

# **Stones into Schools**

## **by Greg Mortenson**

### About the Book

From the author of the #1 bestseller *Three Cups of Tea*, the continuing story of this determined humanitarian's efforts to promote peace through education

In this dramatic first-person narrative, Greg Mortenson picks up where *Three Cups of Tea* left off in 2003, recounting his relentless, ongoing efforts to establish schools for girls in Afghanistan; his extensive work in Azad Kashmir and Pakistan after a massive earthquake hit the region in 2005; and the unique ways he has built relationships with Islamic clerics, militia commanders, and tribal leaders even as he was dodging shootouts with feuding Afghan warlords and surviving an eight-day armed abduction by the Taliban. He shares for the first time his broader vision to promote peace through education and literacy, as well as touching on military matters, Islam, and women—all woven together with the many rich personal stories of the people who have been involved in this remarkable two-decade humanitarian effort.

Since the 2006 publication of *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson has traveled across the U.S. and the world to share his vision with hundreds of thousands of people. He has met with heads of state, top military officials, and leading politicians who all seek his advice and insight. The continued phenomenal success of *Three Cups of Tea* proves that there is an eager and committed audience for Mortenson's work and message.

### Praise for the Book

"Mortenson's story serves as a reminder of the power of a good idea and the strength inherent in one person's passionate determination to persevere against enormous obstacles."

—*Marilyn Gardner, The Christian Science Monitor*

"Sometimes the acts of one individual can illuminate how to confront a foreign-policy dilemma more clearly than the prattle of politicians. Such is the case with Greg Mortenson, whose work gives insights into an essential element of fighting terrorism."

—*Trudy Rubin, the Philadelphia*

*Courtesy of Viking*

## About the Author

### **Greg Mortenson**

American Philanthropist (1957– )

Updated: 02/28/2008

**Personal Information:** Born 1957, in MN; son of Irvin and Jerene Mortenson; married Tara Bishop (a clinical psychologist); children: two.

**Education:** University of South Dakota, graduated, 1983.

**Military/Wartime Service:** U.S. Army; medic; received U.S. Army Commendation Medal.

**Addresses:** Home: Bozeman, MT. Office: Central Asia Institute, P.O. Box 7209, Bozeman, MT 59771.

**E-mail:** cai@ikat.org.

**Career:** Former emergency room nurse, San Francisco, CA; Central Asia Institute, Bozeman, MT, founder and executive director.

**Awards:** David Brower Conservation Award, American Alpine Club, 1998; Peacemaker Award, Montana Community Mediation Center, 2002; Golden Piton Award, *Climbing Magazine*, 2003, for humanitarian effort; Vincent Lombardi Champion Award, 2003, for humanitarian service; Peacemaker of the Year award, Benedictine Monks (Santa Fe, NM), 2003; Outdoor Person of the Year, *Outdoor Magazine*, 2003; Salzburg Seminar fellow, 2003; Freedom Forum Free Spirit Award, National Press Club, 2004; Jeanette Rankin Peace Award, Institute for Peace, 2004; Anti-Terror Award, *Men's Journal*, 2005; Humanitarian of the Year Award for Montana, Red Cross, 2005; Alumni Achievement Award, University of South Dakota, 2006; Kiriya Prize for non-fiction, 2007, for *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*

### **WRITINGS**

- (With David Oliver Relin) *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time* (autobiography), Viking (New York, NY), 2006.

Contributor to books, including *Sustainable Development in Central Asia*, edited by Shirin Akiner and Sander Tideman, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1998; *The Difference a Day Makes: 365 Ways to Change Your World in Just 24 Hours*, edited by Karen Jones, New World Library (Novato, CA), 2005; and *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories for a Better World: 101 Stories to Make the World a Better Place*, edited by Jack Canfield, Health Communications (Deerfield Beach, FL), 2005.

## Sidelights

In 1993, Greg Mortenson went to Pakistan to climb K2, the second-highest mountain in the world. He had no idea when he departed just how far the journey would take him. Mortenson failed to reach the summit, and then he was separated from his group and found himself lost during the descent. He wound up in a remote village in Pakistan begging for aid and shelter. The villagers took him in and cared for him until he was healthy enough to continue, and he promised to repay them by building a school for the village's children.

