



Ask the Author

A Q&A on writing, parenting, and travel with
Kellie McIntyre, author of *The Passport Project*

What inspired you to write this book?

Like most everyone, I spent the Dumpster-fire summer of 2020 watching our nation and world implode. I felt called to create something that would unify people, rather than divide.

People always say to write what you know, and I know two things: One, there is no better way to develop an appreciation for freedom and diversity than through travel. And two, anyone who survives 24/7 family time while hopscotching across the globe with middle schoolers has a story to tell.

Why did you make travel a priority over sports and other extracurriculars?

We set a goal when Delaney and Riley were in elementary school to explore every continent except Antarctica before they finished high school. We weren't much of a "sporty" family, so we made travel our sport. Instead of collecting participation trophies, we collected passport stamps. We would generally take a big trip over the Christmas break as we worked toward our goal. But on one three-week trip to Thailand and Cambodia, we met a family who was carrying backpacks identical to ours—except they were traveling for a year! That moment planted the seed for our own family sabbatical.

What was the result of this goal?

In 2013, we packed one bag each and embarked on a family journey around the world. What started out a family goal turned into a first-class education from economy seats. And that education has turned in *The Passport Project*.

Why did you decide to write *The Passport Project* from your middle-school daughters' perspectives?

If you put *Dork Diaries* and *Around the World in 80 Days* into a book blender, you'd get *The Passport Project*. You can take the kids out of middle school, but you can't take the middle school out of kids. Our daughters were dealing with all the normal issues of adolescence, while constantly navigating new customs and cultures. There is so much pressure in middle school to be like everyone else. Everybody wants to dress the same, look the same, be the same. Nobody wants to be different. But traveling reminds us that it is our differences that make the world so interesting. Besides, anything written from a middle schooler's perspective is bound to be entertaining.

The Passport Project fills the void of 'round-the-world travelogues for teens and tweens. Students are curious about the world, but most have to not seen much of it. While not everyone has the opportunity to explore the far corners of our planet, everyone can travel by book.

Who is your target audience?

Our story is appropriate for ages 10 and up. Anyone who loves travel adventures, family stories, or learning about the world will enjoy it. Its 5-star reviews cross generational, gender, and racial lines. Educators and book clubs can use the discussion guide to spark meaningful conversations in the classroom or living room. And a fun fact for movie buffs—*The Passport Project* aces the Bechdel Test.

What is the setting for your story? Why is it significant?

Part one of our story, *The Bubble*, begins in the Birmingham, Alabama suburb of Vestavia Hills. In part two, *The World*, the reader travels to twelve countries across four continents. Each new passport stamp is a real-life social studies lesson in new customs, cultures, religions, and rules—resulting in so many awkward family moments.

Unfortunately, when people outside of the South think of Birmingham, "tolerance and diversity" are not the first words that come to mind. I hope to change that. Given Birmingham's tragic history, it is especially meaningful that a book celebrating racial and cultural differences begins there.

Why do you believe travel is as important as sports for youth?

Sports play a valuable role in our society. No doubt. But not every kid has the talent or interest in devoting their lives to a single activity. Travel creates shared family bonds and memories that will last a lifetime. And with travel, everyone is in the game. While there are countless life lessons that can only be learned as part of a team, there are just as many life lessons that can only be learned outside of your country and culture.

If you had to summarize the theme of your story in one sentence, what would it be?

Life is so much richer when we embrace the world beyond our bubbles.

What advice do you have for parents who are contemplating a similar adventure?

Stop talking about it, and do it! It's the best parenting decision *and* life decision you'll ever make. Your kids only have one childhood. Make it one to remember.

Family travel isn't cheap! What's your secret to affording these adventures?

Most of the world can be visited for much less than the glossy-travel-brochure prices. My whole deal is figuring out how to go on the most amazing adventures (think: African safaris, Galapagos Islands, luxurious Maldives) for a reasonable amount of money. Once I've cracked the nut, I share how we did it on our website so other families can do it too.

Why is travel the perfect gift?

Travel doesn't break or go out of style, and the memories last forever!

Where can readers find *The Passport Project*?

Readers can request it from their favorite bookstores or find it at the major online book retailers. It is available in paperback, hardback, and ebook. Bulk pricing is available for schools and organizations.