spent a couple days orienting people with the language and the culture a little bit.

Eve: A couple days. That's like... That's no time.

Kieryn: Yeah, it's zero time.

Eve: It took me six weeks to be able to ask for breakfast in Kyrgyz.

Kieryn: Yeah. I mean... Well, the only thing that they really teach you how to say is like evangelizing in the language. The mission trips that the churches I went to went on were usually to Haiti or Guatemala. So, a lot of us... A lot of us. A lot of people already kind of knew Spanish, so learning... it was easy enough to jump and learn the other languages and the nuances there-ish, without [crosstalk]:

Eve: I think that's the theory. I don't think [crosstalk]

Kieryn: I think that's the theory. That didn't...

Eve: I don't think that's reality.

Kieryn: No, it didn't actually happen. That's just how it's marketed.

Eve: How it's phrased, yeah.

Kieryn: Like, "You'll be able to this..."

Eve: I've heard that these summer mission trips... People would go down and they'd be like, "We're going to go, like, help build an orphanage," or like, "We're going to, like, build a school."

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Or, "We're going to go, like, do a summer camp for these kids who live in this orphanage or school."

Kieryn: mm-hmm. Yeah, that was part of it. It was like building a thing or bringing supplies.

Eve: Yeah. It's so interesting because if you think about how far money goes in these places that are not developed in the same way as where we live... The fact that you have these white people raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for ten white teenagers to go some place for a week to bring supplies is such a waste. Just send the money, don't send the people.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: It'll go so much farther.

Kieryn: They don't care about that. They don't care about making it better. They want to send people there to proselytize. And, most of that is spent on getting the people there. Very little is actually [crosstalk]

Eve: You want to be able to get a cute photo of your white, basic self in Toms shoes surrounded by smiling brown children.

Kieryn: Exactly.

Eve: That way, you can find your handsome pastor husband.



Kieryn: Right. Yeah, exactly.

Eve: Yeah. You'll be... That's how you become the smoking hot wife.

Kieryn: Right.

Eve: Of the pastor. You remember my friend Robert Evans from Behind the Bastards?

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: He used to talk about this... So, he grew up in an evangelical community in Texas, def not fundamentalist but still, missions trips were a thing in his community. He went on a missions trip as a kid. I don't remember... I feel like it was central America somewhere. But what they did was they were building a foundation for a schoolhouse, I believe. They were so bad at what they were doing...

Kieryn: Oh, no.

Eve: - that every night after they finished their work the organization that was hosting them would have locals come in and re-do everything that they did.

Kieryn: Oh, my God.

Eve: At night, so they wouldn't know. He found out by accident. They were having to do twice the labor because they were doing their foundation-laying work incorrectly. So, they were wasting materials that they had brought, and they were making extra work for everybody.

Kieryn: Oh, my God.

Eve: It was like this huge open secret in that community.

Kieryn: Oh, my God. That's terrible.

Eve: But, that's kind of how these things always go.

Kieryn: It is how they go.

Eve: That's kind of the perfect anecdote to describe these missions trips.

Kieryn: Yeah, exactly. And, you know, they all have these white-savior complexes so they're like, "Yeah, I'm here and I'm helping! It's fine that these people have to clean up after my mess because I'm doing them a favor by being here." It just fuels that.

Eve: Right. It's a direct extension of colonialism, of white colonialism.

Kieryn: It is.

Eve: Like the situation with the Huaorani in Ecuador, the point is to destabilize the indigenous population so that you can convert them to your society and tell them all the things that they're doing wrong. Then, you can steal whatever resources they have and make a profit off of it.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm. Yep. Well, I mean, they should willingly give it to you out of thanks for saving them [crosstalk]

Eve: Saving their souls?

Kieryn: Showing them the error of their ways.

Eve: Yeah.

Kieryn: Giving them eternal life, really.

Eve: Saving their mortal souls. It's great.

Kieryn: And this is... Ugh, it's everywhere. This is why... This is sort of why the U.S. is the way it is. This is how... Ugh. I feel like missionary work is literally colonization and that's why we have all these problems right now.

Eve: Yeah. So, talk about John Chau. What's the story? Why are we talking about him today?

Kieryn: I mean, because he died for doing that thing.