Mortenson returned to the United States, sold everything he owned, which netted him a mere two thousand dollars, and solicited donations until he had enough money to build that first school. After difficult negotiations with local officials and threats from local Muslim clerics, who were opposed to Mortenson's plan to educate girls as well as boys, Mortenson finally succeeded in opening the school. He then founded the Central Asia Institute, which built dozens more. By 2006 the institute had sponsored fifty-five schools, which served 24,000 children in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia.

This story is told in *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*, which Mortenson wrote with journalist David Oliver Relin. The book presents "a fresh perspective on the cultures and development efforts of Central Asia," Vanessa Bush noted in *Booklist*, as well as an "incredible story of a humanitarian endeavor." A *Kirkus Reviews* critic dubbed *Three Cups of Tea* "inspiring [and] adventure-filled," while a *Publishers Weekly* contributor concluded that the "captivating and suspenseful . . . book will win many readers' hearts."

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### BOOKS

- Mortenson, Greg, and David Oliver Relin, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*, Viking (New York, NY), 2006.

### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, March 15, 2006, Vanessa Bush, review of *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*, p. 9.
- *California Bookwatch*, April, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*.
- *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, May 4, 2006, "One Man's Fight to Educate Girls in Central Asia."
- *Entertainment Weekly*, March 10, 2006, Timothy Gunatilaka, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 73.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, February 1, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 124.
- *Parade Magazine*, April 6, 2003, Kevin Fedarko, "He Fights Terror with Books."
- *People Weekly*, March 20, 2006, Maria Speidel, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 65.

- *Publishers Weekly*, March 1, 2004, John F. Baker, “Viking Senior Editor Ray Roberts Won an Auction for a Book by Mountaineer Greg Mortenson,” p. 14; January 9, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 45.

#### ONLINE

- *Freedom Forum*, <http://www.freedomforum.com/> (July 12, 2004), brief biography of Greg Mortenson.
- *Greg Mortenson Home Page*, <http://www.gregmortenson.com> (August 30, 2006).
- *Three Cups of Tea Web site*, <http://www.threecupsoftea.com> (August 30, 2006).
- *Volvo for Life Awards*, <http://www.volvoforlifeawards.com/> (August 30, 2006), brief biography of Greg Mortenson.

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2008

**Source Database:** Contemporary Authors Online

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#### David Oliver Relin

American Journalist (1963?–)

Updated: 05/03/2007

**Personal Information:** Born c. 1963.

**Education:** Vassar College, graduated.

**Addresses:** Home: Portland, OR.

**Career:** Journalist. Former senior news editor for *react* (weekly magazine).

**Awards:** Teaching/writing fellowship, Iowa Writers Workshop; Michener fellowship, 1992, for writing about Vietnam; Kiriya Prize for non-fiction, 2007, for *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*; over forty awards for his work as a writer and editor.

#### WRITINGS

- (With Greg Mortenson) *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*, Viking (New York, NY), 2006.

Contributor to periodicals, including *Parade* magazine and *Skiing* magazine. Contributing editor, *Parade* and *Skiing*.

#### SIDELIGHTS

(see entry under Greg Mortenson)

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, March 15, 2006, Vanessa Bush, review of *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations — One School at a Time*, p. 9.
- *California Bookwatch*, April, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*.
- *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, May 4, 2006, "One Man's Fight to Educate Girls in Central Asia."
- *Entertainment Weekly*, March 10, 2006, Timothy Gunatilaka, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 73.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, February 1, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 124.
- *People*, March 20, 2006, Maria Speidel, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 65.
- *Publishers Weekly*, March 1, 2004, John F. Baker, "Viking Senior Editor Ray Roberts Won an Auction for a Book by Mountaineer Greg Mortenson," p. 14; January 9, 2006, review of *Three Cups of Tea*, p. 45.

