

UCSB A&L: An evening with Greg Mortenson

Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

HAVING SPENT A LIFETIME under the gaze of the world's tallest peaks, it is no wonder that climber-turned-humanitarian Greg Mortenson exudes an inner calm and a warmth of spirit that could melt a glacier. Mortenson recently made a visit to the Santa Barbara area to share his vision of promoting peace in the volatile regions of Northern Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan through education, especially for girls, one school at a time.

"There is an African proverb I learned as a child in Tanzania," said Mortenson, who spent his youth on

the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. But if you educate a girl, you educate a community."

Seventeen years ago, Mortenson built his first school in Korphe, a village he wandered into after a failed attempt to summit K2, the second highest peak in the Karakoram Range. After seeing children scratching their lessons in the dirt, he vowed to return and build them a school. Despite obstacles including everything from an armed kidnapping to tea with the Taliban, and a CIA interrogation, Mortenson and his crew at the Central Asia Institute have now successfully built over 140 schools, as well as countless temporary schoolrooms for displaced refugees.

Mortenson's adventures are chronicled in the *New York Times* bestseller *Three Cups of Tea*, now required reading for troops going into Afghanistan, and continued in his second book, *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and*

Pakistan. During his presentation, Mortenson credited the wives of key military figures for bringing the book to their husbands' attention. Mortenson's dedication to the power of literacy, especially for women, has come full circle, it seems. The word may yet prove mightier than the missile in the fight to wage peace in the world.

In addition to sharing his story to a sold out crowd at the Arlington Theatre, Mortenson spent time in local schools and shared three cups of tea with the Santa Barbara Middle School Teen Press corps. Seventh graders Lili De Voto and Emily Dewey conducted an exclusive interview with Mortenson while Mark Godges performed a rap he composed in celebration of Mortenson's work, both of which can be viewed on the SBMS Teen Press website.

"I had no idea that having three cups of tea was so important. After meeting with Greg, everything clicked. I realized how much one person could do to change our world," said Dewey, who learned that after the first cup of tea, you're a stranger; after a second cup, you're a friend; after a third cup, you're family. "When you're reading *Three Cups of Tea*, it's just an outside perspective," added De Voto. "But when you actually talk with Greg or get involved, you see what a big difference he is making."

To learn more about Greg Mortenson and the Central Asia Institute, visit www.ikat.org. To see the SBMS Teen Press in action, visit www.sbmsteenpress.org.



Lili De Voto, Emily Dewey, and Greg Mortenson sharing tea