Eve: Oh, my gosh. One less obnoxious, white missionary bro to swipe around on Tinder, I guess.

Kieryn: Yeah. Thank you.

Eve: He did the women of the world a favor.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm. Really. And what you said at the beginning, actually, is something that he said. "The first one to heaven wins."

Eve: That was his mindset.

Kieryn: That's how he lived his life. He approached his missionary work that he was doing as like.... He didn't really mind if he died doing it. That was kind of the point. That's how my family saw a lot of things, too. When you say things like that, that stands out to me because I'm like, "Ah, there's a lot actually going on there."

Eve: Right, so is this taking the "I want to be like Jesus" stuff so literally that you become a messiah-complex because you are looking to go die for this cause?

Kieryn: And probably [crosstalk]

Eve: You are spoiling for a fight.

Kieryn: And probably not helping him in this messiah complex aspect is the fact that his initials are J.C.

Eve: And he used that on his YouTube channel.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: He is like, "Look, I am literally Jesus Christ."

Kieryn: Yeah. For the uninitiated, something that was part of the culture in all of my churches growing up was anyone who had the initials J.C. felt like they were super special because they had Jesus' initials. I knew youth pastors who made a big deal of being 33 and their initials were J.C. [crosstalk]

Eve: Oh, yeah. My mom did that, too. Your Jesus year, when you turn 33.

Kieryn: If you survive it, then... I don't know.

Eve: Obviously, you're not called to martyrdom.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: You're not enough like Jesus. You have more growing to do.

Kieryn: But, that was a huge thing. It's just like, "Yes..." Using that is a huge signal to me that they had a messiah complex happening. Yes, they are his initials, but because of his background and his belief about the way he approached his missionary work... There was a messiah complex thing happening. He was prepared to die for this. I feel like that plays into not caring a lot about the impacts that you're having.

Eve: Yeah, yeah. This goes into what we were talking about last episode with the "Who cares what the consequences are? God's going to come back and fix everything."

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: This is the same kind of mindset of... They're like, "Who cares about consequences? This is not real life. Your physical existence right now is not legitimate because we are yearning for heaven..." [crosstalk]

Kieryn: This is not your final form.

Eve: Yeah, this is not your final home. We're yearning for heaven. We're yearning for our new bodies and our new earth and new heaven. That is what matters, so if we go to this village and we get these people sick with our white-people diseases and they all die but they die believing in Jesus, it's worth it because that's a better existence than what they had before.

Kieryn: Right, because you just saved them and their souls. Really, this existence is just in the way of being in heaven and everyone just wants to be in heaven, so...

Eve: I believe... As I think Saeed Jones would say, "The caucacity of it all."

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: It's kind of the epitome of it. That's the pinnacle of what that phrase means. Like, "This is some white colonialist vampire bullshit."

Kieryn: Yeah. "It's better for you to die believing in this religion that we introduced you to, from a disease we also introduced you to, than it is for you to continue living the existence that has been your way for eons."

Eve: Yeah, I mean, it's a false choice. It's some person holding a gun to your head and saying, "Do this thing, or else. And, I'm still going to shoot you anyway. And, it's your own fault."

Kieryn: Yeah. That's basically how missionary-ing is. It's gross. It's really gross. The more away from church I've been and the more I've grown as a person, the grosser missionary-ing is to me.

Eve: Well, yeah. The less you are indoctrinated... The less you're used to having your boundaries crossed and having demands made on you in all these unreasonable and presumptive ways, the more uncomfortable you're going to get with them. And, when you run into them you're going to have strong allergic reactions if you're a sentient human.

Kieryn: Yup. Like, the way missionary-ing works when they're like, "Oh, yeah. We'll bring food and supplies and provide all of these things, and teach people the right way." It reminded me a lot of the Salvation Army, which I don't know... My mom was really into the Salvation Army, so I read some biography about...

Eve: William Booth.

Kieryn: Yeah, when I was a child.

Eve: William and Catherine Booth were the couple that founded it.

Kieryn: Yeah. The Salvation Army is... Everybody knows about it. There's thrift stores in every town. It's huge. This huge, very Christian, very evangelical organization that runs thrift stores and all that. But, if you want to get any aid from them at all, one, you can't be queer and two, you have to go through this process and basically be indoctrinated [crosstalk] with whatever it is...