### ONLINE

- *Wordstock*, <http://www.wordstock.com/> (August 30, 2006), brief biography of David Oliver Relin.

**Source:** *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2007

**Source Database:** Contemporary Authors Online

## Author Interview

10 Questions with Greg Mortenson  
December, 2009

Humanitarians such as Greg Mortenson wage wars of ideas. In the best-seller *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson described how he built a school in a remote village in Afghanistan. He then founded more than 130 schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan, hoping to supplant extremism with literacy and female equality. In the process, he survived a kidnapping by the Taliban, two fatwas, and 17 years spent traversing some of the world's most isolated territory. Mortenson's latest book, *Stones into Schools*, describes his recent progress in the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan and how women are using education to better their communities. Fun fact: He studied more than 600 Goodreads reviews of *Three Cups of Tea* before he sat down to write *Stones Into Schools*. Mortenson spoke with Goodreads about working amid the Taliban and the transformative power of education.

*Goodreads:* You work in areas with very low female literacy rates. What is the "Girl Effect" and why is girls' education so crucial?

*Greg Mortenson:* Today there are 78 million female children who can't go to school (120 million children in total) because of slavery, poverty, religious extremism, gender discrimination, and human trafficking. When a girl gets an education to at least a fifth-grade level, three important things happen: Infant mortality drops significantly, population explosion is curbed, and the basic quality of health improves dramatically.

From my own perspective, the first thing that happens is that girls teach their mothers how to read and write. Boys tend to just learn for themselves. Girls immediately start teaching their mothers. It spreads like wildfire. When kids come home from the marketplace with vegetables or meat wrapped in newspaper, you'll see the mother very carefully unfold the newspaper and ask her daughter to read the news to her. That's very powerful because a woman can then understand what's going on in the outside world.

When women have an education—this is more political, and I'm specifically talking about Afghanistan and Pakistan—they are much less likely to encourage their sons to participate in violence or terrorism or to join the Taliban. After 9/11, the Taliban had a lot of desertion. Since then they have primarily targeted illiterate and impoverished societies because many educated women refuse to allow their sons to join the Taliban. [A mother's disapproval] is quite a strong deterrent.

There's a huge economic incentive. With female education and literacy, one of the first things that happen is that women start staking their rights for land ownership. They go to the district courts, and they file titles and deeds for land ownership. That's a key process if you want a civil society. That's happening in Afghanistan right now. There are more than a million widows. They know they have the right to own land, but when they're literate and have legal representation, they are much more likely to get involved.

*GR:* You've been dedicated to girls' education for 17 years—long enough to see a generation graduate. What kind of long-term effects are you seeing in these communities?

*GM:* When we first set up a school, the girls are very demure. Their heads are down. When we go back to that village a year or two later, all the women are excited, and they know what's going on around the world. We're focused on the very rural areas. We don't focus on the urban areas; our goal is to get schools started where there are no girls in school. The last place first.

Last year a young woman named Fozia Khan became the first woman—out of 4.2 million people—to pass her bar exam in northern Pakistan. She's now in the United States for two years, and she wants to get into land advocacy for women. She's become the role model for tens of thousands of young women. Next spring Shekila Aslam from Baltistan, northeast Pakistan, will become the first female physician out of 1.2 million people. She's planning to go back to her village and work there. We have had four women who have graduated from high school join the police force. One is now a captain. They help with domestic violence and abuse toward women.

*GR:* The Taliban has shut down only one of your schools, and it reopened under the protection of local guards just two days later. Given how often the Taliban tries to shut down schools, especially girls' schools, why do you think your schools have largely escaped its targeting?

*GM:* I grew up in Tanzania, Africa, for 14 years. My father started a hospital on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. One thing that my father insisted on that I've tried to follow is that he always put local people in charge, not Westerners or foreigners. For long-term sustainability and viability, you have to empower the local people and put them in charge. Sometimes it is frustrating, or it can take longer, but ultimately that's the real way to do it.

