

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations-- One School at a Time Study Guide

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations-- One School at a Time by Greg Mortenson

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations-- One School at a Time Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 through 5.....	4
Chapters 6 through 9.....	7
Chapters 10 through 12.....	9
Chapters 13 through 16.....	11
Chapters 17 through 23.....	13
Characters.....	16
Objects/Places.....	19
Themes.....	21
Style.....	23
Quotes.....	25
Topics for Discussion.....	27



Plot Summary

Greg Mortenson is participating in a climbing expedition in Pakistan, up the rugged face of a mountain called K2, when a fellow climber becomes ill. Greg and a friend help the man down to rescue choppers and find that they are simply too exhausted to make another attempt at the summit. They pack up and walk out, headed toward civilization. Greg, overly tired and not paying attention, wanders away from the trail and his porter, a man named Mouzafar. Greg finds himself in the remote village of Korphe and stays there for several days. He learns about the people and their customs and is welcomed by a leader, Haji Ali, who comes to think of Greg as a son. When Greg asks to see the school, he discovers that the children have to meet outside in all kinds of weather and that they share a teacher. He is so moved by their devotion to study—carefully copying multiplication tables in the dirt without a teacher to oversee their work—that he makes a promise to build a school for the village.

Back in the United States, Greg starts trying to raise money but can find little support. He is finally approached by Dr. Jean Hoerni who writes Greg a check for twelve thousand dollars with the instructions "don't screw up." Greg returns to Pakistan, buys the materials and then faces the problem of getting the materials to the remote village. Back in the United States, he approaches Hoerni with the problem and receives another check for ten thousand dollars to build a bridge. Greg returns to the project which winds up taking several years. He travels back and forth to the United States in between his work on the bridge and then the school, until Hoerni calls on a friend to write Greg a check for living expenses so that there is no need for him to work at his profession as a nurse.

Hoerni dies and leaves a million dollar bequest to form the Central Asia Institute. Greg draws a salary from that and marries a woman named Tara Bishop. The couple have two children though Greg continues to spend months every year in Pakistan, building many more schools, adding onto government schools, paying teachers and providing educational materials. He travels back and forth to the country, lending his help when there is a need for fresh water for the country's refugees fleeing military presence and helping to establish fresh water systems, hydro generators and adult vocation buildings in an effort to improve the overall quality of life for the people.

After the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States, Greg finds himself urging help in educating the young people of the country, saying education provides options for the youth and that this is the only way to eliminate a rush to join the insurgents. Greg is touted as a forward-thinking hero by some but is criticized by others for providing aid to America's enemy. He eventually realizes that it is time to move on and prepares to break ground on similar projects in other countries.



Chapters 1 through 5

Chapters 1 through 5 Summary and Analysis

In September of 1993, Greg Mortenson is part of a small group of professional hikers who have just made an attempt on a rugged mountain called K2. It is located in Pakistan and Greg, along with his fellow hiker Scott Darsney, are hiking back toward civilization when Greg becomes separated from his group. It is explained that Greg had been making the attempt at the summit of K2 in memory of his younger sister, Christa, who had died young. Greg is so exhausted that he has lost sight of Darsney as well as his own guide, a man named Mouzafer. Mouzafer has almost all Greg's belongings except a thin blanket. Greg recalls the events that brought him to this point. He and Darsney had been involved in a rescue operation and the exertion, lack of sleep and the rigors of the high altitude had sapped them so that they give up their dreams of reaching the summit with other climbers. Greg had been determined to leave a necklace belonging to Christa at the summit. Now, huddled in his blanket, alone and lost, he accepts the fact that his body's inability to endure any more strain has resulted in his failure to follow through with his plan to honor his little sister.

In chapter two, Greg survives the night and is more optimistic the following morning. He resumes his walk and hears the "tinkling of bells" that indicates he is near a village. He finally encounters Mouzafer, a Balti, who is relieved to find "Mr. Gireg." Greg found Mouzafer when Mouzafer had completed work for another group of hikers. He had agreed on a ridiculously small payment for carrying Greg's pack off the mountain, an offer Greg accepted because of his weakened state. Mouzafer makes "butter tea" for Greg and they continue their trip. Days later, Mouzafer has begun walking far ahead of Greg and making camp ready by the time Greg catches up. After several days of this, Greg is again lost. He stumbles upon a village called Korphe and notes that whites have never before visited the village. He is welcomed by the village elder, Haji Ali, provided the best of everything they have, and is told that they will send someone to find Mouzafer on the following day.

