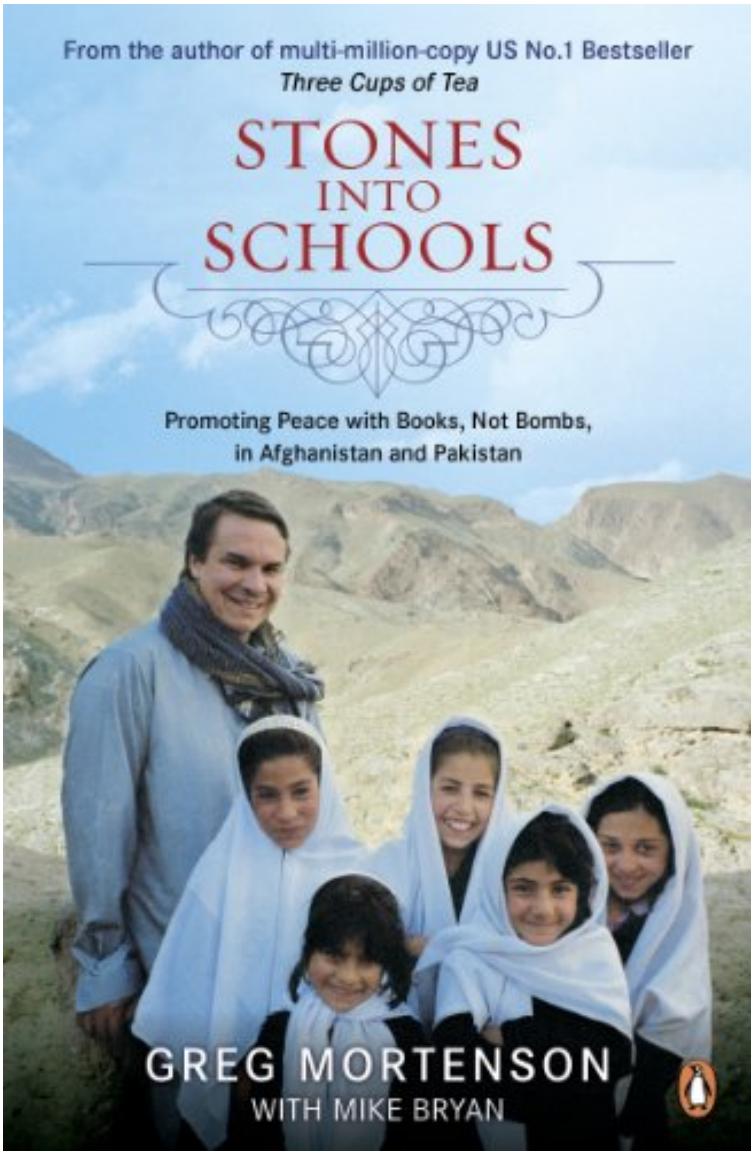
# Stones into Schools






*Par Greg Mortenson*
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[Mobile ebook] Stones into Schools

**Par Greg Mortenson : Stones into Schools** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stones into Schools:

**Description :**

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 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.ExtraitINTRODUCTIONEvery leaf of the tree becomes a page of the BookOnce the heart is opened and it has learnt to readSaadi of ShirazIn September of 2008, a woman with piercing green eyes named Nasreen Baig embarked on an arduous journey from her home in the tiny Pakistani village of Zuudkhan south along the Indus River and down the precipitous Karakoram Highway to the bustling city of Rawalpindi. The three-day tripfirst on foot, then on horseback, and later by jeep and bustook Nasreen, her husband, and their three small children from the sparsely populated Charpurson Valley, in the extreme northern part of Pakistan, directly into the heart of the Punjab, home to more than eighty-five million people. With the exception of a few farming tools, most of their worldly possessions, including a Koran, were crammed into a black suitcase that was cinched together with baling twine. They also carried a bulging burlap sack whose contentsevery stitch of spare clothing they werent wearing on their backswere as jumbled and mixed up as the pieces of Nasreens own story.In 1984, at the age of five, Nasreen started attending one of the first coeducational schools to open up in the north of Pakistan, a region where women were traditionally denied the opportunity to learn reading and writing. Excelling at her classes, she distinguished herself as one of the smartest students in the school until 1992, when her mother unexpectedly died of pneumonia and Nasreen was forced to abandon her studies in order to care for her blind father, Sultan Mehmood, and her four siblings. Eventually her father remarried, and Nasreens new stepmother, a woman who believed that girls had no business pursuing education, would taunt Nasreen late at night when she tried to continue her studies by the light of a kerosene lantern. Women should work instead of reading books, her stepmother would rail. Books will poison your mind and you will become a worthless wife and mother!Nasreen didnt see it that way. During her school years, she had acquired a rather bold dream for someone with resources as limited as hers: She had resolved that one day she would become a maternal health-care providera profession she had first been exposed to when roving government health-care teams would make their annual rounds through the local villages. She vividly remembers the joy with which she anticipated immunization shots, just so she could interact with the workers in their white cloaks. My favorite smell was the antiseptic they would use, she says. Also, I envied how they would write down all the babies names, heights and weights, and immunization details in tidy rows in a spiral notebook.Fueled by her dream, Nasreen studied relentlessly, despite her stepmothers harassment. After tending to my brothers and sisters and doing all the household work, she recalls, I would wait till everyone was asleep, and then late at night I would read. She persisted in this manner until 1995 when, at the age of fifteen, she received her metric diplomathe equivalent of a high school degreebecoming one of the first of a handful of women from northern Pakistans Hunza region ever to do so. As the brightest student and one of the first female graduates for miles around, she was now poised to make good on her ambition.In 1999, Nasreen was offered an annual scholarship of $1,200 by our nonprofit Central Asia Institute, a stipend that would pay her tuition, room, and board for a two-year course of study and enable her to obtain her rural medical assistant degree. With these qualifications, Nasreen could then carry her skills north over a treacherous 16,335-foot pass into the Wakhan Corridora remote portion of Afghanistan just a few miles north of Zuudkhan where Nasreens ancestors originally came from and where more women die each year during childbirth than anywhere else on earth.By this point, however, Nasreen had been betrothed to a handsome but lazy young man from a nearby village, and her mother-in-law, Bibi Nissa, feared that Nasreens scholarship would rob her household of the new daughter-in-laws labor. Even though there were no other qualified girls in the Charpurson Valley to replace Nasreen as a scholarship candidate, Zuudkhans tanzeemthe council of elders who decide all matters of local importanceupheld Bibi Nissas objections and forbade Nasreen from accepting her stipend, thereby consigning her to a life of near slavery that remains the destiny of so many promising young women in the remote villages of Pakistan and Afghanistan.During the ten years that followed this decision, Nasreen toiled twelve-to sixteen-hour days tending goats and sheep in the mountains, tilling her familys potato fields, hauling water in metal jerricans, and