Central Asia Institute’s

Journey of Hope

Spring 2011

www.ikat.org

A mid-year report by Kari Ronnow with photography by Ellen Jaskol.
Asalaam-Alaikum.

As CAI’s board chairman, it is an honor to bring to you this special springtime supplement of Journey of Hope. I recently returned from an extended visit to Pakistan and Singapore to visit CAI projects and staff, and also help coordinate new teacher-training programs.

While in Pakistan, I had an incredible time drinking many cups of *dudh patti* (sweet milk tea) and *kehwa* (green tea) with local CAI staff. While there, we discussed the establishment of a new Pakistan-based registered trust that would be CAI’s collaborative arm in Pakistan, completely run by local staff. Ultimately, when this trust is put in place, it would mark the realization of Greg Mortenson’s dream to have local people in charge of their own destiny.

In Singapore, I spent time visiting with Farheen Mukri, who will bring her team to Pakistan and Afghanistan this year to help with our teacher-training programs. Farheen, whose father is a retired Pakistani ship captain, is a leader in the field of international NGO leadership training, especially teacher training. She has traveled extensively in Southwest Asia on her own, sleeping on earthen floors, riding on the tops of buses with chickens and hiking up mountain trails into remote villages.

Farheen told me she especially admires CAI for its focus on working directly with local communities and using local staff. “When development work is put in the hands of locals, it sometimes takes longer, and mistakes happen, but the end results are far more enduring and sustainable,” she said. CAI is excited to have Farheen on our team.

Back in the U.S., CAI has reinforced its commitment to collaboration with other Pakistan-focused NGOs, including DIL (Developments in Literacy), HDF (Human Development Foundation), TCF (The Citizens Foundation), Zindagi Trust, AKDF (Agha Khan Development Foundation) and The Edhi Foundation. Our hope is that CAI will have more opportunities to hold joint symposiums and other events to help increase cultural tolerance and awareness of Islamic values in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world.

To address the recent media allegations, CAI is gathering relevant facts from our field managers in Pakistan and Afghanistan to provide more comprehensive reporting. Greg Mortenson is receiving many requests for interviews with international media outlets. Armed with a healthy heart, he will give those interviews after his impending surgery. His prognosis is excellent.

In the meantime, the CAI Board members and staff are happy to answer all questions to assure our donors that there has been absolutely no financial misappropriation and that CAI has never swerved from its mission to educate the poorest of the poor, the underserved people, especially girls, in remote regions of Central Asia where no one else dares to work.

Most of all, *shukria* (thank you) for your tremendous support, ongoing generosity, prayers and belief that together we will create peace through education.

Please enjoy this springtime *Journey of Hope*. We welcome your feedback.

–Abdul Jabbar
CAI Board chairman
Spring is a season of renewal and hope. In that spirit, this special spring edition of Central Asia Institute’s Journey of Hope publication is an effort to bring readers up to date on what is happening with the organization, and offer inspiration and reassurance amid the recent spate of criticism and doubt.

CAI holds fast to its belief that educating children in Pakistan and Afghanistan – giving them a sense of a bigger world and their place in it, and nurturing their dreams of a better future – ultimately benefits us all. The organization, its domestic and overseas staff and its Board of Directors remain particularly dedicated to addressing the complex issues of educating girls, and to inspiring and facilitating that complex cultural transition, especially in remote areas.

However, in the wake of unprecedented criticism, one supporter recently remarked, “We believe that an element of disorganization might be present in the administrative aspects of CAI, which would be not at all surprising given the chaotic nature of life in the regions CAI serves. We feel that the best path forward is to take these allegations seriously, to undergo thorough, objective and public self-assessment, and to welcome the outside scrutiny.”

We agree. CAI remains dedicated to being as transparent and accountable as possible and to providing as much information as possible in a timely fashion. Ultimately, we want our supporters to know that the money they have given is being used for its intended purpose.

