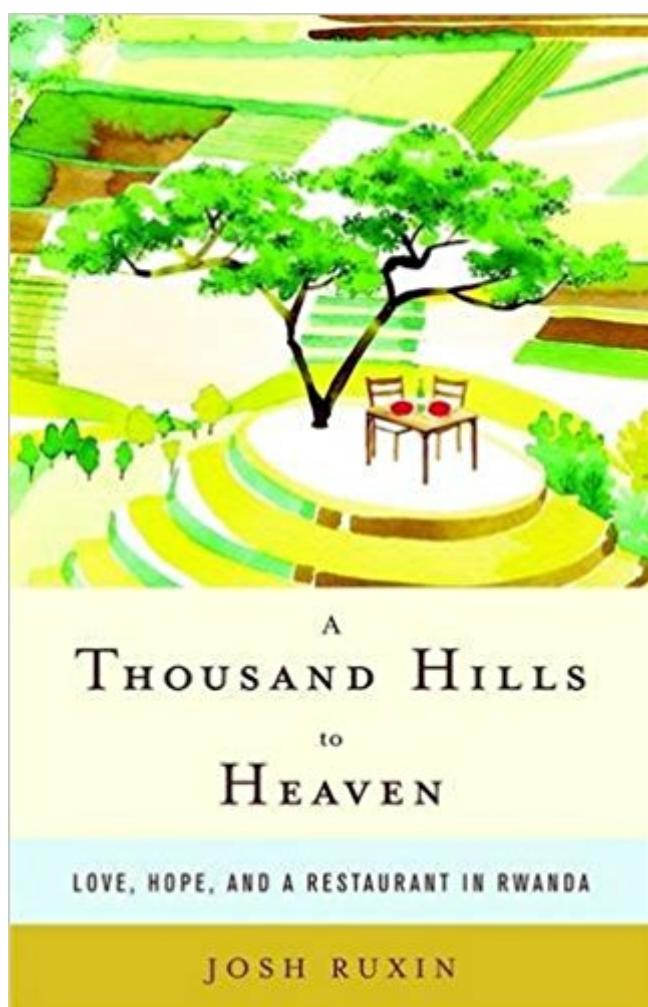


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# A Thousand Hills To Heaven: Love, Hope, And A Restaurant In Rwanda



## **Synopsis**

One couple's inspiring memoir of healing a Rwandan village, raising a family near the old killing fields, and building a restaurant named Heaven. Newlyweds Josh and Alissa were at a party and received a challenge that shook them to the core: do you think you can really make a difference? Especially in a place like Rwanda, where the scars of genocide linger and poverty is rampant? While Josh worked hard bringing food and health care to the country's rural villages, Alissa was determined to put their foodie expertise to work. The couple opened Heaven, a gourmet restaurant overlooking Kigali, which became an instant success. Remarkably, they found that between helping youth marry their own local ingredients with gourmet recipes (and mix up "the best guacamole in Africa") and teaching them how to help themselves, they created much-needed jobs while showing that genocide's survivors really could work together. While first a memoir of love, adventure, and family, *A THOUSAND HILLS TO HEAVEN* also provides a remarkable view of how, through health, jobs, and economic growth, our foreign aid programs can be quickly remodeled and work to end poverty worldwide.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Part memoir, part history lesson, part discourse on how to make a public health project work using business standards, the story of Ruxin's life in Rwanda is riveting and inspirational. Although the author denies that the book is "about genocide," it is indeed imbued with the stories of the "the unspeakably dark times" in this African country's history. When Ruxin, a Fulbright scholar and public health activist, and his wife arrived in Rwanda in 2005, his mission was to create health facilities that

worked, addressing the problems of AIDS, malaria, TB, and widespread malnourishment. The newlywed Manhattan couple said "a huge good-bye to everything they knew," procuring one-way airfare and a home directly across from the infamous Hotel Rwanda. In time, Ruxin (now on the faculty at Columbia University) received approval from the Rwandan government to pursue his Millennium Village Project. The bad news was that the area they ended up in was Mayange, a five-village cluster of dust and despair, lacking in any sense of community. The couple soon opened a restaurant called Heaven. Ruxin recounts how he and a top-notch team of health experts, organizers, agronomists, and others turned Mayange into a productive model that was eventually replicated in other locations. He also details the parallel development of a restaurant called Heaven, which was the brainchild of his wife, Alissa, who is also trained in public health. From the depths of destruction to "Heaven," Ruxin chronicles the regeneration of this remarkable country, ultimately revealing the healing power of forgiveness and hope.