gathering up eighty-pound bags of firewood and moist patties of yak dungZuudkhans two primary sources of heating fuel during the six-month-long winters. During this time she also gave birth to three babies and suffered two miscarriages, all without the attendance of a maternal health-care worker.Despite the drudgery and the frustration, Nasreen patiently waited out her decade of servitude. Whats more, during her brief moments of respite, she kept her health-care dream alive by seeking out and caring for the sick, the elderly, and the dying within her community. The lamp in my life refused to be snuffed out, she says. God never let the kerosene of hope run dry.Then, in the summer of 2007, the leadership of Zuudkhans tanzeem changed and the elders decided to set aside their opposition. Nasreen spent a year in the town of Gilgit attending a preparatory school to build back her academic skills after the long

hiatus. Finally, in the summer of 2008, with her scholarship in hand, Nasreen was free to travel to Rawalpindi to resume her studies.Today, Nasreen is a year away from completing her medical training program, but she has decided to continue with her schooling in order to complete a full OB-GYN nursing degree. Sometime in 2012, she hopes to move her family to the Wakhan and begin providing the kind of medical care that this region, one of the most isolated and forbidding places on earth, so desperately needs. As for her lost years, Nasreen harbors no bitterness whatsoever, mainly because she is convinced that her experiences imparted some essential insights.Allah taught me the lesson of patience while also giving me the tools to truly understand what it means to live in poverty, she says. I do not regret the wait.During the exact same time that Nasreen and her family were making their way down the Karakoram Highway toward Rawalpindi, I was paying a visit of my own to a small town in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. This was no different from any of the other 120-odd trips I make each year to cities across the United States and abroad in order to promote educational opportunities for women like Nasreen throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan. By the rather warped standards of my own schedule, September 18, 2008, was a fairly ordinary day. During the preceding week, I had given seventeen speeches at schools, churches, and libraries in nine other cities; and at three oclock the following morning, I was slated to board a private plane that would take me from Durango to my next appearance, a childrens peace rally in Rockford, Illinois. This would be followed by another eighteen lectures in eight more cities before returning to Pakistan on October 6. Somewhere in the middle of this, I was also hoping desperately for a one-day reprieve with my family.In many other respects, however, September 18 was anything but ordinary. The previous weekend the federal government had permitted the investment firm Lehman Brothers to go bankrupt before attempting an $85 billion-dollar rescue of the insurance giant AIG. By the time the stock market had closed that afternoon, the Dow Jones was in free fall and the entire U.S. financial system seemed to be hovering on the brink of collapse. In short, I could not possibly have selected a worse time to stand in front of a group of Americans and ask them to pull out their checkbooks.Fortunately, perhaps, my schedule allowed no time to contemplate the absurdity of this. It was a few minutes before 7:00 p.m. when, having already completed six back-to-back lectures, I dashed across the campus of Fort Lewis College to the gym, where more than four thousand peoplealmost a third of the townhad formed an impossibly long line. The fire marshal would eventually be forced to bar the door and prevent the final three hundred of these folks from entering the building. (Someone later told me that Durango hadnt seen a crowd this size since Willie Nelson last came to town.)Although the talks I give in these kinds of settings tend to vary according to the composition of my audience, I always begin with the same words: As-Salaam Alaaikumthe Islamic invocation that means May peace be upon you. And regardless of where I wind up steering the discussion, the heart of my presentation always includes the story of a promise.This story begins in Pakistan in 1993, the year I attempted to climb K2, the worlds second-highest mountain, only to be forced to turn back two thousand feet shy of the summit. After making my way back to K2 base camp, I then got lost while trekking down the thirty-nine-mile Baltoro Glacier and wound up staggering into a little village called Korphe (pronounced KOR-fay), a place so destitute that one in every three children perished before the age of one. It was in Korphe that I was provided with shelter, food, tea, and a bed. And it was in Korphe one afternoon during my recuperation that I stumbled across eighty-two children sitting outside writing their lessons with sticks in the dirt, with no teacher in sight. One of those young students was a girl named Chocho, and somehow she got me to promise the community that