Eve: Yeah, the term "army" is not a metaphor.

Kieryn: No, no. It's very...

Eve: They have an entire booklet and a lifestyle and training program. It's kind of like... I mean, it's Scientology Lite in some ways because it's this very strict environment.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: When it started... William and Catherine Booth... It was started in Victorian England. There was no welfare for factory workers.

Kieryn: Right.

Eve: And unions weren't a thing yet. I think what they were doing was they were helping children who were orphaned or abandoned by their families, and they were helping young mothers and all these poor people who didn't really have a lot of resources. And so, there was some good that they were doing [crosstalk]

Kieryn: It was started to fill a need, but they had this entire...

Eve: But they were very strict about their lifestyle requirements. You had to be completely sober. They're tied up with A.A. in certain ways. I feel like there's stories of them abusing disabled people?

Kieryn: Yeah, they weren't great with that. I don't remember much...

Eve: And they don't really pay their employees very well. [crosstalk] And the money goes straight up to the top of the food chain.

Kieryn: Yeah. When I lived in Maine... This is a complete sidebar, but I have beef with the Salvation Army outside of "they just hate queer people."

They believe that they are the only organization that can provide aid. So, I worked for a nonprofit in Maine where we gave presents to migrant children and poor families who couldn't afford Christmas presents. They would also... these families would also go to the Salvation Army, and the Salvation Army would say, "If you go get presents from this other nonprofit, then you can't use our services." So, don't ever donate anything to the Salvation Army. They're terrible humans.

Eve: Yeah. I refuse to shop there, ever, because they're so bad.

Kieryn: They're awful. They're entire [crosstalk]

Eve: I think the last time I shopped there was at this outlet in Grove City when I was a junior in college.

Kieryn: Yeah. But anyway, they require a lot. Any services that they provide outside of their thrift store is very strict and authoritarian and rigorous. And, they hate gay people.

Eve: It's another little cult.

Kieryn: It really is.

Eve: Okay.

Kieryn: And it's huge.

Eve: Yeah. And, people... they're just so ubiquitous, nobody even thinks about it.

Kieryn: Right. They don't... the Santa Clauses aren't... The Santa Clauses don't hate gay people. The Santa Clauses probably are gay themselves in some cases, but they don't let you use their services [crosstalk]

Eve: Yeah, but they've probably been forced to go through conversion therapy.

Kieryn: Right, yeah. They're just... It's missionary-ing at home and indoctrinating people at home. It's the same kind of approach that I see people like John Chau... but, it's domestic.

Eve: Yeah. I feel like if you've listened to us for a while, or know me, you know that I served in the Peace Corps, and you've probably got a lot of questions in terms of, "If you're so against this, why did you do that?"

I will acknowledge that, historically speaking, the Peace Corps has had problems of this nature, and that Peace Corps volunteers as individuals often go into Peace Corps with the same kind of messiah complex and the same kind of white savior mentality. It was a very complicated decision for me. I had a whole lot of reasons for why I needed to do it. Some of it was related to I just needed to be as far away as I possibly could get from my family when my parents were going through a split. I could see the writing on the wall and it was like, "Oh, God. I'm going to get roped back in to all of this. So, I just need to go very, very far away." And, I was right and I was really glad I did it, but there was also this part of me that really needed to, on some level, recover my resume from years and years of being involved with Christian nonprofits and show that I was interested in something legitimate. I mean... Bounded choice where you have very limited options to make free choices really complicated and really ran my life for so long that it's just hard to talk about.

So, the Peace Corps. Their language acquisition stuff is some of the best that I've ever heard of. Honestly, a lot of other professional organizations where they require you to learn languages, they mimic things off the model the Peace Corps has developed. When you go to your host country in Peace Corps, there's a headquarters in that country. The staff... locals-to-Americans ratio... Peace Corps has requirements for how many Americans can be on staff in that headquarters, and it's usually a really low number, like two or three. It's staffed by locals who are invested in the work.

Peace Corps doesn't go into a country unless that country invites them. Peace Corps volunteers do not do work at any site or in any community or of any kind unless it is within the requested kinds of work that that host country has invited Peace Corps in to do. They call it a skills trade, or a skills exchange. They'll be like, "We need our English teachers to have better conversation skills to better equip our children. So, you can come in and work in our schools, and we have certain sites that are open to you and you only work in those communities." It's very much initiated by the host country, run by host country nationals. Your job description is designed by the locals. You don't...