2014 Nautilus Award Gold Winner "An absorbing and affecting narrative." -- *New York Times*"Part memoir, part history lesson, part discourse on how to make a public health project work using business standards, the story of Ruxin's life in Rwanda is riveting and inspirational.... From the depths of destruction to "Heaven," Ruxin chronicles the regeneration of this remarkable country, ultimately revealing the healing power of forgiveness and hope." -- *Publishers Weekly*"The upbeat story of an American couple raising their three children in Rwanda and making a huge difference in the lives of thousands.... A personal adventure tale with a serious message for those concerned with eradicating poverty." -- *Kirkus*"Even those disinterested in the wonk of development work will be enchanted by the characters in *A THOUSAND HILLS TO HEAVEN*." -- *The Daily Beast*"Josh Ruxin is a dynamic and creative leader in the fight for Health for All in Africa and the world. His stories are like Josh himself: lively, interesting, and inspiring. Read this terrific book and you'll be filled with ideas of how you too can help to change the world." -- Jeffrey D. Sachs, director, The Earth Institute at Columbia University, author of *To Move the World*"Heart-wrenching. Heart-warming. Poignant. Inspirational. Written with uncommon empathy and deftly turned phrases, full of entrepreneurial idealism tempered by hard-boiled common sense, and told with a modesty worthy of Mother Teresa and a page-turning suspense reminiscent of Stieg Larsson, *A Thousand Hills to Heaven* may well be the most meaningful book you read this year." -- Steven Raichlen, author of *Planet Barbecue* and host of *Primal Grill* on PBS"Josh Ruxin is an entrepreneur for the 21st century who works at the intersection of health and business. His book beautifully captures his family's experiences and their ground-breaking - and often tasty - initiatives." -- Ambassador Mark

R. Dybul, Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria"This breezy memoir traces a wide-eyed do-gooder American duo from their naïve arrival to Rwanda, across years of work and lessons learned with the poor, concluding with a boutique bed-and-breakfast called Heaven. Wild ride." -- Laurie Garrett, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations"Josh Ruxin limns the trajectory of his work, and his family's life, against the backdrop of a country's transformation. As all of us privileged to work in Rwanda know, there are remarkable opportunities-and stories-here, personal, professional, and universal. Some of these are recounted in *A Thousand Hills to Heaven*, Ruxin's account of the origins and growth of a project, a family, and a restaurant." -- Dr. Paul Farmer, Harvard Medical School, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Partners In Health"Ruxin's work in Rwanda is an inspiration and in this book, he brings his insights and experience right to you. It's a moving, extraordinary journey that's worth sharing with your friends and your family." -- Larry King, host of *Larry King Now* "Ruxin's story offers a window into the painful past and promising future of a nation ravaged by genocide and now bursting with potential. In a voice both compassionate and pragmatic, Ruxin offers a repudiation of conventional wisdom on international development work, making the case for a response that is at once creative and integrated, bold and humble. But the success of the book is that this lesson is delivered through an intensely personal narrative - tracking a decade in the life of a young couple through love and loss, certainty and doubt. This book is at times wrenching, at times hilarious and always honest. And perhaps its greatest feat is in calling the reader to account for our own choices - when have we failed to venture off the safe, well-trodden path? What would it take to choose an inspired life, driven daily by a higher purpose? How much are we willing to risk in the pursuit of a calling?" -- Rabbi Sharon Brous, IKAR"A memoir of love, adventure, and family, *A THOUSAND HILLS TO HEAVEN* also provides a remarkable view of how, through health, jobs and economic growth, our foreign aid programs can be quickly remodeled and work to end poverty worldwide." -- Mother Nature Network"A Thousand Hills to Heaven is a memoir of making the impossible possible. The Ruxins created a model for success, and helped bring health and happiness to a region that desperately needed it."•Kurt Michael Friese, Civil Eats