I would someday return and build them a school.The fulfillment of that promise involves a tale that recounts my fumbling efforts in Berkeley, where I worked as a nurse, to sell my car, my climbing gear, and all of my books in order to raise the necessary moneyand the subsequent chain of events through which a lost mountaineer eventually came to discover his lifes calling by fostering education and literacy in the impoverished Muslim villages of the western Himalayas.A few years ago, I put these events together into a book called Three Cups of Tea, and as those who have read all 338 pages can attest, its a rather long and unusual story. It is also a story that has always struck me as the chronicle of an ordinary man who inadvertently bumbled into an extraordinary place.When it really comes down to it, I am nothing more than a fellow who took a wrong turn in the mountains and never quite managed to find his way home. My initial vision, if you could call it that, involved helping a village knock together a 2,218-square-foot schoolhouse without any plumbing or electricity in the middle of a barley field at 10,400 feet. In a world filled with bold dreamers and big ideas, its hard to imagine a goal more humble than this. And it is the diminutive stature of this beginning that may help to explain why I now live my days beset by an almost continuous sense of wonderment and confusion.Although I have, by my staffs estimate, completed a total of 680 appearances in

more than 270 cities and towns from Miami and Los Angeles to Anchorage and Shreveport over the last three years, each time I travel somewhere new, I am still shocked by the sheer number of people who flock to hear this tale. Last summer in Boston, when the organizers of a talk I was giving at Northeastern University realized how many people wanted to learn about our schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, they booked me into a hockey stadium and filled the place with 5,600 people. A week later at a basketball arena in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 9,500 folks showed up and my speech had to be broadcast on a Jumbotron.Thats a big change for someone who once considered himself lucky to get the attention of half a dozen bored shoppers at a Patagonia or REI outlet, and perhaps the only thing that amazes me more than the size of these audiences is their dedication and interest. It is not unusual for people to drive six or even twelve hours to hear these presentations, then stand in line for another two hours simply to get their books autographed. But perhaps the most noteworthy testament to their commitment is the sort of thing that took place on that September night in Durango.On the very same evening that Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, was informing members of the House Financial Services Committee that the entire global economy was days away from a complete meltdown, the citizens of Durango, population 16,007, presented the Central Asia Institute with checks totaling nearly $125,000. A single contribution of $50,000 was given by George Boedecker, the founder of the shoe manufacturer Crocs. But the rest of the money came from the sort of individuals who will never know what it means to own a brand or run a corporation. Ranchers, housewives, and salesclerks. Mechanics, teachers, and plumbers. Secretaries, dental hygienists, students, and retirees. People who embody the virtues, as well as the limitations, of a life that is fashioned from humble materials. People, in other words, as ordinary and as unremarkable as me and you.In my view, that is amazing enough all by itself, but then consider this.Very few of the people in Durango that night had ever been to Pakistan or Afghanistan. No more than a handful could have been Muslim. And it was doubtful that a single one would ever see, with his own eyes, the schools, books, pencils, and teacher salaries that his money would pay for. Still, they opened their hearts and gave. There, on the threshold of the greatest economic collapse since the Great Depression, in the midst of an era when so many of our leaders have encouraged us to subordinate our noblest impulses to our basest fears, a small community in Colorado responded in exactly the same way as every other city and town to which I have traveled in America since this whole saga got started.When you hand this money over to the folks over there on the other side of the world, said one local businessman, who had tears in his eyes as he spoke, just tell them that it comes from a little town in the mountains of Colorado so that their daughters can go to school.Here, then, is the source of my wonder and confusion. Why do so many Americans seem to care so deeply about people who live in a place that is so far away? Despite everything that has happened, how can our anger and our fear be transcended so consistently by our decency? And what is it about the promise of educating childrenespecially girlsthat so often, and with such fervor, seems to evoke what is best in all of us?In addition to being a profoundly bewildered man, I am an incorrigible introvert. I am