So, as the snow melts and trees begin to bud in the remote areas where CAI works overseas and in Montana, where CAI has its headquarters, work continues unabated. Here are a few highlights of CAI’s projects this spring:

- Details are being finalized for CAI to build a female teachers-training college in Muzaffarabad, the capital city of Azad Kashmir. The original structure was destroyed in the massive 2005 earthquake and students are currently studying in tents without restrooms. The new building will accommodate at least 200 students after construction is completed this year. The government provided the earthquake-proof design. CAI staff is working with the Azad Kashmir government on this project, as well as a seven-member school management committee.
- Also in Muzaffarabad, CAI is expanding its girls’ scholarship program (see page 2).
- Plans are taking shape for construction of at least 60 new schools across Afghanistan in 2011.
- New schools are being dedicated in May in Afghanistan’s Panjshir and Badakhshan provinces.
- A new initiative to build three schools in remote, southeastern Tajikistan has been successfully launched (see page 3).

Meanwhile, Greg Mortenson, CAI’s cofounder and executive director, is scheduled to undergo a surgical heart procedure in May to fix a hole between the right and left atria, a condition known as atrial septic defect. This condition has led to chronic low oxygen levels, or hypoxia. As per doctor’s orders, he is confined to bed rest at home with supplemental oxygen to prepare for the surgery. His post-surgery recovery is anticipated to take weeks, if not months, depending on how long he agrees to sit still.

Spring is always a busy season for CAI. Schools are in session, construction is under way and villages that have been cut off through the winter are accessible again. And although the spring of 2011 has delivered considerable challenges for CAI, the organization continues to be motivated by belief in a better future – and hope.
With the help of Central Asia Institute, Fozia Naseer became the first person from her village in Azad Kashmir ever to travel to the United States, become a lawyer and learn to drive a car.

Now she wants to return the favor and help other Kashmiri girls continue their education beyond high school.

This spring, in her new position as women's development and scholarship director, the determined 28-year-old is setting up CAI's new girls' scholarship program in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

“I believe in CAI’s work. I know how important education is for girls,” she said in a phone interview.

With the help of her family, Naseer graduated from high school and earned a bachelor’s degree in education and a master’s degree in political science. When CAI began working in Azad Kashmir after the 2005 earthquake, she received a scholarship to help her finish her last two years of law school in Muzaffarabad, followed by another scholarship for two years of post-graduate work at Montana State University in the United States.

“I was fortunate and had CAI scholarships for four years,” she said. “I want, and CAI wants, more girls to be so lucky and have a chance to be educated and powerful.”

Six Kashmiri girls already participate in CAI’s scholarship program in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. They live in a hostel and attend classes in the city’s high school and colleges.

But shifting those girls to Muzaffarabad and expanding the program to accommodate more Kashmiri students will simplify logistics and alleviate some of the anxiety inherent in educating girls far from home.

“We already have a scholarship program, but it was not local,” she said. “The girls are happy about this change. Their families are happy, too, because now the girls can stay near their homes and, culturally, it is important for girls to be near their families.”

Muzaffarabad is a conservative city of an estimated 750,000 people at the confluence of the Jhelum and Neelum rivers, 138 kilometers from Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

The city was at the epicenter of the devastating Oct. 8, 2005, earthquake that killed approximately 80,000 people in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. More than 50 percent of the buildings in Muzaffarabad were destroyed in the quake, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, and reconstruction has been agonizingly slow.

Naseer has met with representatives from the high school and university in Muzaffarabad to discuss the girls’ enrollment. She is also looking for a house to convert into a hostel and a small staff to run it.

“The best part of the program is that it shows what good work CAI is doing in this area and reinforces the people’s belief in that good work,” she said. “It is really important for all girls of Pakistan to get a chance for an education and I am so excited to be part of that.”

- Fozia Naseer

“It is really important for all girls of Pakistan to get a chance for an education and I am so excited to be part of that.”

CAI scholarship student, Bushra, 14, does her homework at a girls’ hostel in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, where she lives with other CAI scholarship students. The program allows girls from rural areas to continue their education at a level higher than that offered in their village.

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Central Asia Institute empowers communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, especially for girls, promotes peace through education, and conveys the importance of these activities globally. Since 1996, CAI has established or significantly supported over 170 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. CAI is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, federal IRS EIN #51-0376237.

Sign up for CAI’s email newsletter, “Alima,” at www.ikat.org/alima
Three years of negotiations and countless cups of tea have resulted in a plan for Central Asia Institute to establish three schools this summer in the mountainous southeastern corner of Tajikistan.

CAI’s first 15 years were spent promoting education in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but expanding into Central Asia was the long-term vision of the organization’s co-founder, Jean Hoerni, according to CAI Executive Director Greg Mortenson. Hoerni, a Swiss physicist, and Mortenson cofounded the nonprofit organization in 1996.