We're now able to go into pretty volatile areas, some of the Taliban areas. This year we put the first girls' high schools in four provinces of Afghanistan. There are many Taliban around, but we're able to [build schools] because we have relationships with the local people. They are able to talk to the Taliban, and so the Taliban are reluctant to attack our schools. Since 2007, the Taliban have bombed or destroyed 850 schools in Afghanistan and an additional 600 in Pakistan. We had one school attacked, but only for two days. I think [our schools remain open] because we insist that the community give free land for the school, as well as free wood, free resources, and free or subsidized manual labor—2,000 to 5,000 days of manual labor. We match that with teacher training and support, skilled labor like masons or carpenters, and materials. The community becomes invested.

*GR:* *Three Cups of Tea* was a runaway best-seller. Has the success of that book at home impacted your work overseas?

*GM:* We've had our best year ever, but I keep saying that every year since we started. Since *Three Cups of Tea*, the relationships that we've been so fastidiously and slowly nurturing are really coming together. Things are getting a lot easier. I call myself more of a cheerleader now.

*GR:* You have been both a critic of and an unofficial advisor to the U.S. military. How do you feel about the current military strategy on the ground in Pakistan and Afghanistan?

*GM:* In *Three Cups of Tea*, although I'm a military veteran, I was a little critical of the military. After 9/11 I went to the Pentagon a couple of times, and I called them all laptop warriors. I can say now that the military has gone through a huge learning curve in the last three to four years—even more than the State Department or our political leaders—and the military really gets it. It's about listening more, building relationships, and empowering the elders. *Three Cups of Tea* is now mandatory reading for all senior commanders and Special Forces deploying to Afghanistan. I tried to highlight some personal examples of the military's inspiring work in *Stones Into Schools*.

*GR:* You've received angry letters from Americans who object to educating Muslims overseas. Others question the right of Westerners to encroach on local cultures in developing countries. What is your response to these kinds of criticism?

*GM:* Some people say that I'm just trying to push Western ideas and morals and that I have my own agenda. But to be really honest, the reason I do this is because when I ask women in rural Afghanistan and Pakistan, "What do you want?" very consistently women say, "One, we don't want our babies to die. Two, we want security and peace. And, three, we want our children to go to school."

I'm not doing this for my own agenda or trying to pat myself on the back. If I wanted to make money, I definitely wouldn't be running around in this part of the world.

*GR:* You founded Pennies for Peace, an international service-learning program. A large part of your outreach focuses on educating American students about the lack of educational opportunities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. How are young people getting involved?

I visit about 200 schools a year in the U.S.: elementary schools and universities, private and public schools, urban and rural. I talk to kids and try to inspire them to go out and make a difference. My contention is that we should spend 99 pennies here in the U.S. for our education, and 99 people can work here in the U.S., and one penny or one person can go overseas. Let's keep to that formula, or even less—one out of 500 people.

I think there's been a phenomenon of community service happening around the country in the last 10 or 15 years. I read a U.S. News & World Report study that came out two years ago, which said that in 1970 about one-third of college graduates wanted to go out and make their community or the world a better place (and this was the time of bell-bottom

jeans and peace guitars), and by 1990 it dropped to 18 percent (the "me" generation, everybody wanted to go out and make a buck). Today about 45 percent of college graduates really want to go out and do something, whether it's in their community or the international community. It's cool that kids are starting to look upon education as an honorable career.

*GR:* Can you describe a typical day spent writing?

*GM:* It takes a lot of organization. The first book I dictated and then wrote with my coauthor, David Oliver Relin. At the time, my wife said if I wrote a book it would be a pamphlet, so they wanted someone to bring it out more. This book was actually much more challenging because I wrote it in first person.

I compiled a list of about 600 of the *Three Cups of Tea* reviews and comments on Goodreads (criticism, complaints, suggestions, praise, et cetera), printed them out on paper, and went through them carefully. Some of the comments, such as "You didn't share enough about why you do what you do; you didn't talk about your family or your personal feelings; you describe these amazing women and girls, but you didn't talk about how they felt when they first went to school or what it meant to their mothers," were very insightful comments. I've incorporated some of the suggestions and criticism in my new book, *Stones into Schools*. It was a very helpful process. I really worked hard to bring out the women's personal feelings, and I enjoyed it a lot.

