

KNOWLEDGE BEYOND BORDERS

Cliff Missen's Commitment to Educational Access



Cliff Missen's journey began with a transformative experience in Africa in 1982. Visiting a remote village in Liberia, he was struck by the profound silence of isolation -- no hum of technology, no flicker of screens, no access to the outside world through the internet.

Missen witnessed firsthand the stark contrasts in internet access. Entire communities were being left behind in the digital age. The moment sparked a long-lasting commitment to bridging this divide.

"I lived in Alaska for part of my youth. I lived in eastern Washington... and I lived in Seattle," Missen said. "I mean, there is just such a vast difference in terms of information access, the way people think."

After this initial trip, Missen lived in Liberia for a year, and in this remote setting, he encountered a variety of individuals who had a thirst for knowledge. He met one woman in particular who was very interested in the health care field.

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This woman, often mistaken for a witch because of her strength and determination, Missen said, shared a bond with him over a simple guidebook to basic medicine he had called “Where There Is No Doctor.”

“She was just a force to be reckoned with,” Missen said. “We would spend a lot of time underneath the gaslight going over this book at night. And whenever she caught me free during the day, it was like, ‘show me, show me some more book.’”

Missen was inspired by individuals like this woman, who reinforced his belief in the transformational power of education.

“I just realized, you know, that the only thing that changes human destiny is education,” Missen said. “What really matters for families, for generations, is education.”

Cliff Missen, the founder of Chipster Personal Library, is a visionary educator and technologist dedicated to bridging the digital gap and providing educational material worldwide for those who lack internet access.

The Chipster Personal Library resulted from Missen’s first project, the eGranary Digital Library, which created offline digital libraries via DVD. For 20 years, Missen and eight field associates in different countries around the world were training individuals and doing installations of eGranary in over 2,200 institutions.

However, after understanding the difficulties and challenges faced in areas with limited infrastructure, Missen explained that he created the Chipster to make a smaller, more personal and portable form of device that gives everybody agency.

The Chipster, a thumb-sized chip, provides educational resources ranging from thousands of books to videos all stored in a USB flash drive. Everything is free and able to be easily copied and transferred to other devices. The portability of the Chipster gives users the ability to take every opportunity that they can get and access offline information.

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When asked about what motivates him every day, Missen said that it is important to note that this mission gives him a lot of satisfaction; however, he reiterated that it is the people that he has met throughout his career and spent years with who inspire him the most.

“Having lived around them, having worked with them, I understand what they go through,” Missen said. “As I’m thinking about what we are putting into the Chipster, how are we getting the Chipster out there, I’m really thinking about these people who I know.”

Cliff Missen continues to be driven by those whom he has met throughout his career. These encounters not only motivate his work but also serve as direction and provide purpose for projects like the Chipster Personal Library. By keeping the faces and stories of those he aims to help at the forefront of his mind, Missen ensures that his work helps those in rural regions who lack or have no internet access reach their full potential.

“Everywhere I go I meet saints, people who are doing amazing things to improve the lives of people around them, and sometimes they have very few resources with which to do it,” Missen said. “But they have the stamina, the energy, the enthusiasm for doing that kind of work and they inspire me.”



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