“Before his death from leukemia in early 1997, Dr. Hoerni asked me to promise that someday we would establish a school in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan,” Mortenson said. “I promised him I would do that, but told him it might take 10 or 20 years.”

In late April 2011, Sarfraz Khan, CAI’s “most-remote-area project director,” called from Khorog, Tajikistan, to report that Tajik government officials, including Minister of Education Abdujabbor Rahmonov, had given CAI’s plan the green light.

“The Tajik minister of education and also the minister of interior gave permission for new schools in very remote areas of eastern Tajikistan,” Khan said in a phone interview. “Now we can start.”

Mortenson said, “The promise made to Jean Hoerni many years ago has now come to fruition. This is incredible news. This is a historic moment for CAI.”

The schools will all be located in an area known as the GBAO, or the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, an autonomous province in the Pamir Mountains of eastern Tajikistan. The area covers 45% of Tajikistan’s land, but has only 3% of the population, according to Tajik government statistics.

“The schools’ locations were picked in conjunction with the ministry of education, who gave Sarfraz a list of 187 villages in the GBAO it needed help with, but also through working with the communities,” Mortenson said. “The villages that will get schools were the ones in the most remote areas that were able to contribute free land, sweat equity and resources.”

The three confirmed sites are:

• Sajmak, in extreme southeastern Tajikistan, near the Afghan and China borders.
• Lyangar, in southern Tajikistan, near Karl Marx peak (6,723 meters).
• Vanj River Valley, on the southern side of the Darvaz Mountains in southcentral Tajikistan.

All three are near the Tajik border with Afghanistan adjacent to Badakhshan Province, where CAI has dozens of schools.

Mortenson’s philosophy has always been to set up schools in what he calls the “Last Best Places,” a term coined by Montana author William Kitteredge. Or, put another way, CAI “starts in the mountain-side and goes to the city-side,” as the staff often says.

“We already have funds available, we’ve completed the registration process, and now we have the government permission and community support,” Mortenson said. “We will go very slowly, one cup of tea at a time. As Sarfraz told the minister from the very beginning, ‘CAI move much slow, but we are much strong.’

“Funds will be wired and, inshallah (Allah willing), CAI will have three new schools in Tajikistan this fall,” he said.
One afternoon in Kabul, Afghanistan this past March, members of Central Asia Institute’s in-country staff and their boss, Greg Mortenson, climbed a steep path through a ramshackle neighborhood on the city’s south side.

The dirt path wound through a hodgepodge of houses assembled with whatever materials were on hand – mud, tin sheeting, old steel containers once used to transport military supplies. The residents, refugees of the decades of war across Afghanistan, face a daily struggle to survive. Basic necessities – such as food, water and firewood – are scarce.

The team’s destination was CAI’s Roya Women’s Literacy Center, one of dozens of such places CAI has set up across the city to teach women basic skills.

“We walked up the path until we reached a mud wall with a big green gate,” Mortenson said. “We went inside, across the dusty yard, and up six stairs into a mud house. Once inside, we climbed another set of stairs to a room, where the door was opened to reveal 100 women seated in circles on the floor helping each other learn to read and write.”

Hundreds of women gather for a few hours each day in CAI’s women’s centers for free lessons in reading, writing, math, conversational English, Dari, Arabic, hygiene, sanitation and nutrition, vocational and life skills. The centers, set up in the relative safety of rented houses or teachers’ homes, cater to women of all ages, from preteens to senior citizens.

The women at this particular center were mostly refugees from northern Afghanistan, who fled the fierce fighting during the Taliban years and endured a tortuous circuit of life in refugee camps before winding up in Kabul.

“She then began teaching them how to bargain in the marketplace, telling them the shopkeeper will always double the price and then lower by a fourth, while they should start low and go up,” Mortenson said.

Women need such practical instruction because throughout the years of war and Taliban oppression, they were not allowed in public without a male escort. Men did all the shopping.

But that, like so many facets of daily life in Afghanistan, is changing.

STORY BY KARIN RONNOW  |  PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELLEN JASKOL
Mortenson had several objectives on this spring trip to Afghanistan. One was to collect the financial documents needed for accounting purposes in the United States. “To coincide with the calendar in Pakistan and Afghanistan, CAI’s fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. So generally, late winter or early spring is when we compile financial reports from overseas,” he said.