awkward, soft-spoken, ineloquent, and intensely shy. I do not enjoy speaking in public, posing for photographs, or asking other people for money. I dream of privacy, I revere silence, and I loathe any action that involves drawing attention to myself. (Even creating these pages was painful: It took a supreme effort on the part of both my wife, Tara, and my editor, Paul Slovak, to force me to agree to write it in the first personan approach that is emphatically not my cup of tea.) In the Christmas pageant of life, the characters I admire mostand the only roles for which I would ever consider auditioningare the ox and the donkey.Given these facts, the duties of speaking, promoting, and fundraising into which I have been thrust during the last several years have often made me feel like a man caught in the act of conducting an illicit affair with the dark side of his own personality. For politicians and celebrities, a lifestyle that entails an endless schmoozefest of back slapping and elbow rubbing seems to come as instinctively (and as necessarily) as breathing. I, on the other hand, find this kind of thing extremely discomfortingpartly because it sits so directly at odds with my deepest instincts about personal decorum, and partly because it so often leaves me wrestling with a sense of shame. All of which may help to explain why the unexpected and runaway success of Three Cups of Tea seems, at least in my view, to be charged with such a wicked irony.As I write this in the summer of 2009, the book is currently logging its 130th week on the New York Times bestseller list for trade paperback nonfiction, has sold more than three million copies, and is being published in three dozen countries. As you might imagine, this has produced the kind of publicity and attention that I find intolerable. But it has also opened the door to some extraordinary opportunities.Hard currency goes a long way in the impoverished hinterlands of the western Himalayas, where $20 is enough to educate a first grader for an entire year, $340 can send a girl to four

years of high school on a full-ride scholarship, and $50,000 is sufficient to build and outfit an eight-room schoolhouse and endow the teachers salaries for the first five years. During the four years since Three Cups of Tea was first published, our contributors have not only financed the construction of scores of new school buildings but have also funded scholarships, teacher-training programs, and womens vocational centers in remote villages extending from the glacier-carved valleys of the Karakoram to the wind-blasted reaches north of the Hindu Kush. Every bit as important as these projects, however, is the awareness that our donors have helped to raise about the vital importance of girls education.Studies from the World Bank indicate that just one year of primary school can result in an income bump of 10 percent to 20 percent for women later in life. According to Yale economist Paul T. Schultz, an extra year of secondary school may raise that same girls lifetime wages by an additional 15 to 25 percent. And the effects dont end there. A number of studies indicate that in communities where a majority of the girls are educated through the fifth grade, infant mortality drops significantly after a single generation. At the same timeand somewhat paradoxicallybasic education for girls correlates perfectly with lower, more sustainable population growth. In communities where girls have received more education, they marry later and have fewer children than their illiterate counterparts.These premises, which I also encountered in the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, are now accepted by many development experts around the world. (The definitive short book on the general subject is What Works in Girls Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World, by Barbara Herz and Gene B. Sperling.) Simply put, young women are the single biggest potential agents of change in the developing worlda phenomenon that is sometimes referred to as the Girl Effect and that echoes an African proverb I often heard during my childhood years in Tanzania: If you teach a boy, you educate an individual; but if you teach a girl, you educate a community. No other factor even comes close to matching the cascade of positive changes triggered by teaching a single girl how to read and write. In military parlance, girls education is a force multiplierand in impoverished Muslim societies, the ripple effects of female literacy can be profound.Take the issue that many in the West would consider to be the most pressing of all. Jihad is an Arabic word referring to a struggle that is undertaken as a means of perfecting oneself, improving society, or defeating the perceived enemies of Islam. In Muslim societies, a person who has been manipulated into believing in extremist violence or terrorism often seeks the permission of his mother before he may join a militant jihadand educated women, as a rule, tend to withhold their blessing for such things. Following 9/11, for example, the Talibans forces suffered from significantly increased desertions; as a countermeasure, they began