In chapter three, Greg is served tea by Haji Ali's wife, Sakina, and has sugar in his drink, only later realizing that sugar is very rare among the people and that he has again been given the best they have. Mouzafer arrives and Greg sends him on ahead, spending some time among the people of Korphe. He soon realizes that life is difficult for them, that food is barely adequate, and medical care nonexistent. With his few supplies and armed with his training as a trauma nurse, Greg is soon in demand. He treats injuries and illnesses as best he can and promises himself that he is going to repay their kindnesses. The people soon call him "Dr. Greg" despite his repeated reminders that he is only a nurse. One day Greg asks to visit the school and learns that there is not a building and that the children share a teacher with another village. On the day Greg visits, the children huddle against the cold, copying multiplication tables in the dirt with sticks or writing on slates with sticks dipped in muddy water. Greg tells Haji Ali that he will build a school for the children though he has no idea how to make it happen.



In chapter four, Greg goes to his self-storage building where possessions were kept while he was in Pakistan on the hiking trip. He recalls his childhood as the oldest child and only son of Irvin and Jerene Mortenson who had worked as missionaries in Africa. Greg had grown up there, moving back to the United States as a teenager, attending Ramsey High School, and finding that he never fit in until he joined the military, moving to Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, for basic training. Greg goes on to college, loses his father to cancer and his younger sister after Christa suffers a severe seizure.

In chapter five, Greg is back at home in California and begins writing letters to everyone he believes might be willing to donate toward building a school in Korphe. He returns to work as a trauma nurse, working emergency rooms and odd shifts. He keeps all his possessions in the storage building and sleeps in his car to avoid the cost of an apartment. During his work, he meets a doctor named Marina Villard. Greg is attracted but admits that he cannot decide whether he should ask her out or avoid her so that he can think straight. Greg is using a typewriter to put out his letters, having rented one from a supply house. When the supply house closes, he goes to another copy shop called "Lazer Image" and finds that they do not have typewriters. He knows nothing about computers but a man named Kishwar Syed begins to teach him to use the computer. He explains his mission and Syed helps him quickly produce all the letters he needs, then helps brainstorm more people who might be open to donating.

Then Marina asks Greg out on a date. They begin to see each other though Greg pays close attention to the money he spends and realizes that every dollar spent on fun is taking a dollar from the school construction project. Meanwhile, Jerene is now the principal at a school in River Falls, Wisconsin. Greg visits and tells the students about the children of Korphe. They respond by collecting pennies—a total of eight hundred dollars that puts Greg's project a step toward reality. Tom Brokaw is the only letter recipient to respond and he sends a check for one hundred. The police begin rousting Greg out whenever he tries to sleep in his car and his unwillingness to spend money on a room during a weekend hike trip with Marina puts tension in their relationship.

One day Greg is told Dr. Jean Hoerni is trying to reach him. Hoerni is a physicist and has begun several successful companies. He is seventy and cuts right to the chase, asking Greg how much he needs to build the school. Greg hesitates, wondering how much of the twelve thousand dollars he should ask for. He finally says that he can construct the school for twelve thousand dollars. Hoerni says, "Is that all," and sends the check for the total amount along with a note that says, "Don't screw up." Greg tells Marina that he will live a more normal life upon his return from the building project, sells his car and his climbing gear to have enough money to live while he is working on the school, and leaves for Pakistan.

—

Greg is obviously very close to his sister, Christa, though he has two other sisters who are also younger than he. Christa's disability seems to be what drew Greg so close to her and he notes that his insistence results in Christa's getting a job, moving around some on her own and even having a boyfriend. Greg's career choice—nursing—seems



a direct result of the fact that he had hoped for a cure for Christa and perhaps felt that he might be able to speed the process.

Greg's tenacity in climbing is typical of all aspects of his life. When he fails to make the summit at K2, he is initially sad that he did not make his goal, but admits that it is because his body simply was not strong enough to withstand the rigors that had been placed on it. An interesting aspect of this "failure" is that Greg and a fellow hiker actually saved another hiker's life, at one point being the only volunteers to put themselves to any great amount of trouble in order to do so.