But Mortenson’s heart condition and hypoxia, exacerbated by years of chronic fatigue, meant his trip to Afghanistan had to be short and focused. In addition to meeting with staff members, visiting women’s centers and a visit the site of the new CAI Gumran Girls’ School in Logar Province, he spent time at the bustling CAI Community Learning Center in Kabul.

Mortenson said the center has come a long way since the day in 2006 when CAI’s Afghan Operations Director Wakil Karimi told him, “We need a place so we can have an office, literacy programs and teacher training.” Karimi warned that the price of land in Kabul was going up fast, with no sign of stopping; land prices had quadrupled since the U.S. had invaded Afghanistan in 2001. If CAI was going to buy land in Kabul, it had to act fast.

So Mortenson and Karimi looked all over the city, eventually buying property about six miles south of the city center for $24,000. “At that time, much of the area was undeveloped,” Mortenson recalled.

On the 2-acre plot of land, Karimi built a two-story structure with classrooms, an office and computer labs – all surrounded by an 8-foot-high wall. The Dari words for “Education is Light” are painted on a wall overlooking the courtyard.

When Mortenson revisited what has become the hub of CAI’s operations in central Afghanistan this spring, he noted significant changes in the neighborhood. It’s now crowded with refugees who have returned to Afghanistan after spending years in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran.

But there are positive changes, too, especially for women and girls, he said. “Although this area of south Kabul is fairly conservative, you can see women in high heels, some with veils, most with headscarves, some fully covered in azure-blue burkas, but they are outside their homes, that’s a huge change, and many now have shoulder bags for their textbooks, school papers and even some laptops.”

CAI has also hired a female manager for the center, a college-educated woman named Maliha who is, Mortenson said, “highly proficient on the computer, a prolific e-mailer, and fluent in Pashto, Dari, Arabic, English and Urdu,” after years spent living as a refugee outside Afghanistan.

“Her desk is the first office on the left and when people enter, she’ll often invite them in and pepper them with questions,” he said. “She is a big advocate of empowering women. She’s also a great role model. And now women come from all over Kabul to request her assistance.”

Mortenson visited various classes in the center, which are offered year-round by 23 part- and full-time instructors teaching basic literacy, computer and office skills and running several women’s programs.

“The center is unique in that students come from all walks of life, all ages, to get extra help with subjects such as math, English,
science, computers, Arabic, Dari,” Mortenson said. “Even dozens of Afghan National Army employees, many of whom are illiterate, learn to read and write at the center during their off-duty hours. The army gave them incentives to improve their basic skills – if they attend literacy classes, they have a better chance of promotion.”

The center also includes a limited enrollment K-10 school for orphans and students from poor families who need extra attention and incentives to stay in school.

One boy in first grade, Waisudin, 12, said last summer that he is still trying to juggle morning classes with long hours as a tile worker. “He must work because his father died, he is the oldest boy with three brothers and two sisters, and there is nobody in his house to bring money to the family,” Karimi said.

“I had many problems before,” Waisudin said. “This is the only school that accepted me.”

Waisudin’s teacher, Asma, said the CAI center is important because “in Afghanistan, there is not enough money for schools, but education is important, so it is our responsibility and our duty to help.”

Previously a receptionist, Asma said last summer that she shifted to the center, “because I want to help my people, because it is a good center and helps poor people. I respect CAI. The people here are very kind, and have a lot of experienced teachers and a lot of good goals.”

**Multipliers**

Mortenson’s trip also included a stop at another CAI women’s center, Familia Reshkhur, where he had a chance to talk about one of his favorite topics – the links between education and overall good health and wellbeing.

As he spoke with the women, the conversation quickly turned to Afghans’ propensity for having many children.

“Some of the women were giggling about that, but I told them that female literacy is the single most important factor in reducing population growth and fighting poverty,” he said. “I used a simple way to show them, drawing circles on papers, about the multiplier effect. That means, if one woman has eight children, each of whom also has eight kids, she might eventually have 64 grandchildren, and 512 great-grandchildren. But if a woman is educated and has only three children and that continues into the next generation, she would perhaps have nine grandchildren, and 27 great-grandchildren.

“Then Wakil said, ‘what is the best way to have less children? Education. And this costs you nothing’.”