targeting their recruitment efforts on regions where female literacy was especially low.Education, of course, offers no guarantee that a mother will refuse to endorse violent jihad, but it certainly helps to stack the odds against the menand, yes, they are invariably menwho promote the lie that killing innocent people is in keeping with the teachings of the Koran. Although I am not an authority on the Koran, religious scholars have repeatedly emphasized to me during the last sixteen years that murder and suicide are two of the most unforgivable sins in Islam.It is important to be clear about the fact that the aim of the Central Asia Institute is not indoctrination. We have no agenda other than assisting rural women with their two most frequent requests: We dont want our babies to die, and we want our children to go to school. And in the process of addressing those wishes, it is certainly not our aim to teach the children of Pakistan and Afghanistan to think or to act like Americans. We simply want them to have the chance to attend schools that offer a balanced, nonextremist education. In this respect, were also extremely sensitive to the difference between literacy and ideology. It is our belief that the first helps to thwart intolerance, challenge dogma, and reinforce our common humanity. The second does the opposite.At the moment, female literacy in rural Afghanistan continues to languish in the single digits. In rural Pakistan, the figures are a little higher, but not by much. The demand for schools, teachers, books, desks, notebooks, uniforms, chalkboards, paper, and pencils in these two Islamic nations is immense, and the benefits of American investment in this intellectual infrastructure are indisputably clear. Nothing that has happened since my unsuccessful attempt to climb K2including 9/11has changed my conviction that promoting female literacy represents the best way forward for Pakistan and for Afghanistan.Education is one of the many basic values that Americans of all faiths share with Muslim people everywhere.When journalists write about the achievements of the Central Asia Institute, they often tend to trot out the same sets of figures. They are fond of mentioning that during the sixteen years since my failure as a K2 climber, I have completed thirty-nine trips to Pakistan and Afghanistan, where, without using a dollar of money from the U.S. government, the Central Asia Institute has established 131 schools that currently serve more than 58,000 students, most of them girls. These articles also claim that the response to my message cuts across the lines that traditionally divide politics, religion,

and class in the United States. They point out that the fans of Three Cups of Tea include not only Bill Clinton, Laura and Barbara Bush, John Kerry, and Colin Powell, but also prominent military leaders such as CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, and SOCOM (Special Forces) commander Admiral Eric Olson. To my honor, Three Cups of Tea is now required reading for all officers enrolled in counterinsurgency courses at the Pentagon.In some ways, these tidbits of information may be usefulif nothing else, they convey a general sense of what weve been up to and what others think of our work. On a personal level, however, this approach tends to miss the point. If there is a metric by which I measure the achievements of the Central Asia Institute, it is not the amount of donations we receive each year, or the number of people who have read Three Cups of Tea, or even the number of schools we have built. In fact, it really has nothing to do with math and everything to do with the girls whose lives have been changed through education. In the end, the thing I care most aboutthe flame that burns at the center of my work, the heat around which I cup my handsare their stories.And by Gods grace, what marvelous stories these women can tell.Take the case of Jahan Ali, whose grandfather, Haji Ali, was Korphes nurmadhar (village chief) and who became my most important mentor. On the first day I met Jahan in September of 1993, she extracted a promise from me that if she graduated, we would send her off to a maternal health-care programan IOU that she triumphantly collected on nine years later. After finishing grad school in Korphe, she went on to enroll in advanced studies in public policy administration. Meanwhile, back home, Jahans father has been trying to marry her offshe is currently twenty-three years old, and her bride-price, thanks to her education, has now shot from five to fifty adult rams. Jahan, however, declares that she first intends to become a community leader and a member of Pakistans parliament. I am not going to get married until I achieve my goal, she recently told me. Inshallah (God willing), someday I will become a super-lady.Then there is the story of Shakila Khan, who graduated with the first class at our school in Hushe, a village in a valley to the south of Korphe that sits in the shadow of Masherbrum, one of the highest mountains on earth. Currently in her third year at Fatima Memorial Hospital in Lahore and scoring in the nineties, Shakila is