Greg Mortenson Bio


Since 1996, Central Asia Institute (CAI) has supported over 250 community initiated educational and service projects, where few education opportunities existed before.

In 2009, Mortenson received Pakistan’s highest civil award, Sitara-e-Pakistan (“Star of Pakistan”) for his humanitarian effort to promote girls education in rural areas for fifteen years.

Several bi-partisan U.S. Congressional representatives have nominated Mortenson twice for the Nobel Peace Prize in both 2009 and 2010.

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 later 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 humanitarian campaign, in which Mortenson has dedicated his life to promote education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

His work has not been without difficulty. In 1996, he survived an eight day armed kidnapping by the Taliban in Pakistan’ 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 two 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 and militia 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 for over a decade in rural villages where few foreigners go, and considered the ‘front lines’ of the ‘war on terror’

In addition to his advocacy for female literacy and education, Mortenson is an advocate for the global abolishment of the manufacture and usage of land-mines, and actively campaigns for the U.S. to join the 158 countries that have already signed an anti-land mine pact.

While not overseas half the year, Mortenson, 52, lives in Montana with his wife, Dr. Tara Bishop, a clinical psychologist, and two young children.

MILITARY
Admiral Mullen has advised senior U.S. military commanders to read Three Cups of Tea. It is mandatory reading for officers in the Norwegian War College, Forsvarsnett, for U.S. Special Forces deploying to Afghanistan, all U.S. Marines training at MARSOC Camp Lejeune, officers in counter-insurgency training, and Canadian Defense Ministry members.

Three Cups of Tea 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, (ret) General McKiernan, and several other U.S. military commanders who advocate for empowering elders and building relationships as a part of an overall strategic plan.

Mortenson has spoken and has had discussions at SOCOM, MARSOC, NORAD the CSF at the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, Naval Air Command, NORAD, and been to the Air Force, Naval and West Point Academies. Annually he voluntarily visits about one to two dozen military bases, without charge or honorarium to help troops deploying to Afghanistan understand cultural issues, tribal etiquette and the nuances of tribal warfare.

He has also met several times with most senior military U.S. commanders to help advice and brief them on Afghanistan and Pakistan with issues related to cultural understanding, tribal etiquette. These include General David Petraeus (CENTCOM commander), Admiral Eric Olson (SOCOM –Special Forces) Commander, Admiral Mike Mullen (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff), General Conway (U.S. Marine Corps Commander), General Stanley McChrystal, ISAF / U.S. Commander Afghanistan, Major General John Macdonald, Deputy commander – Afghanistan, Secretary Gate (DOD Secretary) and several other military commanders.

AWARDS
1975 US Army Commendation medal
1998 American Alpine Club David Brower Conservation Award
2002 Peacemaker Award from Montana Community Mediation Center
2003 Climbing Magazine "Golden Piton Award" for humanitarian effort
2003 Vincent Lombardi Champion Award for humanitarian service
2003 Peacemaker of the Year" Benedictine Monks, Santa Fe, NM
2003 Outdoor Person of the Year - Outdoor Magazine
2003 Salzburg Seminar fellow, sponsored by Microsoft
2004 Freedom Forum "Free Spirit Award" - National Press Club, D.C.
2004 Jeanette Rankin Peace Award - Institute for Peace
2005 Men's Journal 'Anti-Terror' Award by Senator John McCain
2005 Red Cross “Humanitarian of The Year” Montana
2006 Golden Fleur-de-lis Award from Comune Firenze, Italy
2007 Medical Education Hall of Fame Award, Toledo, OH
2007 Rotary International Paul Harris Award for Promoting Friendly Relations Among People
2007 Mountain Institute Award for Excellence in Mountain Community Service
2007 Dayton Literary Peace Prize – Book Award, Dayton, OH
2008 Citizen Center for Diplomacy - National Award for Citizen Diplomacy
2008 Courage of Conscience Award – The Peace Abbey, Sherborn, MA
2008 Graven Award - Wartburg College, IA
2008 National Award for Citizen Diplomacy - Citizen Center for Diplomacy
2008 Academy of Achievement Award
2008 Sword of Loyola – St. Louis University
2009 Sitara-e-Pakistan “Star of Pakistan” (Pakistan’ highest civilian award)
2008 Mary Lockwood Founders Medal For Education - Daughters of The American Revolution
2009 Archon Award - Sigma Theta Tau International (Nursing Award)
2009 National Education Association NEA – Human Rights Award
2009 Austin College Leadership Award – Sherman TX – Promoting education issues for peace
2009 City College San Francisco Amicus Collegii Award – Promoting peace through education
2009 Jefferson Award for Community Service: Harvard Kennedy School of Business
2009 Gambrinus Giuseppe Mazzotti Literary Prize (Italy)
2010 Toronto School District (Canada): Peace Award
2010 Honorary Induction – Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society
2010 Loyola Marymount University (CA) – Doshi Bridgebuilder of Peace Award
2010 The Common Wealth Awards: For Public Service
2010 The Salem Award for Human Rights
2010 The Christopher Award: “To affirm the highest values of the human spirit”
2010 The 10th Annual Lantern Award “Excellence in Education Innovation” (MOSTE-LA, CA)
2010 Distinguished Service to Education Award: National Elementary School Principals Association
2010 Smithsonian Institution: Benjamin Franklin Laureate Award for Public Service
2010 Literature to Life Award – American Theater Place
2010 Viking Award – Norway House for pursuit of bold, dangerous and important undertakings
2010 Freedom Award – Freedom Festival for extraordinary devotion to the cause of liberty at home and abroad
2010 American Peace Award – representing the spirit of the world peace through thoughts

HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREES

Concordia College , Moorhead , MN 2007
University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD 2007
Montana State University, MT 2008
Villanova University, PA 2008
University of San Francisco, CA 2008
University of Washington – Bothell, WA 2008
Lewis & Clark College, OR 2008
Seattle University, WA 2008
Colby College, ME 2009
Simmons College, MA 2009
St. Louis University, MO 2009
University of Pennsylvania, PA 2010
Brookdale College, Lincroft, NJ 2010

THREE CUPS OF TEA BOOK – AWARDS AND MENTIONS

2006 Time Magazine Asia Book of The Year
2006 People Magazine – Critics Choice
2006 Publisher’s Weekly – Starred Review
2006 Kirkus Review – Starred Review
2006 Borders Bookstore Original Voices Selection
2007 Banff Mountain Festival Book Award Finalist
2007 Kiriyama Prize Nonfiction Award
2007 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association - Nonfiction Award
2008 Montana Honor Book Award
2008 Dayton Literary Prize Nonfiction Award – Runner up
2009 Mom’s Choice Award – Author of the Year
2009 Gambrinus Giuseppe Mazzotti Literary Prize (Italy)

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Pennies For Peace website www.pennniesforpeace.org