Greg's attitude with regard to the people of Korphe is interesting in that he is immensely curious about their lives despite the fact that he had seen other small communities in the country during his stay. His attraction to this town and these people is never fully explained but it seems that Greg seriously wants to know more about people, ideals and cultures. Greg had lived a life of giving as a child. His parents raised money to establish a teaching hospital, Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center. Greg recalls that his father had told the people of that community that the center was theirs, that they should take pride in the accomplishment and should take control of its operation. It is an attitude he will mimic with regard to the school he is working to build.



Chapters 6 through 9

Chapters 6 through 9 Summary and Analysis

In chapter six, Greg arrives in Pakistan by the cheapest method possible. He takes a rooftop room in Rawalpindi that is glassed in and stifling hot as the cheapest accommodation available while buying the materials for the school. He takes the attitude that every dollar spent is a dollar less to be spent on the school or supplies for the students. A man named Abdul Shah becomes his guide over the coming days as Greg buys the materials. They begin with concrete and Abdul says that they cannot bargain over this important commodity. The next day, Greg's shirt rips and Abdul takes him to a tailor where Greg orders two light brown shalwar, native clothing. They then go to buy the lumber and Abdul bargains for hours while Greg does little other than watch and drink tea. At the end of the second day, he has other materials as well, such as tools, and they are all to be delivered to a truck hired for the trip to Korphe on the following day.

In chapter seven, Abdul and Greg arrive at the lumberyard early the following morning and go through the ritual of preparing to pray, Greg joining in. By the end of the day, Greg has all his supplies and prepares to leave the city. The driver drives all night with Greg perched on top of the load. They are nearing their destination when traffic is stopped by a local conflict. They remain parked overnight, hoping the situation will be resolved, and Greg waits to shots fired in excitement that it has been resolved. They continue on their way and arrive at Skardu where they are going to leave the supplies until Greg can arrange from them to be moved the treacherous trip by foot to Korphe.

In chapter eight, Greg decides to leave his building supplies with Mohammed Ali Changazi, a man who helps arrange tours and climbs for foreigners. Greg is almost immediately worried about his supplies but Ghangazi continues to keep them hidden away and tells Greg that they are safely out of reach of bandits. There is immediately an effort by two other village leaders to get Greg to build a school in their village rather than in Korphe. Changazi says that he can see to it that a school is built in Kuardu, his village, before winter sets in. Greg refuses all requests and holds firm to his pledge to build a school in Korphe though he recognizes that they see him as a person with finances to make projects like this school a reality.

Greg arrives in Korphe and talks with Haji Ali who says that they want the school but that they must first have a bridge so that their village is not so isolated. The only direct route to the village is by way of a tiny cable car that is dangerous at best. Greg is disappointed but turns that emotion on himself, admitting that he had not thought about how to get the supplies to Korphe and that he is going to have to find a way to build a bridge. In chapter nine, Greg returns to San Francisco and expects that Marina will meet him but she is not there. He notes that he had only called once because of the high cost of phoning and that the call had been terminated quickly. He arrives at her house and she meets him at the door, saying that she has begun seeing an



anesthesiologist during his absence. Greg is crushed but Marina says that the few postcards she had received from him had not referred to their relationship at all and that she had not been willing to wait around. He shows up to work and his boss, citing the fact that his return to the states had been delayed by weeks, fires him. Greg begins thinking about the bridge and Haji Ali's reaction to his arrival, thanking Greg profusely. Greg thinks about calling Hoerni but cannot bring himself to say that he failed in his mission to build a school. Greg talks to a climber named Dr. Louis Reichardt who climbed with Greg previously and now tells him that he should call Hoerni. Greg does.

Greg says that he does not particularly have a religious belief. When he is hoping to reach the K2 summit, he says that he plans to leave Christa's necklace there and says that he is leaving it for any deity that happens to exist. While he is in Rawalpindi, he begins to take note of those practicing Islam. He says that Islam literally means "to submit" and that the idea of submission is not particularly welcome in his lifestyle, but seems drawn to the practice anyway. At one point, surrounded by men pointed toward Mecca, Greg notes the power of belief surrounding him.

An interesting aspect of the story is that Greg is once held at gunpoint in the United States and a group of young men take the two dollars he has in his pocket. While in Pakistan, he is not particularly afraid of the military presence and says that if he were to be killed there it would be while traveling on the horrible roads rather than being shot by soldiers.

