

Caboodles Book Club Kits

Stones into Schools

Greg Mortenson



Reviews

Booklist Reviews 2009 December #1 Mortenson's best-seller, *Three Cups of Tea* (2009), introduced his commitment to peace through education and became a book-club phenomenon. He now continues the story of how the Central Asia Institute (CAI) built schools in northern Afghanistan. Descriptions of the harsh geography and more than one near-death experience impress readers as new faces join Mortenson's loyal "Dirty Dozen" as they carefully plot a course of school-building through the Badakshan province and Wakhan corridor. Mortenson also shares his friendships with U.S. military personnel, including Admiral Mike Mullen, and the warm reception his work has found among the officer corps. The careful line CAI threads between former mujahideen commanders, ex-Taliban and village elders, and the American soldiers stationed in their midst is poetic in its political complexity and compassionate consideration. Using schools not bombs to promote peace is a goal that even the most hard-hearted can admire, but to blandly call this book inspiring would be dismissive of all the hard work that has gone into the mission in Afghanistan as well as the efforts to fund it. Mortenson writes of nothing less than saving the future, and his adventure is light years beyond most attempts. Mortenson did not reach the summit of K2, but oh, the heights he has achieved.

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Kirkus Reviews 2009 November #1 A heartening follow-up to the bestselling *Three Cups of Tea* (2003). Mortenson and his NGO Central Asia Institute (CAI) have been committed to building schools in the most remote corners of Pakistan and Afghanistan for the last 16 years. Here he resumes where he left off in his previous book and spotlights the extraordinary efforts to make good on a promise he made in 1999 to villagers of the Wakhan Corridor, a rugged, isolated area of northeastern Afghanistan. The Wakhan is occupied by the Kirghiz, who had been forced out of their land with the coming of the Soviets before returning to restricted migratory patterns, and are cut off from basic, life-sustaining government services. For Mortenson and his well-meaning, multiethnic crew he calls his "Dirty Dozen," the village of Bozai Gumbaz proved to be "the definition of our last-place-first philosophy." By enlisting the help of the local leaders and supplying the Kirghiz with necessary building materials (hailed by yak), the CAI fulfilled one of its main goals: to get the people to build a school on their own. Based in Bozeman, Mont., Mortenson tells the remarkable story of how his group operates. He travels America giving talks, raising awareness and enormous sums of money (\$900,000 poured in after a 1993 Parade article), considering proposals about where next to build a school (it must be at least 50 percent girls) and courting local commandhans, or warlords. The organization had to contend with threats of kidnapping, Taliban violence, the Kashmir earthquake of 2005 and ingrained injunctions against educating girls. In his humble, winning style, the author writes of making peace with the U.S. Army, whose bombing caused enormous civilian bloodshed. *Three Cups of Tea* is now required reading for counterinsurgency officers, and Mortenson effectively demonstrates the "cascade of positive changes triggered by teaching a single girl how to read and write." Inspiring evidence of the tsunami effects of a committed humanitarian.

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Author Biography

Greg Mortenson is the co-founder of nonprofit Central Asia Institute www.ikat.org, founder of Pennies For Peace www.penniesforpeace.org, co-author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Three Cups of Tea* www.threecupsoftea.com, and author of bestseller *Stones into Schools* www.stonesintoschools.com.

In 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 bi-partisan 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.

Mortenson was born in Minnesota in 1957. He grew up on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania (1958 to 1973). His father Dempsey, co-founded Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center (KCMC) www.kcmc.ac.tz a teaching hospital, and his mother, Jerene, founded the International School Moshi www.ismoshi.org.

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 corn-field.

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 2010, Mortenson has established or significantly supports 145 schools in rural and often volatile regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which provide education to over 64,000 children, including 52,000 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".

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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.”

Book tour, reviews and media on www.threecupsoftea.com

Central Asia Institute website www.ikat.org

Pennies For Peace website www.penniesforpeace.org

Stones into Schools website www.stonesintoschools.com

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Discussion Questions

1. If you've read *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson's first book, how does this compare? Do you find it as inspiring or as dramatic as the first book?
2. Again, if you've read *Three Cups*, in what ways does Mortenson seem to have changed. Consider, for instance, the effect that becoming a celebrity has had on his efforts. How would you say Mortenson comes across in this book?
3. Mortenson talks about the Taliban as a "ring of men with Kalashnikovs who help to sustain the grotesque lie that flinging battery acid into the face of a girl who longs to study arithmetic is somehow in keeping with the teachings of the Koran." Talk about the ways in which Mortenson's schools— especially his belief in educating girls—challenges that repressive culture. Why in his view is it important to educated girls?
4. What role does the US military play in the book? How—and why—does Mortenson change his views about the US war effort in Afghanistan?
5. How has Mortenson's work affected US foreign policy and military strategy in Afghanistan and elsewhere? What have we as a nation, as a world community, learned from him?
6. Why is Mortenson angered by both Pervez Musharraf (then-president of Pakistan) and Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's president, when both praise his work?
7. Talk about how Mortenson and his local compeers cut through bureaucracy to accomplish their goals.
8. Although deeply inspiring, is Mortenson's vision for peace— through education and literacy—realistic or naive?

(http://www.litlovers.com/guide_stones_into_schools.html#discussion)