Before leaving, Mortenson asked a woman to read aloud from her science textbook.

“She boldly stood up, said her name was Bibi Ashia and said that she was from Badakhshan Province. She had escaped after the Taliban killed several of her relatives in 2000,” he said. “She is a mother of 10 children and I asked for all of their names. After reading aloud, she told me that the most important thing she and the other women have in their lives today is education. She said, ‘With education, we women will have a future.”

Abdul Qaseem, 17, jokes with fellow students during a computer class at CAI’s Kabul learning center.
Supporters have had numerous questions, and we appreciate the time and thought that has gone into all of them. Below, we have provided a list of the dozen most-commonly asked questions and CAI’s answers, given the information available at this time.

1. **If CAI’s primary mission is to build schools and educate girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, isn’t public education really about CAI’s fundraising efforts?**

   CAI has two purposes—as described in the original 1996 certificate of incorporation and in its application for recognition of exemption as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization filed with the Internal Revenue Service—to establish and support education in remote mountain communities of Central Asia and to educate the public about the importance of these educational activities.

   From the beginning, Greg Mortenson’s presentations (educational outreach) have inspired people to support CAI’s mission with time, money and awareness. His presentations and his books help fulfill the stated corporate and charitable purposes of CAI. While it is true that during 2009-2010 a significant amount of CAI’s resources were dedicated to domestic and international educational outreach, the result of that effort makes possible CAI’s ambitious plans overseas for 2011 and beyond.

   “CAI plans to establish more than 60 schools in Afghanistan this year,” Mortenson said. “However, in Pakistan, CAI plans to establish about a dozen schools; the emphasis there is not so much on new schools, but to improve the education quality, scholarships, teacher training – human capacity building.

   In Afghanistan, we still need new buildings. In many ways our work in Afghanistan at this point resembles where we were 10 to 15 years ago in Pakistan.”

2. **Please provide total expenditures broken down in percentages spent on overhead vs. program. Is CAI really spending 59% of earnings on fundraising?**

   CAI is dedicated to using every dollar as efficiently as possible. In 1996, 100% of donor dollars went to programs, while 0% went to overhead. In 2009, 88% went to programs and 12% to overhead. The average annual percentage CAI has spent on programs throughout its history is 78%.

   In those figures, the programs category includes money set aside in CAI’s Talim (Pashto for “education”) Fund, a nest egg dedicated and restricted solely for overseas projects. The amount raised and set aside in that fund constitutes about 38% of the total of about $60 million that CAI has raised in the past 15 years and brings total program funding to a level that reflects CAI’s mission and donors’ desires.

   With the explosion of support over the past three years, the Talim Fund has grown from $2 million to $20 million, while the number of schools built or significantly supported by CAI increased from 78 to over 170, with plans for more than 70 additional schools in 2011.

3. **Every nonprofit must file an annual tax return. According to reports, your nonprofit only filed once in 14 years - is that true?**

   No. IRS 990 forms filed for every year since CAI’s inception are available on our website, http://www.ikat.org/about-cai/financials/

4. **What is your response to allegations that many of the schools you claim to have built do not exist, were built by others, or stand empty?**

   Every single day, CAI’s work helps to improve the lives of tens of thousands of people, especially girls, in remote areas of
Pakistan and Afghanistan. Throughout the school year (which varies, depending mostly on climate), thousands of students are in classes at CAI schools. Teachers are teaching. And women are meeting at vocational centers, where instructors are providing literacy, health, and myriad other lessons.

At least once a year, a U.S.-based CAI staff or Board member travels to the region to collect documentation, dedicate new schools and check on CAI projects. However, routine checks of the schools are, like the long-term relationships necessary to sustain this type of work, the responsibility of individual in-country project managers in conjunction with local education committees. That includes insuring that education is indeed taking place in these schools.

“In order to function successfully, our first priority is to put the local people in charge,” Mortenson said. “Sometimes that is risky, more risky than some people may be comfortable with. But by empowering the local people and putting them in charge, the results are far more sustainable and lead to a much greater sense of ownership or pride in the project.”