Kieryn: That's great.

Eve: If you ever see a Peace Corps volunteer asking for funds on their Facebook page or through a crowdfunding source, it means that Peace Corps has not approved this project as being sustainable. It doesn't mean that they disapprove this project, but they have very strict requirements for the kinds of projects they will fund. It has to be something that's initiated by the community, so it's not the Peace Corps volunteers' idea. It has to be managed by somebody in the community. The Peace Corps volunteer can never touch the funds. They can use the funds, but the bank account is going to be in the name of a local and managed by a local, and the budgeting is managed by a local. You report back your spending and any money you don't use goes back into Peace Corps' coffers, which is like tax dollars. Or, U.S.A.I.D. funds because they partner with them in some countries.

You have to write the project plan in such a way that whatever happens to you... you're kind of irrelevant so the project is sustainable. The way they talk about it is... it's such a stupid catchphrase, it means almost nothing now, but the way they see it is it has to be able to be run and continued without your help.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: And it has to be a self-fulfilling project so it will have some way to generate funds for maintenance or whatever. It's so different. All of these assumptions... And then, their language and culture acquisition... you live with a host family who wants you. You submit to their house rules. They teach you the culture and the language. You pay them rent, you pay them for your food, you negotiate a fair budget and Peace Corps gives you a stipend for it.

When I said before that I was earning \$200 a month in Peace Corps in Kyrgyzstan, pretty much 70% of that money was going right into my host family. That's still not a lot. I really... But, it also went a really long way, you know?

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: All of these things... You're putting economic resources into this community. You're learning the local language. You are submitting yourself to the rituals and culture of that community, and you're not coming in to make waves.

Kieryn: Mm-hmm.

Eve: you're coming in to learn.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Your agenda is to be a tool that this community can use to do whatever it is that they want to do for themselves.

Kieryn: Yeah, it's actually wanted and consented to instead of just invaded.

Eve: Yeah. There's this... I mean, it is... "Consent" is, I think, a really good word for this. Peace Corps does consensual work. Missionaries are cultural rapists.

Kieryn: Basically, yes. They really... Yeah.

Eve: Yeah. It's just super fucked up. I went into Peace Corps being really nervous. I was like, "Finger on the trigger, I'm going to bail the minute I start seeing things look like missionary culture." And, I didn't. I saw volunteers acting like that, individuals. But, they would be corrected or redirected by Peace Corps staff. They were managed and reprimanded and held accountable.

Kieryn: That's awesome.

Eve: Yes, there's still the problem of, "you're going in for two years, and then you leave." That's problematic. There's still elements that are problematic. I'm not going to deny that. But, it's so different at its heart from how missionary work is done.

Kieryn: Right. It approaches the entire thing from a different place.

Eve: Yeah, which is so good.

Kieryn: Yeah. It's not, "I know more than you and I'm better than you, and here let me help you." It's, "I have skills if you want to use them."

Eve: Right, "I have a certain skill set. You want a certain skill set." The third goal of Peace Corps is... They have three goals, and they're all about this consensual language and cultural exchange. The third goal is you go back to wherever you came from and you maintain... telling white Americans about your experiences.

Any time I'm sitting around with people and they're like, "Now, where were you? In Kurjackistan?" and I'm like, "Kyrgyzstan." Like, get it right.

Kieryn: It's not hard.

Eve: It's not that hard. I'm pushing back on this entitled colonialist mindset that's here. Because of my experiences there, I am continuing to basically market Kyrgyzstan and educate people who are prejudiced against central Asian Muslims, or are not familiar with this as a country, or don't know anything about it as a community or a culture. Yeah, I think it's really positive because that's... people have so much colonialist baggage that they're not aware of. To run into someone who has had these different experiences really broadens how we think about the world.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: It's incredibly valuable. And, it's a project that requires a lot of humility. I think that's really good. [crosstalk]

Kieryn: Right. Like, missionaries come back and they think they're a hero and their entire premise is that they should be celebrated for doing [crosstalk]

Eve: And everyone treats them like a hero.

Kieryn: Yeah, yeah.