Greg's naiveté and his frustration can both be seen at various times along the way to completing the school at Korphe. The process is vital in that it provides a training ground for other building projects Greg will oversee in the coming years. However, he sets out without fully researching how and where to get the supplies. When he tells one man that he has trucked them such a long distance, he is asked why he did not buy them closer to the building site and admits he had not known there was a closer source. When the villages begin fighting over his school, he goes off alone and cries. Later, when he is dealing with the slow pace of the workmen, he tries to rush the process but is reminded by a village leader that he has to understand the people and to fit the project to them rather than trying to remake the entire culture to fit the project.



Chapters 10 through 12

Chapters 10 through 12 Summary and Analysis

In chapter ten, Greg makes arrangements for the supplies necessary for the bridge to be delivered to near the building site. He recalls his elation as Hoerni agrees to pay for the bridge, writing a check for ten thousand dollars and urging that Greg get the school built in time to send Hoerni a picture, and then reminding Greg that Hoerni, somewhat advanced in age, is not getting any younger. He laughingly says that his ex-wives would spend that much in an afternoon. Greg returns to Pakistan and upon his arrival at Korphe, goes into the kitchen area ruled by Sakina, wife of Haji. This is unacceptable for an outsider but Sakina, like her husband, treats Greg as a son and laughs as he makes tea. Greg participates in a hunt for an ibex as he waits for the rains to come to an end so that the work can get underway. Greg hires a crew of masons to build each end of the bridge and uses an army engineer to design it.

One night Greg and Twaha, son of Haji, talk about women. Twaha's own wife died in childbirth and Greg reveals his breakup with Marina, admitting that she was not the right woman for him anyway. Twaha jokingly says that Greg had better find the right one soon because at forty, he will soon be "too old and fat." Greg encounters an American named George McCown who becomes an advocate of his work. He also meets a Wakhi tribesman, Faisal Baig, who will later serve as Greg's bodyguard.

In chapter eleven, Greg is in the United States and is working in a burn unit and attends a meeting of the American Himalayan Foundation where Hoerni tells George McCown that George should give Greg money. Greg says he has enough to finish the school if he is careful and Hoerni says the money George is going to give Greg is for his personal living expenses while he works on the project. During the dinner, Greg meets Tara Bishop. There is an immediate connection and six days later they decide to marry.

In chapter twelve, Greg delays his return to Pakistan a couple of weeks in order to spend more time with Tara and meets a man named Ghulam Parvi who is now working for Changazi. Parvi helps Greg regain possession of his building materials though about a third of the items are simply gone. Greg arrives at the village to discover that little foundation work has been done and that winter is too near to accomplish anything now. He is disappointed but comes to realize that Haji is right in his assessment of the situation—that the children have had no school for centuries and that putting off the building for another year is not a problem.

In the United States, Hoerni and Tara are both amazed at Greg's passion for the project in Pakistan. Hoerni says that Greg should make it his life's work. In fact, Greg has looked at this first school as being a project to get finished so that he can decide what to do with his life. He is looking for a career and that is what Hoerni suggests that Greg make his work in Pakistan—a career. Hoerni points out that the men who pleaded with Greg to build a school in their villages were right in that there is a need for schools there



as well. In 1996, when Greg again returns to Pakistan, he enters as the director of the newly-formed Central Asia Institute with an annual salary of \$21,798. Greg's first actions are to hire Mouzafer and Parvi work with him. Mouzafer looks ill and Greg is concerned but learns that Mouzafer and some other men walked, day and night, to make sure the concrete was in place for Greg's arrival. Greg and Tara move to Bozeman, Montana, near her mother's home, and buy a small house.

The people of Korphe are very excited about the building project though some do not really understand what is happening. One young girl says that she had seen books provided by Greg and knows what a picture of a school looks like, though she has trouble imagining her role in the school. She will later graduate from that school. Greg, now feeling the weight of responsibility for the Central Asia Institute, tries to rush construction but Haji urges that he slow down to match the natural pace of the people. Greg is relegated from foreman to bystander but admits that Haji is right. One day a mercenary arrives and demands that the school be torn down. He accepts a bribe of a dozen of the village's best rams instead. Greg notes that the price, considered in terms of the village's combined wealth, is exorbitant. Haji pays willingly, saying that he will pay whatever is necessary so that the children of the village are not illiterate as he is.

—

Greg realizes that the bridge is a positive thing in that it means that the people of Korphe will be able to reach medical help in a fraction of the time, but he notes that it also means that the outside world will have access to the remote village. Greg admits that he cannot help but worry about the impact of this change in the lives of the Korphe people. He will later note that the women of the village, given the opportunity by way of the bridge for regular visits with friends and family outside the village, are much happier and seem "empowered," a side-effect he had not considered.