slated to become the first locally educated female physician ever to emerge from Baltistans population of 300,000 people. She is currently twenty-two years old and intends to return to the Hushe Valley to work among her people. My main two goals, she says, are that I do not want women to die in childbirth or babies to die in their first year.Finally, consider Aziza Hussain, who grew up in the Hunza Valley, not far from the point where the Karhuram Highway crosses into China. After graduating from Gulmit Federal Government Girls High School in 1997 and completing a two-year maternal health-care program on a CAI scholarship, Aziza, too, insisted on returning home to ply her skills within her own communitya place where as many as twenty women perished each year during childbirth. Since Aziza came back in 2000, not a single woman in the area has died giving birth.Thirteen years after we completed our first school in Korphe, the maiden generation of Central Asia Institute women have graduated and are preparing to launch their careers. These women are now making first ascents far more dramatic and impressive than the achievements of western climbers, such as myself, who have been coming into these mountains ever since Aleister Crowley, the British poet, spy, and yogic devotee, made the first attempt to climb K2 in 1902.Already, these daughters have climbed so much higher than we mountaineers ever dared to dream.Serious and worthy efforts to promote schooling for girls are currently taking place all over the world, from Guatemala and Egypt to Bangladesh and Uganda. The unusual twist that the Central Asia Institute applies to this enterprise, however, is encapsulated in the title of Three Cups of Tea, which refers to a Balti saying that Haji Ali invoked during one of my first visits to his village. The first cup of tea you share with us, you are a stranger, he intoned. The second cup, you are a friend. But with the third cup, you become familyand for our families we are willing to do anything, even die.Of the many lessons that that old man imparted to me, this was perhaps the greatest. It underscores the paramount importance of taking the time to build relationships, while simultaneously affirming the basic truth that in order to get things done in this part of the world, it is essential to listen with humility to what others have to say. The solution to every problem, Haji Ali firmly believed, begins with drinking tea. And so it has proven.After my first encounter with Haji Ali in 1993, I returned to the United States, raised twelve thousand dollars, and then went back a year later to Pakistan, where I purchased a massive load of cement, lumber, and other supplies in the city of Rawalpindi. This material was piled onto a Bedford truck and ferried up the Karakoram Highway to the town of Skardu, a trip that took three days. There it was transferred to jeeps and driven to the end of the road, eighteen miles from Korphewhere I arrived with the expectation of being greeted like a hero. Instead, I was informed (after drinking several cups of tea with Haji Ali) that before we could start construction on the school, we had to

build a bridge. The reason? It would be impossible to ferry the construction materials over the roaring Braldu inside the only device spanning the river, a rickety wooden basket suspended beneath a 350-foot cable.Perhaps I should have thought of this earlier; in any case, the unexpected turn of events seemed like a disaster. It forced me to retreat back to the United States, where I had to convince my main benefactor, Dr. Jean Hoerni, to contribute even more money, which was then used to purchase even more construction materials and transport these supplies to the edge of the Braldu, where the residents of Korphe built a 282-foot-long suspension bridge over the river. In the end, the whole exercise set the project back nearly two years.At the time, I found this detour and its delays utterly maddening. Only years later did I begin to appreciate the enormous symbolic significance of the fact that before building a school, it was imperative to build a bridge. The school, of course, would house all of the hopes that are raised by the promise of education. But the bridge represented something more elemental: the relationships upon which those hopes would be sustained over timeand without which any promise would amount to little more than empty words.Korphes schoolhouse was finished in December 1996, and since then each and every school we have built has been preceded by a bridge. Not necessarily a physical structure, but a span of emotional links that are forged over many years and many shared cups of tea.This philosophy means that some of our projects can grind along at a pace that mirrors the ponderous movement of the Karakoram glaciers. For example, in Chunda, a conservative rural village in Baltistan, it took eight years for us to convince the local mullah, an immensely cautious and pious man, to permit a single girl to attend school. Today, however, more than three hundred girls study in Chundaand we take great pride in the fact that they do so with the full support