**[SundayReview](http://www.nytimes.com/pages/opinion/index.html" \l "sundayreview) | Op-Ed Columnist** [Nicholas Kristof](http://www.nytimes.com/column/nicholas-kristof)  JULY 25, 2015

**A Millennial Named Bush**

THE time-honored way to speak of young people is with horror. They’re wild, reckless, irresponsible, narcissistic, immoral and hopeless — and always have been.

Now along comes this generation of millennials, and we have a problem. They are raised on “service projects,” apply to Teach for America in torrents and [donate to charity at a higher rate](http://cdn.trustedpartner.com/docs/library/AchieveMCON2013/MIR_2014.pdf) (87 percent) than their elders. Basically, they’ve stabbed us older generations in the back with their idealism and altruism, robbing us of the opportunity to feel superior.

One of the exemplars of this trend, also catering to it, is Barbara Bush, 33. Yes, President George W. Bush’s daughter — the one you perhaps last heard of when she was busted for underage drinking in 2001.

That was a relief, for it indicated some youthful irresponsibility for us to cluck-cluck at: A daughter and granddaughter of presidents, and she provokes a scandal!

But Barbara joined her father on a 2003 trip to Africa and was [staggered by the human toll](http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014/08/31/321705866/a-trip-with-her-folks-turned-barbara-bush-into-a-global-activist) of AIDS in Uganda. “That inequity blew my mind,” she recalled.

So she returned to Yale and took health classes, and then quietly took a job (while her father was still in the White House) in a South African hospital, often working with children with AIDS.

After her return, she and five friends began brainstorming about how to help recruit more people to global health. Her connections opened doors — she’s frank about that — and they ended up starting [Global Health Corps](http://ghcorps.org/), initially intended as a kind of Teach for America for global health. Bush became chief executive at age 26.

Today Global Health Corps is booming. It receives nearly 6,000 applications a year for fewer than 150 positions as fellows. Half of the fellows are American and half foreign, mostly African, and the program gets plenty of praise from health professionals.

Barbara Bush acknowledges that her last name has opened doors and helped Global Health Corps expand, and she offers no apologies for her name.

“I’m crazy about my family,” she said. “I was very much taught to care about the world.”

She has a reputation as the liberal in the family (like her grandmother, also a Barbara), for she has spoken out in favor of gay rights, lives in New York City, and at Global Health Corps has built ties to abortion rights groups like Planned Parenthood Global and Marie Stopes International.

Still, she’s wary of being pinned down too much.

“I’m not a huge fan of labels,” she said, citing the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s comments about the perils of [reducing anything to “a single story.”](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en)

“It’s easy to single-story a lot of the people who are very important to me,” she said.

I asked if it was sometimes awkward when friends were snarky about her father (I’ve been critical myself). “I went to college when my dad was running for president, and that’s pretty awkward,” she replied. “I don’t take it personally.”

Her passion for service certainly echoes widely in her generation. Dr. Paul Farmer, the globe-trotting co-founder of [Partners in Health](http://www.pih.org/), emailed me from Rwanda (where he was working with Global Health Corps fellows) to say that when he was going into medical school there was little interest in global health. Now young people are passionate about getting involved.

“Looks from my vantage point that the ‘me generation’ (mine) has been replaced by a millennial generation much more focused on others,” he wrote.

Global Health Corps fellows, typically in their late 20s, are placed with groups like Partners in Health or Covenant House, in Africa and in America. Whether in Zambia or in the United States, two fellows work for a year side by side, one from the host country and one from abroad.

I was initially suspicious of Global Health Corps, wondering how young people, often with no medical training, could be useful. But Bush points to a Global Health Corps logistics expert who worked on a drug supply chain in Tanzania, improving drug access. And architects worked on designing clinics in Rwanda with less air flow, so tuberculosis patients would be less likely to infect others.

“I’m a big fan of the Global Health Corps,” said Dr. Peter Piot, who [helped discover Ebola](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/07/health/there-before-ebola-had-a-name.html) and later ran the United Nations program on AIDS. “They engage nonmedical people in global health” — and that, he said, is a central challenge of health care worldwide.

Bush’s family loyalty and health passions converge when she speaks about her father’s program against AIDS, Pepfar — which has [saved millions of lives](http://www.pepfar.gov/funding/results/) (and is, in my view, his best legacy).

“I’ll probably burst into tears,” she said when I asked about it. “I’m extremely proud of him for Pepfar. I’m extremely proud of him — I could talk to you till October about it!”

And then she burst into tears.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/opinion/sunday/nicholas-kristof-a-millennial-named-bush.html?_r=0>