Josh Ruxin's book *A Thousand Hills to Heaven* is a must-read for college students, international businesspeople and global entrepreneurs. Best Practice Principles are clearly defined, based on trial and error. It's extraordinary how much Josh Ruxin and his wife, Alissa, have accomplished in the relatively short period of time they've spent in Rwanda. Their passion for finding answers to "critical need" and willingness to listen to and learn from Rwandans have enabled them to discover how to

be effective instruments of change in a vastly different culture. Life and lives have been altered forever because they have created an environment of hope through economic development and unique health initiatives. If you've been to Rwanda, Josh's evocative descriptions will bring back the sights, sounds and smells. The book made me laugh out loud and even cry a little while empowering me to continue my own efforts in the country. A well-crafted and inspirational read.

Josh Ruxin tells the story of rousing himself from a comfortable life as a successful Manhattan-based development consultant, to the front lines of poverty in equatorial Africa as Rwanda has grappled with the legacy of genocide. He shares both the conflicts and triumphs he encounters with others and himself as he seeks to make a difference in the lives of individuals in the most direct way possible -- but also in a way that could be applied more broadly. Josh is both a dreamer and a realist, capable of intense devotion and unvarnished critique. The book unfolds as an intimate conversation between author and reader -- one can imagine having it at Heaven, the coffee shop-turned bar-turned restaurant-turned hotel (and is there a bowling alley too?!) that Josh and his wife Alissa open in the midst of working to permanently improve the fortunes of Mayange, a rural district that has seen the worst that war, drought, and pestilence can offer. We experience Josh's doubts and fears, his hopes, and the lessons he learns and imparts as he works with Rwandans to effect lasting change in country and city. Again and again Josh leaps into worthy ventures with unknown outcomes, gently but insistently asking us through example what our own priorities are -- and how we might better align them.

Josh Ruxin has written a very personal story about his life, giving the reader an open, and sometimes even raw, view into the trials and successes of following his heart. His writing flows well both stylistically and in content, escorting the reader gracefully from chapter to chapter. The book follows the last decade or so of Josh and his wife, Alissa, moving to Rwanda, beginning new careers, and starting a family. Josh is tapped to manage one of the Millennium Villages, while Alissa manages to successfully get her unique restaurant idea off the ground. They both face cultural growing pains, in their personal and professional lives, especially given the sobering reality of a Rwanda in reconstruction. However, with each other's support, and the support of some incredibly warm and caring people around them, they end up creating something that will last even beyond their short stay in Rwanda. Whether you are a save-the-world type or just-in-it-for-the-ride, this book will no doubt touch at some of those heart strings, both sad and happy. And ultimately, it will invite you to think about what sort of positive change you may want to bring in this world.

I've had the privilege to dine at Heaven dozens of times, but the story of the Ruxin's lives is even more delicious than the food. In the interest of full disclosure: the dynamic Ruxin duo are dear friends of mine, since my family lived in Kigali for many years with them. Still, I had no idea that Josh was so poignant a writer, able to capture and craft such a story! I've heard parts of their story, but I finally feel I see the whole beautiful adventure clearly now. Those of us who have lived near them have been touched by their journey, and such a rare and inspiring journey it has been, it is good to see the whole thing and appreciate the many unlikely steps that have led them to where they are today. What Josh has done here is a great service: he has artfully presented their amazing story with a clever insight that even their Kigali neighbors would not have known... and he's presented it in an entertaining way so that those far from Kigali, those who never have met anyone so adventurous, can feel like they have been granted special access to the honest thinking of those who lead a truly remarkable life.

Josh does a wonderful job of weaving together three seemingly unrelated topics - love/family, development work, and food - into a warm and honest memoir. His story is at once his own as well as the stories of all the incredible people he meets and works side-by-side with in Rwanda to transform a region devastated by the genocide, build one of Kigali's finest restaurants, and start a family. His points on international development are insightful and refreshing, and could only be derived from someone who has worked and lived overseas (from the U.S.) in an emerging economy for an extensive period of time. If you're looking for a book that will take you on an adventure, tickle your intellect, and challenge your perceptions of how things should be - all while being very easy and enjoyable to read - then this is the book for you. Definitely not your typical book on global health, international development, aid work, poverty reduction, etc. etc. - which is a very good thing.

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