

Reviews

Publishers Weekly Review Some failures lead to phenomenal successes, and this American nurse's unsuccessful attempt to climb K2, the world's second tallest mountain, is one of them. Dangerously ill when he finished his climb in 1993, Mortenson was sheltered for seven weeks by the small Pakistani village of Korphe; in return, he promised to build the impoverished town's first school, a project that grew into the Central Asia Institute, which has since constructed more than 50 schools across rural Pakistan and Afghanistan. Coauthor Relin recounts Mortenson's efforts in fascinating detail, presenting compelling portraits of the village elders, con artists, philanthropists, mujahideen, Taliban officials, ambitious school girls and upright Muslims Mortenson met along the way. As the book moves into the post-9/11 world, Mortenson and Relin argue that the United States must fight Islamic extremism in the region through collaborative efforts to alleviate poverty and improve access to education, especially for girls. Captivating and suspenseful, with engrossing accounts of both hostilities and unlikely friendships, this book will win many readers' hearts. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Booklist Review On a 1993 expedition to climb K2 in honor of his sister Christa, who had died of epilepsy at 23, Mortenson stumbled upon a remote mountain village in Pakistan. Out of gratitude for the villagers' assistance when he was lost and near death, he vowed to build a school for the children who were scratching lessons in the dirt. Raised by his missionary parents in Tanzania, Mortenson was used to dealing with exotic cultures and developing nations. Still, he faced daunting challenges of raising funds, death threats from enraged mullahs, separation from his family, and a kidnapping to eventually build 55 schools in Taliban territory. Award-winning journalist Relin recounts the slow and arduous task Mortenson set for himself, a one-man mission aimed particularly at bringing education to young girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Readers interested in a fresh perspective on the cultures and development efforts of Central Asia will love this incredible story of a humanitarian endeavor. Vanessa Bush

Source: "Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time ." Amazon.com. 1996-2009. Amazon.com, Inc., Web. 19 Oct 2009. <<http://www.amazon.com/Three-Cups-Tea-Mission-Promote/dp/0143038257>>.

Caboodles Book Club Kits

Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson



Author Biography

Greg Mortenson is the co-founder of nonprofit Central Asia Institute www.ikat.org, founder of Pennies For Peace www.penniesforpeace.org, and co-author of New York Times bestseller 'Three Cups of Tea' www.threecupsoftea.com which has sold 3 million copies, been published in 34 countries, and a New York Times bestseller for 120 weeks since its January 2007 release, and Time Magazine Asia Book of The Year.

In March 2009, Mortenson received Pakistan's highest civil award, Sitara-e-Pakistan ("Star of Pakistan") for his dedicated and humanitarian effort to promote education and literacy in rural areas for fifteen years. Several bipartisan U.S. Congressional representatives nominated Mortenson for the Nobel Peace Prize this year. The award recipient is chosen by a secret process and announced in October. Three Cups of Tea is required reading for U.S. senior military commanders, for officers in the Norwegian War College, Forsvarsnett, for U.S. Special Forces deploying to Afghanistan, Pentagon officers in counter-insurgency training, and Canadian Defense Ministry members.

The book has been read by General David Petraeus – CENTCOM Commander, Admiral Mike Mullen - Chairman Joint Chief of Staff, and Admiral Eric Olson – SOCOM Special Forces commander, and several other U.S. military commanders who advocate for building relationships as a part of an overall strategic plan for peace. Mortenson has addressed the National Defense Senior Leadership Conference at the Pentagon, visited over two dozen military bases, NORAD, and been to the Air Force, Naval and West Point Academies.

Mortenson was born in 1957, and grew up on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania (1958 to 1973). His father Dempsey, founded Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center (KCMC) www.kcmc.ac.tz a hospital, and mother, Jerene, founded the International School Moshi. He served in the U.S. Army in Germany (1977-1979), where he received the Army Commendation Medal, and graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1983. In July 1992, Mortenson's sister, Christa, died from a massive seizure after a lifelong struggle with epilepsy on the eve of a trip to visit Dysersville, Iowa, where the baseball movie, 'Field of Dreams', was filmed in a cornfield. To honor his sister's memory, in 1993, Mortenson climbed Pakistan's K2, the world's second highest mountain in the Karakoram

range. While recovering from the climb in a village called Korphe, Mortenson met a group of children sitting in the dirt writing with sticks in the sand, and made a promise to help them build a school. From that rash promise, grew a remarkable humanitarian campaign, in which Mortenson has dedicated his life to promote education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. As of 2009, Mortenson has established over 90 schools in rural and often volatile regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which provide education to over 34,000 children, including 24,000 girls, where few education opportunities existed before.

His work has not been without difficulty. In 1996, he survived an eight day armed kidnapping by the Taliban in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province tribal areas, escaped a 2003 firefight with feuding Afghan warlords by hiding for eight hours under putrid animal hides in a truck going to a leather-tanning factory. He has overcome fatwehs from enraged Islamic mullahs, endured CIA investigations, and also received threats from fellow Americans after 9/11, for helping Muslim children with education.