Greg has to work at realizing that his role in the lives of the people of Korphe is not to take over their culture. He says that they have a rich history and the fact that there is nothing recorded in writing does not make that any less true. He also notes that what they need is a way to help themselves. Greg comes to realize that the school is a way for them to help themselves. He will continue to wrestle with this over the coming months of the project.

Greg seems to have created a strong bond with Haji's son, Twaha. They talk, for example, about how a man can have sex with a woman in the village. Twaha says that he is permitted to have a sexual relationship with a widow and offers to arrange that for Greg, who declines. When Greg returns again to the village after his marriage to Tara, he tells Twaha first. Twaha says that his father had noted a difference in Greg and seems to already know about the marriage though he has not asked Greg for details.



Chapters 13 through 16

Chapters 13 through 16 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirteen, Greg travels around the country. He has been warned by Haji Ali never to travel alone and always to find a guide he trusts. He is having trouble following that advice and eventually settles for a man he barely knows as a guide to his next destination. The man's name is Badam Gul and he tells Greg that he has a "lucrative career" catching and selling rare butterflies to European museums. Greg and Gul travel into Waziristan and Greg is nervous at the fact that most of the men he encounters are heavily armed and smoking a great deal of hashish. Greg decides that he will simply spend the night in the hospitality of a man he believes to be a village elder and to begin the conversations the following day to see how they feel about a school. He is wakened in the middle of the night by men pointing guns at him. He is blindfolded and taken away. Greg asks for a Koran and on the third day of captivity, receives one. In the middle of the fifth night he is fighting horrible despair. At one point Greg tells his captors that his wife is expecting their first child—a fact that is true and the due date is just a month away. Greg tells those holding him that the child is to be a boy, though it is actually a girl, hoping that they will understand his need to be present for the momentous occasion and let him go. Greg continues to believe that he is probably going to be killed. Then the men begin a huge celebration, tell Greg it is probably best if he does not know too many of the details as to what prompted the celebratory atmosphere, and many of them give him money before he is set free.

In chapter fourteen, Greg is back home where Tara is preparing for the birth of their child with a midwife and Greg present. Greg recalls that he had called Tara soon after being released, and had tried to downplay the danger he had been in. Tara says that she had tried to reconcile herself to the fact that he might be dead after he had not called for several days. Tara gives birth to a healthy girl they named Amira Aliana Mortenson. Soon after he receives a call from Jean Hoerni, now in Seattle, with the news that Hoerni has been diagnosed with leukemia and urging that Greg hurry the completion of the school because Hoerni wants a photo of the completed project. Back in Pakistan, Haji Ali helps pave the way with other villages to find out what villages are willing to commit to the work to build a school. On the day the Korphe school is completed, Haji Ali presents Greg with a ledger accounting for every cent spent. Greg returns to the states with the photo of the completed school and goes to visit Hoerni in Hailey, Idaho. When Hoerni becomes increasingly ill, Greg leaves his family at home and serves as Hoerni's nurse. He says that Hoerni does not go peacefully, but is angry about dying, though he finds peace in hearing the quiet singing of the children of Korphe. He leaves a million dollars to fund the continuation of the Central Asia Institute.

In chapter fifteen, a new board of directors is created to oversee the CAI's work and projects. Jennifer Wilson, Hoerni's widow, is on the board as is Jennifer's cousin, Julia Bergman. Bergman has seen Greg's school though, happening upon it by accident. She is a librarian and quickly lends her talents to the task of creating a library for Korphe. In



Pakistan, Greg hires Parvi to work on local aspects of the projects and a man named Suleman as a problem solver. Upon arrival back in Pakistan, Greg learns that there are a series of petitions for schools and other projects. Greg sets out to build three schools in a single season. There is a problem with religious leaders but Greg meets with a higher religious leader who accepts Greg's work, meaning the lower leaders will also have to accept. The three schools are built quickly and in addition a government school is added. Greg hires additional teachers for the government school to reduce the teacher-student ratio. In Korphe, he oversees the building of the Korphe Women's Vocational Center where the women can meet to sew in order to earn money. The center is so successful that the men begin looking for a way to earn extra money as well. Tara's brother, Brent, helps establish a training program so that young men can learn to assist the climbing teams so prevalent in the area. At one point, Tara goes to Pakistan with Greg and they take their daughter, almost one, along. Tara returns to the United States ahead of Greg and when he returns, he is immediately making plans for the coming year in Pakistan.