Some authors don't like to read any book reviews. I have a thick skin. I also appreciate even the critical reviews, because you can learn from them. My dad was big advocate of listening not only to the people who praise you but also to your critics.

I also had my wife's book club and a couple of other book clubs go through the manuscript of *Stones into Schools*. They gave some incredible feedback and really improved the stories quite a bit.

With the first book, I used to get up at 2:30 a.m. and work for five hours. I was under a lot of pressure. I did it because we had so many people interested in what we were doing. With this book, I got up at 4 a.m. and worked for three and a half hours. A lot of perspiration. But I actually enjoyed writing this second book.

*GR:* Do you have any books or authors who have inspired you?

*GM:* Nicholas Kristof just wrote *Half the Sky*. I've been in touch with him for many years. We talk a lot about women's issues. He's very inspiring to me, and it is really exciting to see that finally some of these causes related to women's rights are taking front and center.

I like Rory Stewart. He wrote *The Places In Between*, a travelogue about walking across Afghanistan. I pretty much only read nonfiction.

GR: What's next for you?

GM: I'm trying to wean myself off this work so that I can become a full-time advocate for girls' education. I've had 87 offers from Hollywood for a movie, but I've turned them all down. I'm very reluctant. I think a movie might jeopardize or put our girls at risk. If I do a movie, it's not going to be about money. I want to make sure the producer has a lot of sensitivity. Angelina Jolie read *Three Cups of Tea*, and she said she would help find a really good producer. She has a big heart.

I'm interested in starting a global women's scholarship fund. I think a lot of women graduate but then fall through the cracks because they don't have opportunities. They are the first wave of literate girls. I'd like to set up a Web site through which a person can individually sponsor a woman online.

I want to have more time with my family and be home. Some reviewers have said, "Well, you're doing a great thing, but you're a poor husband and bad dad because you got married and have responsibilities, and now you're off traipsing around the world." Obviously, that is the hardest thing for me. I'm gone from my family half the year. But on the other hand, I've met hundreds of people in the military. I think kids make the greatest sacrifice of all. My daughter, who is 13, actually takes great offense. She says, "Daddy, I can't believe they would say that about you." She has a black belt in tae kwon do, and she says, "Come to our doorstep and say he's a bad dad."

We did a young readers' version of *Three Cups of Tea*, which included writing from my daughter and was more geared toward girls. We're going to do a *Stones into Schools* version, but a little more geared toward boys, teaching little guys to respect women's issues. My son is eight, and he'll be writing about his experiences. My son and daughter come over [to Pakistan and Afghanistan] every year or every other year. You have to be careful, but it's been really wonderful. We get to spend 24-7 with each other for four to six weeks. Even a lot of American families don't get to do that.

#### Source

Goodreads (2009) *10 Questions With Greg Mortenson*. Retrieved on December 17, 2009, from [http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/408.Greg\\_Mortenson](http://www.goodreads.com/interviews/show/408.Greg_Mortenson)

## Discussion Questions

### Current Events & Politics Discussion Questions

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. What did you know about the subject prior to reading this book? How has this book changed or enhanced your view of the subject?
3. Did the book seem adequately researched? Why or why not?
4. What did you find to be the most interesting events in this book? What, if anything, surprised you?
5. What impact do you think the central figure (or figures) portrayed in this book will have on history? Can you see this book being discussed in later years?
6. With omnipresent media influences around us all day—cable television, talk radio and blogs, as well as traditional media outlets like print and broadcast—do you look for books in this genre (currents events & politics) to deliver a different perspective to you? Did this book do that?
7. If the subject is political and is not in line with your personal political beliefs, how did you feel about reading it? Has it changed your opinion at all? Why or why not?
8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
9. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read other works by this author? Are you inclined to read more books on the topic? Why or why not?

### Source

Reading group guides: the online community for reading groups. *Current events & politics discussion questions*. Retrieved December 17, 2009, from [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/no\\_guide/guide\\_current\\_politics.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/no_guide/guide_current_politics.asp)