

# Building Pathways to Peace, One School at a Time.

One false step can mean disaster when climbing Pakistan's treacherous K2, the world's second-highest mountain. But for Greg Mortenson, losing his way during the descent led him to discover his life's purpose.

In 1993, during a failed attempt to reach the peak of K2, Mortenson became disoriented and wandered away from his fellow mountaineers into the most desolate reaches of northern Pakistan. Ill, he stumbled into an impoverished mountain village where he was nursed back to health. During his recovery, Greg observed the village's 84 children scratching their lessons in the dirt with sticks. When he learned that the government didn't provide a teacher although the cost was just a dollar a day, he was astounded. Before leaving Korphe, he promised to repay the villagers' kindness by returning to build a school.

In an effort to raise money, Greg wrote letters to 580 celebrities, businessmen, and other prominent Americans. His only reply was a \$100 check from NBC's Tom Brokaw. Selling everything he owned, he still only raised \$2,400. But his outlook brightened when a group of elementary school children donated \$623.40 in pennies, inspiring adults to start taking action.



Greg, Saida, and her father read a letter from a U.S. student.

When Greg returned to Pakistan, he first had to build a 283-foot bridge over a deep chasm to get building materials to the remote mountain village. The Braldu Bridge was completed in 1995 and the Korphe School was completed the next year.

That first successful effort at school-building has since grown into a remarkable humanitarian campaign. Through Greg's Central Asia

Institute (CAI), he has built nearly 90 schools in the most remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan—all without government assistance. The CAI provides building materials, skilled labor and teacher training, and in return the communities provide free land, tools and labor.

The obstacles Greg has faced over the years have been staggering. He has had to deal with wrenching separations from his wife and family, face daunting cultural barriers, and travel through desolate, bandit-ridden areas.

Mortenson has survived a 1996 armed kidnapping by the Taliban, fatwas issued by enraged mullahs, a firefight with feuding Afghan warlords, and repeated threats—some from fellow Americans for educating Muslim children.

## THE POWER OF A PENNY

In the U.S., a penny is virtually worthless, but in the impoverished countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, a penny will buy a pencil and \$12 will purchase a desk that seats two.

Greg's program, Pennies For Peace (P4P), educates American schoolchildren about the world beyond their experience and shows them they can make a positive impact on a global scale, one penny at a time.

P4P encourages children—ultimately our future leaders—to be active participants in the creation of global peace.

Approved by the National Education Association for use in public school curricula, the program has grown from 270 schools its first year to 3,580 schools just a year later, and raised more than 100 million pennies last year—one million dollars.

## EDUCATION, THE TEMPLATE FOR PEACE

Greg's greatest satisfaction comes from helping tens of thousands of children realize their dreams and hopes through education. "With each school, I'm more convinced education should be *the* top global priority."



Greg with schoolgirls from Lalander village school, Char Asiab valley, central Afghanistan, in 2005. Courtesy Central Asia Institute

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Greg with Sarhad village students, Wakhan corridor, Pamir mountains in 2006—the first students to attend school in their region. Photo: Teru Kuwayama

He speaks specifically about the importance of educating girls and women: "Until girls are educated, society won't change." Rural Afghanistan and Pakistan have staggering infant and maternal mortality rates. "When we educate girls to the fifth-grade level, we see reduced infant mortality and improved quality of life and health."

The CAI has introduced maternal healthcare training programs, installed water wells to improve hygiene and reduce disease, and established poultry farms and women's vocational training centers so that the schools would generate their own revenue.

There are other benefits—a kind of ripple effect—such as reducing the number of Muslims who might become terrorists. “Often, educated women refuse to allow their sons to join the Taliban,” Greg comments, and points out that although the 9/11 hijackers were educated men, few of their mothers were literate. “The real enemy is ignorance. Ignorance breeds hatred, and hatred breeds violence.”

### STRENGTH THROUGH RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Greg and journalist David Oliver Relin coauthored *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School At A Time*, which has been translated into 32 languages and created widespread interest in Mortenson's work. At the Pentagon, the book is mandatory reading for officers in counterinsurgency training.



The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Mortenson has “a surprising new job: advising the U.S. military on how to fight Islamic extremism.” Greg was invited to the Pentagon to meet with Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who has stated that the U.S. needs a less-militarized foreign policy. General David Petraeus, Commander of the U.S. Central Command, has recommended that his staff read *Three Cups of Tea*. There's been a shift in thinking on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; military leaders are trying to build stronger relationships with tribal leaders.

### TOWARD AN EVER-BETTER FUTURE

Mortenson spends four months a year in Central Asia, then another two on speaking tours across the U.S. These efforts take him away for months at a time from his Montana home and his wife, Tara, and their daughter Amira and son Khyber. “That's the most painful part of my job,” he says. “I didn't get to see my kids learn to walk or tie their shoes or ride a bike.”

Never one to slow down, Greg is working on a new book, *Stones into Schools*, which focuses on Afghanistan and how education is the key to peace and prosperity there.

Meanwhile, *Three Cups of Tea* continues to impact international relations and improve the lives of children in the remote lands of Central Asia, one school at a time. Says Mortenson, “Our best hope for a peaceful and prosperous world lies in the education of all the world's children.”



Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Greg Mortenson.

“When we educate girls to the fifth-grade level, we see reduced infant mortality and improved quality of life and health.”



Greg Mortenson with school children from Nouser village, Neelam Valley, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. Courtesy of Central Asia Institute.

Greg Mortenson is the co-founder of the Central Asia Institute (ikat.org), Pennies For Peace (penniesforpeace.org), and co-author of *Three Cups of Tea*, which has been a New York Times bestseller since its 2007 release and is currently #1.

The former mountaineer has been featured on National Public Radio, all major TV networks, and in numerous publications, including *Parade Magazine*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and many others.

Mortenson received Pakistan's highest civil award, *Sitara-e-Pakistan* (“Star of Pakistan”) for his efforts to promote education and literacy. Among his numerous other awards are the Vincent Lombardi Champion Award for humanitarian service, the *Men's Journal* ‘Anti-Terror’ Award by Senator John McCain, and two Mom's Choice Awards®: Author of the Year and Volunteer Organization of the Year (Pennies For Peace).

The recipient of 11 honorary doctorates, Mortenson was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by several bipartisan members of Congress. The recipient will be announced in October 2009.



Hushe schoolgirls look at a photo album of a U.S. school.

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