In chapter sixteen, a religious leader has demanded that Greg stop his work but a higher religious leader overrides that order, noting that Greg has "noble intentions." Greg finds that he has to eat in the kitchen in order to avoid talking to the many people who want to talk with him. There is then a new project to bring fresh drinking water to the people of some of the remote rural areas. This alone dramatically decreases the number of infant deaths.

—

Greg's difficulties are just now coming fully to light. He is incredibly busy with the work he does in Pakistan and spends months out of every year there. The results are fantastic in that he has overseen the building of several schools, is personally ensuring that several teachers are paid, is personally going through requests and seeing those who want to ask for his help. However, the result is that he is getting little sleep, is anxious all the time, stops exercising and allows himself to gain weight, and has little quality time to spend with Tara and their daughter. Another aspect of this is that the board sees Greg falling apart and urge him to take on some help, a step he is loathe to take. As he continues to try to hold onto control of all this himself, his personal and professional lives begin falling apart. Greg has to make some changes in order to make this work long-term, but cannot bring himself to do so. For example, he continues to work alone though he is now overloaded with correspondence. Greg sees only that he cannot justify spending any money to hire someone to handle the correspondence when that money would pay for a great deal of material in Pakistan.

The stories of several people who have very different lives because of education are related in the book. These people often return to their home villages in order to repay the changes wrought by the education. Greg decides that the chief role of the CAI should be to create life-changing situations and that education is among those. He wants to focus on education up to fifth grade and to specifically focus on educating girls.



Chapters 17 through 23

Chapters 17 through 23 Summary and Analysis

In chapter seventeen, Greg hears of growing unrest in Pakistan and spends a great deal of time pacing in his office, worrying in between sporadic pieces of incoming information. He learns of huge numbers of refugees pouring out of Afghanistan and is told they need "everything" with fresh water topping the list. A young girl named Fatima Batool, who lived for awhile in a cave to evade bombs dropped from above without warning, is among those educated in a CAI school. Five years after the fact, she says that some people believe "Americans are bad, but we love Americans." Fatima says that Americans were the only people who provided for her people in this time of great need.

In chapter eighteen, Greg continues to work at raising money when he is in the United States, fearing the ever-lowering bank balance for the CAI. At one event he sets up two hundred chairs, has only six casual listeners show up for his presentation, and relates information about his failed attempt to climb K2 followed by the story of his work in Pakistan. He says that he can build a school for less than twenty thousand dollars and is surprised to find a check for twenty thousand dollars among the donations at the end of his speech. Other efforts are not so successful and he spends a great deal of time on wild goose chases with nothing to show at the end of the wasted time. Greg is at home when Tara gives birth to their second child, a son named Khyber Bishop Mortenson.

In chapter nineteen, Greg is traveling in Pakistan with a climber and supporter named George McCown. The nation is in a state of unrest though Greg continues to work. In Zuudkhan, there is a small hydro generator that provides electric power for a few homes each evening. In this village there is also a new dispensary to provide basic medical care—a service that had not been available in the past. On September 11, 2001, Greg is hard at work. That night he is awakened by his bodyguard, Faisal Baig, who is crying as he tells Greg that "A village called New York has been bombed." Greg and McCown call home and discover the details from their wives. McCown immediately tries to make travel plans home but it is some days before that can happen. At one point, a leader making a speech at a school asks McCown and Greg for forgiveness for the acts of his countrymen. The man also calls on everyone to help provide protection for Greg and McCown while they remain in the country. At Korphe, Greg learns from Twaha that Haji Ali has died. His wife had died prior to Greg's previous visit.

In chapter twenty, the man named Suleman, hired to solve all kinds of problems for the CAI, invites Greg to the "circus," which is his description of the gathering of news reporters. Greg notes that most do not want the real story of what is going on in the country, only the sensational details—true or not. Greg is cited in some of the articles and he pleads for people to realize the heart of the trouble is not the religious teachings of the country but the ignorance, using this to plead for help creating educational opportunities for the country's children. This prompts hate mail once Greg is back home and he begins to fear for his family's safety.