Mortenson is a living hero to rural communities of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he has gained the trust of Islamic leaders, military commanders, government officials and tribal chiefs from his tireless effort to champion education, especially for girls.

He is one of few foreigners who has worked extensively for sixteen years (over 72 months in the field) in rural villages where few foreigners go. TV newscaster, Tom Brokaw, calls Mortenson, "one ordinary person, with the right combination of character and determination, who is really changing the world". Congresswoman Mary Bono (Rep – Cali.) says, "I've learned more from Greg Mortenson about the causes of terrorism than I did during all our briefings on Capitol Hill. He is a true hero, whose courage, and compassion exemplify the true ideals of the American spirit." While not overseas half the year, Mortenson, 51, lives in Montana.

Source: "Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time." Amazon.com. 1996-2009. Amazon.com, Inc., Web. 19 Oct 2009. <<http://www.amazon.com/Three-Cups-Tea-Mission-Promote/dp/0143038257>>.

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Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson



Discussion Questions

1. There is a telling passage about Mortenson's change of direction at the start of the book: "One evening, he went to bed by a yak dung fire a mountaineer who'd lost his way, and one morning, by the time he'd shared a pot of butter tea with his hosts and laced up his boots, he'd become a humanitarian who'd found a meaningful path to follow for the rest of his life." What made Mortenson particularly ripe for such a transformation? Has anything similar happened in your own life?
2. Relin gives a "warts and all" portrait of Mortenson, showing him as a hero but also as a flawed human being with some exasperating traits. Talk about how Relin chose to write about Mortenson's character—his choice of details, his perspective, the way he constructs scenes. Is Mortenson someone you'd like to get to know, work with, or have as a neighbor or friend?
3. At the heart of the book is a powerful but simple political message: we each as individuals have the power to change the world, one cup of tea at a time. Yet the book powerfully dramatizes the obstacles in the way of this philosophy: bloody wars waged by huge armies, prejudice, religious extremism, cultural barriers. What do you think of the "one cup of tea at a time" philosophy? Do you think Mortenson's vision can work for lasting and meaningful change?
4. Have you ever known anyone like Mortenson? Have you ever had the experience of making a difference yourself through acts of generosity, aid, or leadership?
5. The Balti people are fierce yet extremely hospitable, kind yet rigid, determined to better themselves yet stuck in the past. Discuss your reactions to them and the other groups that Mortenson tries to help.
6. After Haji Ali's family saves Greg's life, he reflects that he could never "imagine discharging the debt he felt to his hosts in Korphe." Discuss this sense of indebtedness as key to Mortenson's character. Why was Mortenson compelled to return to the region again and again? In your opinion, does he repay his debt by the end of the book?
7. References to paradise run throughout the book—Mortenson's childhood home in Tanzania, the mountain scenery, even Berkeley, California, are all referred to as "paradise." Discuss the concept of paradise, lost and regained, and how it influences Mortenson's mission.
8. Mortenson's transition from climbing bum to humanitarian hero seems very abrupt. However, looking back, it's clear that his sense of mission is rooted in his childhood, the values of his parents, and his relationship with his sister Christa. Discuss the various facets of Mortenson's character—the freewheeling mountain climber, the ER nurse, the devoted son and brother, and the leader of a humanitarian cause. Do you view him as continuing the work his father began?
9. "I expected something like this from an ignorant village mullah, but to get those kinds of letters from my fellow Americans made me wonder whether I should just give up," Mortenson remarked after he started getting hate mail in the wake of September 11. What was your reaction to the letters Mortenson received?
10. Mortenson hits many bumps in the road—he's broke, his girlfriend dumps him, he is forced to build a bridge before he can build the school, his health suffers, and he drives his family crazy. Discuss his repeated brushes with failure and how they influenced your opinion of Mortenson and his efforts.
11. The authors write that "the Balti held the key to a kind of uncomplicated happiness that was disappearing in the developing world." This peaceful simplicity of life seems to be part of what attracts Mortenson to the villagers. Discuss the pros and cons of bringing "civilization" to the mountain community.
12. Much of the book is a meditation on what it means to be a foreigner assimilating with another culture. Discuss your own experiences with foreign cultures—things that you have learned, mistakes you have made, misunderstandings you have endured.
13. Did the book change your views toward Islam or Muslims? Consider the cleric Syed Abbas, and also the cleric who called a fatwa on Mortenson. Syed Abbas implores Americans to "look into our hearts and see that the great majority of us are not terrorists, but good and simple people." Discuss this statement. Has the book inspired you to learn more about the region?

Source: "The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards." *Reading Group Guides the Online Community for Reading Groups*. Copyright 2001–2009. *ReadingGroupGuides.com*, Web. 19 Oct 2009. <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/memory_keepers_daughter1.asp>.