Eve: There's no way that I have ever considered my Peace Corps service to be heroic at all.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Like, I didn't have to do it. It was kind of presumptuous of me to do it. So, I feel kind of guilty about that, but I also gained a whole lot and have some really beautiful friendships with people there who I care about deeply and who I'm still in touch with. It's very complicated. It's not perfect, but it's an improvement. It's a step in the right direction.



Kieryn: Yeah. The cool thing is Kyrgyzstan asked for this.

Eve: Yeah. [crosstalk]

Kieryn: It feels more helpful. It's great. It's help that's actually wanted.

Eve: Yeah. And, Kyrgyzstan doesn't allow missionaries. They've banned missionaries. I've met missionaries in Kyrgyzstan who would come in on tourist visas and basically illegal-immigrant-the-fuck-out. They would stick around; they would have these weird religious-based requirements to participate in these clubs. Like, "We're going to use the Bible to teach you English." People would get annoyed. They would get really frustrated. They'd be like, "Yeah, I went to this English club and it turns out it was church, and I'm a Muslim. I don't need this."

Kieryn: No.

Eve: And, they made our work harder because sometimes they would come in and they'd say that they were Peace Corps volunteers.

Kieryn: Oh, my god.

Eve: Because Peace Corps has such a positive reputation in Kyrgyzstan, people love Peace Corps volunteers. And so, missionaries would come in and say they were Peace Corps volunteers and they'd get that welcome from the community, and they they'd do a 180-gotcha kind of thing. It made our lives difficult because we had to fight back against whatever reputation they had left and the layers of distrust that would be residual after that.

Kieryn: That's so gross, and not surprising.

Eve: Yeah.

Kieryn: I remember my churches had missionaries who did that in China and they were celebrated like heroes because they're like, "Yeah, no! I snuck into the country, and then I taught people about Jesus and I need \$100,000 for Chinese Bibles."

Eve: My father smuggled Bibles into China. He was so proud of himself. I'm sure they just got thrown away.

Kieryn: Probably.

Eve: The whole thing is just really crappy.

Kieryn: Yeah.

Eve: Well, that has been Missionary Culture with Eve and Kieryn.

Kieryn: Join us next time.

Eve: Don't do missions. Just don't do it. Just say no. Just say no to drugs, say no to missions.

Kieryn: Yes. No, don't say no to drugs, but say no to missions.

Eve: Yes. Drugs are great. Can be great.

Kieryn: Can be, if you want them.

Eve: As long as they're not [crosstalk]

Kieryn: Don't do anything dangerous to yourself.

Eve: - financed by major pharmaceutical companies.

Kieryn: Right. We all know antidepressants are of the Devil.

Eve: No, no. I was talking... I was thinking about opioids.

Kieryn: Oh, yes. Right. That also.

Eve: Fentanyl.

Kieryn: Oh, my God. I couldn't even get what I needed after my hysto because they were like, "No, this is an opiate," and I was like, "Well, then give me something else. I don't care. I just want to not die." It's frustrating.

Eve: But yeah. Say no to missions. You can send us an email, send us a question. You can find us on Twitter. I am Eve Ettinger and you're MxDarkwater.

Kieryn: Actually, no. I switched it. I'm BluePupBoi now.

Eve: You're BluePupBoi?

Kieryn: But, boi with an "I" instead of a "Y."

Eve: Okay. [crosstalk]

Kieryn: Yeah, it was too good of a handle to not use, so I'm using that now.

E. Okay. No more MxDarkwater. And I am Eve [crosstalk] I am Eve\_Ettinger now. You can help us out for Christmas presents by joining our Patreon, throwing a few dollars our way, that'd be great. Big shout-out to Aaron who is our producer, who always faithfully edits our episodes and is a wonderful human.

Kieryn: Yes. Donate, because it's winter. And, you should donate to the Coalition for Responsible Home Education.

Eve: We're both board members. We do really great work in terms of advocating for children to not be abused by their parents under the guise of being homeschooled.

Kieryn: Yeah. And you know, actually, maybe lower the math gap a little bit. You can donate at [ResponsibleHomeschooling.org/donate](https://ResponsibleHomeschooling.org/donate); it'll also be in the links on the website.

Eve: Well, thank you for joining us.

Kieryn: See you next week.

Eve: Bye.

Kieryn: Bye.