Recent media reports have alleged that several CAI schools in Baltistan, in northern Pakistan, were either not being used at all or were not receiving funds. Since those reports did not always cite particulars, it is hard to respond with precision except to say that there could be several reasons for that, including:

- Many schools in the remote, mountainous areas close for two months or longer in the winter.
- A disgruntled former manager for programs in Baltistan was not completely honest with Mortenson and CAI’s Board in recent years about the status of schools for which he was responsible.
- “Since 1993, CAI has had 15 primary regional managers running the show or in charge of projects and in only one case, in Baltistan, did that system go awry,” Mortenson said. That case involved a manager who may have engaged in “a confidence trick.”
- “Confidence tricks have been around for a long time, since colonial times, including where I grew up in Africa, where an individual will bend over backwards to help you, refuse to take money for services, befriend you and then after a period of years, begin to test you by committing small infractions to see what your response is,” he said. “They also make you very dependent on their services as a vital part of the operation.”
- One of our great dreams in Baltistan was to set up a hostel in Skardu for students from the outlying regions to continue their education and pursue their dreams. Although the Board approved the original

Students of CAI’s girls’ college in the Ishkoman Valley, Ghizer District of northern Pakistan, gather outside in the school’s courtyard after a dedication ceremony in September 2010.
But in some cases, CAI supplements government funding with additional money for additional teachers. And in the more remote areas, when the government does not make good on its obligation to pay teacher salaries, CAI steps in to pay them and ensure they continue to come to work every day.

6. Please address the allegations that many Board members have resigned.
   Over the years, some Board members have resigned due to philosophical and/or managerial differences with other Board members and/or with Greg Mortenson. Since its inception, CAI has had 14 board members, with an average 5.2-year term of service.

7. Also, three Board members, including Greg Mortenson, are too few. Is the organization giving any consideration to beefing up the Board?
   Yes, the current CAI Board is in the process of expanding the number of Board members and is reviewing qualifications of potential candidates.

8. How do you defend the fact that of the 11 schools claimed to have been built in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, there were really only three?
   CAI has built four schools in Kunar Province and has another five schools under construction, according to its Afghan operations manager, Wakil Karimi. Work on those five has been suspended several times because the ongoing fighting creates a "risky situation."
   "In Kunar, the situation is dangerous and we had to suspend building in some places, pending negotiations with the Taliban," he said. "Al Qaeda and Taliban, they control roads and just kidnap people for the money. We communicate with Taliban and when they say, 'you can start your work,' then we start again."
   Plus, establishing schools in this region is long-term work; three of the four that are now complete took several years from inception to completion. Often a school is established first by providing a teacher, with classes in a tent or rented building.

Mohammad Nazir, CAI operations manager in Baltistan, writes a receipt recording payment of funds to help launch a women's clinic in Khalpalu. The clinic is administered by Shakeela, a graduate of CAI’s Hushe School, who received post-secondary training in women’s health care, with an emphasis on maternal health.

CAI's Afghan Operations Manager, Wakil Karimi, bottom right, talks with laborers laying the foundation for a new school in Musakhil, Afghanistan.
Meanwhile, CAI staff work with the local education committee to address all community concerns, including those of extremists, and identify land. In some cases, schools were well into this process when negotiations fell apart due to “no land,” or “Taliban not agree,” Karimi said.

The provincial and district education managers have assured CAI they are more than satisfied with CAI’s work in Kunar, as are the communities CAI serves. “Go inside of the village, talk to the local people. Their children are coming to the school. They are the ones who know,” Karimi said.

9. How much of Greg Mortenson’s books were fabricated or embellished?

The contents of Greg Mortenson’s books *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones Into Schools* are based on events that actually happened. Media allegations that Greg did not visit Korphe in 1993 are false; he first visited Korphe in September 1993 after failing to reach the summit of K2 and later built a school there.

And Greg was, in fact, detained and held against his will in 1996, with his passport and money confiscated, although his captors did treat him well, as he accurately described in his book. Greg’s initial rebuttal to some of the allegations can be viewed at www.ikat.org.

10. Has Greg used funds for private jets unnecessarily?

There are three reasons Greg has used charter planes.

Number one, Greg’s schedule often presents difficult logistical scenarios that are nearly impossible to accomplish with commercial airlines. Generally, he has to fly late at night to accommodate his hectic schedule, which in the past four years put him in an average 126 cities per year, plus international travel and overseas project visits. Number two is his health, which has been in decline for the past 18 months. And number three is security. Greg has received threats against his life, and commercial travel sometimes presents over-exposure to threatening elements.

Greg began paying his own travel expenses in January 2011.