of the very same mullah who once stood in their way. His change of heart affirms the notion that good relationships often demand titanic patience.Like Nasreen Baig, the green-eyed nurse from the Charpurson, we do not regret the wait. As any wise village elder will tell you, anything truly important is worth doing very, very slowly.The book that you are holding in your hands picks up where Three Cups of Tea left off in 2003 and is partly a chronicle of how that process has continued to unfold in Pakistan during the last several years. Mostly, however, this new book traces our efforts to take our work into a whole new region, the remote northeastern corner of Afghanistan. It is a place that has proved even more challenging than Pakistan, and the saga of what my staff sometimes calls our Afghan adventure is framed loosely in the context of a single school.If Three Cups of Tea lays out the narrative of our first schoolthe seed with which we started our plantingthen this is the tale of the most remote of all our projects, the flower in the farthest corner of the garden. No project has ever taken us so long or required such complex logistics as the little school we built next to the old Kirghiz burial grounds in the heart of the Afghan Pamirs Bam-I-Dunya, the Rooftop of the World. And next to Korphe itself, no school is closer to my heart, because, in ways both large and small, it was the most miraculous. It arose out of a promise made in 1999 during an unlikely meeting that seemed lifted from the pages of a novel set in the thirteenth century, when the horsemen of Genghis Khan roamed the steppes of central Asia. And it drew us into the land of the Afghans, the only place that has ever threatened to usurp the affection and the love I harbor for Pakistan.Part of what has made this school such a surprise is that so many other urgent projects were demanding our attention during the ten years it took to make good on our promise. The fact that we refused to let it go, even amid an earthquake in Kashmir in 2005 and other challenges that are recounted in the pages that follow, is a testament less to me than to the vision and the persistence of the Central Asia Institutes staff, and in particular to a group of twelve men whom I affectionately call the Dirty Dozen. If there are any heroes here, it is they; and for the most part this book is their story, because without these men, none of it would have happened. If the daughters who flock to our schools represent the fire weve lit, then these men are the fuel that sustains the flames. They have guided, pushed, and inspired me in more ways than I can recount, and their commitment and sacrifices run so deep that whatever we achieve will ultimately belong not to me but to them. Without their example and their resourcefulness, I would still be nothing more than a dirtbag mountaineer subsisting on ramen noodles and living in the back of his car.As youll see, the story of the little gem of a school that we built in the most remote corner of central Asia is a roundabout talea thread that like the twisting roads we ply in our battered Land Cruiser through the passes of the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush can sometimes get lost amid the unexpected detours and the landslide of complications that cascade down upon anyone who ventures into that harsh and wondrous part of the world. But these digressions and dead ends may also provide something that readers of Three Cups of Tea have been requesting from me for years. What theyve wanted, more than anything else, is a window into the day-to-day mechanics and rhythms of the Central Asia Institute. A sense of what it feels like to lay the physical and emotional foundation for girls education, book by book and brick

by brick, in the middle of Taliban country. If nothing else, this new work should fulfill that request.I should also note that the first part of this story will cover some ground that may already be familiar to readers of Three Cups of Tea. I thought this was necessary and important because several of these early events began to shape themselves into a meaningful pattern only over time. Back when they took place, I did not understand the full significance of these experiences and lessons they imparted, nor did I realize where they fit into the larger story that it is my privilege to tell here.In short, it was only after having moved forward a considerable distance that I was fully able to comprehend where we had beena phenomenon that would not have surprised Haji Ali, who, to my sadness, passed away in 2001. Haji Ali never learned to read or write, and over the course of seven decades he left his home village only once, to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca. Nevertheless, he understood that hope resides in the future, while perspective and wisdom are almost always found by looking to the past.Sometimes, it seems like everything Ive ever learned traces back to that irascible old man I first met in the barley fields of Korphe.Greg MortensonBaharak, AfghanistanAugust 2009Prsentation de l'diteurIn 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.