In chapter twenty-one, Greg meets Mary Bono, widow of Sonny Bono and U.S. Representative. He is invited to Washington, D.C. to share his first-hand observations. Greg is offered military financing for schools, more than a million dollars worth, but fears that the people will learn the source of the money and that he will lose his credibility with the people of Pakistan.

In chapter twenty-two, Greg is interviewed by a writer for the publication, "Parade," which generates a huge amount of publicity. He receives a great deal of hate mail as well as some checks and support. At the height of the publicity, he goes to the local post office to find that he has several mail bags filled with letters. In Pakistan, Greg is staying at Korphe in a house that has been set aside for his use whenever he is there. The place is something of an informal town hall and when Greg is in residence, there are people constantly coming and going. Though the meetings are not formal, this is the time when Greg hears concerns, learns how things are going and finds out what new steps he needs to take to help the village prosper. During one of these meetings, Jahan arrives. She is Twaha's daughter and was among the first to be educated at the Korphe school. She interrupts the meeting, telling Greg that he had promised to help her attend medical school and that it is time for him to keep that promise. Greg tells her that he will pass the request on to the board, and that he is certain that the request will be approved. Jahan is adamant, saying that classes begin in a week and that she needs the money immediately. Greg laughingly agrees and pulls the money—about four hundred dollars—out, giving it to her father to pay her tuition.

In Parvi's home village, Greg says that he has been toying with the idea of figuring out how to help the students who want to further their education. He tells Parvi to begin work on creating a hostel in Skardu. The hostel will serve as a place for young people to stay while working toward furthering their educations. Greg says that he also wants Parvi to check into the cost of paying tuition for Parvi's daughter. The girl shows great promise, is a straight-A student, and Parvi is overcome with emotion that his daughter would be singled out for the privilege.

In chapter twenty-three, Greg begins to expand his horizons. He travels to a place known as Kirghiz. Years earlier, horsemen from Kirghiz had traveled a great distance to ask Greg for help. He told them that he would do what he could, but the half-hearted promise to help had never been fulfilled. Now Greg tells a man named Sadhar Khan about those horsemen, about his work of the past years and of his harrowing trip to reach the area. Khan realizes who Greg is and apologizes for not having brought the village elders together to welcome him. Greg realizes that his help will be welcomed and knows that he has a great deal of work to do.

Jahan's action in demanding that Greg help her now may seem presumptuous to some but Greg says this is exactly the kind of reaction he hopes to find from the young women educated at the CAI schools. It is not that he wants to create a generation without respect, but that he wants the women to stand up for themselves, and to be willing to demand what they want rather than meekly taking a backseat to what the men

dictate. Jahan begins her education and then comes to realize that she wants even more. She tells Greg that she wants to be an executive charged with overseeing a hospital, that she wants to be known for her work, and that she wants to be "Superlady." Greg cites the education as a foundation for this kind of thinking and for the dreams of the generation coming out of the CAI schools.



Characters

Greg Mortenson

The man who sees the need for a school building for children of Pakistan and who decides to do something about it. He sets out to raise enough money to build the structure but takes it a step farther. Rather than just sending the money to build the structure, he travels back the country himself, personally taking on the task of gathering the materials and overseeing the construction. Greg is a self-proclaimed nonbeliever in Christianity, despite the fact that his parents were missionaries and he was raised in that environment. He is, however, open to ideas about religion and soon sets out to learn the ways of Islam. Greg is a climber from early in the story and climbing is the one thing that holds his attention and gives him direction prior to the project of building the school. As he becomes more committed to the school, he goes so far as to sell his climbing gear in order to support himself during the time it takes for construction. Greg's personality is seen clearly as he first encounters the people of the Korphe. When he realizes that he is lost, he does not simply turn around and leave, but spends time with the people. His time with them is devoted to learning their ways and it is when he asks to see the school that he comes to be devoted to the building of the school.

Haji Ali

The leader of Korphe, the village in Pakistan where Greg plans to build the first school. Haji is a wise man and soon takes Greg in as he would a son, welcoming him on each of his arrivals as he would a son. Haji is very wise in the ways of people and realizes that Greg has to find a way to fit in among the people rather than trying to make the people fit into his plans for building a school. It is Haji who tells Greg that he has to slow down and take time to drink "three cups of tea." The message is that Greg was not accepted into the village because he had taken time to have a single cup of tea with them and that he was not going to accomplish a school without investing that same kind of time with the people. Greg takes Haji's message to heart and admits that he is relegated from crew foreman to spectator because of it. Haji's commitment to the school is every bit as real as Greg's. While Greg has sacrificed and worked to raise the money to build the school, Haji is willing to do the same. When a man comes to the village demanding a bribe in order to allow the school to be completed, Haji pays, though the price is exorbitant and makes a tremendous dent in the wealth of the village overall. He later tells Greg that he is illiterate and that he will pay any price to ensure that the children of the village—boys and girls—will not be.