11. The Board statement that “counsel concluded there is no ‘excess benefit’ – that is, CAI appropriately receives a greater benefit from Greg’s activities than Greg does himself,” is vague. Please elaborate.

Any time Greg gives a presentation about how he came to dedicate his life to building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan and people are inspired, those people donate to CAI, not Greg personally, in furthering CAI’s mission. In addition, his presentations and his books, although his alone, do help CAI accomplish its stated charitable purposes by educating the public and drawing awareness to the significant needs of that region and the significant cultural differences between the U.S. and that region.

While Greg has benefited from this collaboration, CAI has benefited even more. Greg and the Board initiated a self-imposed analysis and evaluation, with outside advice, of their collaboration in January 2011. The results of the inquiry were presented to the Board on April 13. Based on that assessment and the Board’s longtime confirmation of the effectiveness of its collaboration with Greg, the Board confirmed its intention to continue to refine and address the particulars of their relationship on an ongoing basis.

12. What about the possibility of turning over accountability of running the schools to a local organization; if there is no organization, then perhaps an organization under the umbrella of CAI?

In Afghanistan, CAI already operates under the auspices of three organizations: CAI; the Marco Polo Foundation, a registered nonprofit that primarily covers central and northern Afghanistan and has schools in Badakhshan (including the Wakhan Corridor and Pamir), Takhar, and Baghlan provinces; and Star of Knowledge, a registered nonprofit that covers Urozgan, Khosht, Paktia, Nangarhar, Logar, Wardak, Kunar, Panjshir, Kapisa, Parvan, and, this year, Bamiyan provinces.

Our Pakistan operations all remain under the auspices of CAI, although they are divided into regions: Baltistan, Gilgit-Hunza, Azad Kashmir, and Punjab. The staff that run the regional operations are all from those areas.

For more information and current updates visit www.ikat.org.
A message
to the children

Asalaam-Alaikum
Peace be with you

One of my greatest joys is to visit dozens of schools every year, public and private, rural and urban. I truly believe that it is children who are the real catalysts for peace in the world. Not only do children have great ideas, it is also very powerful when children can learn and apply the lessons they learn from their elders about tolerance, compassion, patience and hard work.

My biggest concern about recent allegations in the media against CAI, and myself is that they were mean spirited and gave no consideration to the demoralizing impact such news might have on the children of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the more than 1.2 million U.S. and Canadian children involved in our Pennies for Peace (P4P) program. I am very sorry if these attacks left you feeling confused, hurt, upset or disheartened.

Let me assure you that I stand by the stories conveyed in my books, and by the value of CAI’s work in empowering local communities through education for tens of thousands of children since 1996. I will speak to you in more detail about these issues after I regain my health.

Mostly, I want to assure you that 100 percent of P4P donations go to build schools, purchase school supplies and provide educational support for children in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan. The enormous difference it makes in every single student’s life is undeniable.

Meher’s determination speaks to the pay-it-forward aspect that has emerged as a result of CAI’s work in these remote villages.

“Education is important for me because I can also save my own area and educate other people and kids,” she said. Amina, a teacher in another CAI school in that same area of Pakistan, said your pennies are making a huge difference in her students’ lives.

“All the villagers, teachers, students and all management of our school are thankful to CAI for providing this new building, washrooms, furniture, and supplies for students,” she said in September. “We are so thankful. This is the only organization helping here. Now kids go to school and learn to read and write. We have 85 students here and expecting more.”

CAI would not exist today in villages like Meher’s and Amina’s without the millions of pennies you have donated over the years. Since its founding, more than 9,400 schools, organizations, places of worship, libraries, and businesses have had registered P4P campaigns in 62 countries. You should be proud that you helped educate so many children in Pakistan and Afghanistan with your pennies and hard work. Each of you make a difference in the world by bringing peace through education - one penny at a time.

-Greg Mortenson

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COVER PHOTOS - Front cover: Students at CAI’s Payan Shahr School in Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan, wave goodbye to visitors at the end of the school day. Inside front cover: Women learn to sew at a CAI women’s vocational center in the Hunza region of northern Pakistan. Inside back cover: A student recites her lessons at CAI’s Jafarabad School in the Shigar Valley in Northern Pakistan. Back cover: School children who attend class in a mosque and small outbuilding in Baharak, Afghanistan, show off the new school CAI is building for them.