Christa Mortenson

Greg's younger sister, Christa has a defect from early childhood, possibly a reaction to a vaccination for small pox. Christa spends a great deal of time with Greg prior to her



death, which occurs at an early age. It is an effort to honor Christa's memory that first leads Greg to Pakistan. She continues to influence him and Greg often cites his efforts to honor Christa's memory for the positive things he does in his life.

Mohammed Ali Changazi

A man who makes his living in Pakistan by arranging trips for tourists and climbers, Changazi is shifty and self-serving. When Greg returns to the country after a trip to the United States, he discovers that Changazi has begun building a hotel and that he has used or sold about a third of Greg's building supplies.

Marina Villard

The doctor who begins seeing Greg as he is trying to raise money to return to Pakistan to build the first school at the Korphe village. Marina is weary of Greg's passion prior to his return to do the construction. While he is away, she begins seeing someone else and tells Greg this upon his return, citing his lack of personal communication while he is away as the reason for her decision.

Tara Bishop

The woman who meets Greg during a meeting of the American Himalayan Foundation and who makes an immediate connection with him. They marry six days after meeting and Tara is amazed by Greg's passion regarding the work in Pakistan.

Jean Hoerni

The man who agrees to pay for the first school in Korphe, he is founder of several highly successful companies and is dedicated to Greg's projects. Hoerni wants desperately to live long enough to see a picture of the completed school and does so, though just barely. It is Hoerni's donation of a million dollars that sets up the Central Asia Institute and makes it possible for Greg to build dozens of other schools, vocational buildings and water supplies.

Faisal Baig

The man who serves as bodyguard to Greg whenever he is in Pakistan. Greg notes that Baig takes the job seriously and takes over Greg's security from the moment he touches down in Pakistan until the moment he leaves. Upon learning of the bombing of New York and that this means America is now drawn into the situation, Baig fears for Greg's life once he is outside Pakistan where Baig is not able to provide protection.



Jahan

The daughter of Twaha and granddaughter of Haji Ali, she is among the first students educated in the school at Korphe. Jahan tells Greg that he must fulfill a promise to help her continue her education, specializing in health care so that she can return to help the people of her village. She also tells him that she wants to do great things with her life and Greg says this attitude is a byproduct of the CAI school.

Jerene Mortenson

Mother of Greg, Jerene returns to school and becomes a public school principal after Greg's father dies. Jerene invites Greg to speak at the school, defining the way he is seeking to help the children of Pakistan, and Greg's presentation sparks interest among the children, resulting in their raising some eight hundred dollars as his first donation toward the first school.



Objects/Places

Korphe

The village Greg wanders into after being lost upon his descent from the mountain. This is where Greg sees the need for a school building and where he pledges to construct a building for that purpose.

Africa

Where Greg spends most of his childhood.

Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center

The teaching hospital Greg's parents help establish.

Ramsey High School

Where Greg attends school after returning to the United States.

Fort Leonardwood, Missouri

Where Greg goes to serve out his basic training for the military.

River Falls, Wisconsin

Where Greg's mother Jerene is a principal and where students raise some eight hundred dollars toward Greg's cause.

Rawalpindi

Where Greg stays while buying the materials for the school.

Central Asia Institute

The foundation formed by Greg for constructing schools in Pakistan.



Bozeman, Montana

Where Greg moves after marrying Tara and where he eventually establishes the headquarters of the CAI in his basement.

Hailey, Idaho

Where Jean Hoerni is in the hospital when Greg brings him a photo of the completed school at Korphe.



Themes

The Desire to Help

Greg Mortenson is traveling with a group of climbers when one of them becomes ill from the altitude and has to be rushed down for medical attention. Greg and another man volunteer to make the trek though it means that they give up their own shot at reaching the summit. Greg is disappointed at having not reached the summit though he seems unable to have turned his back on a person in need of his help. This same attitude is seen when Greg asks to see the school at Korphe. After spending a few days with the people of this village, Greg is genuinely interested in their lives. It is not merely curiosity, though this is certainly an important part of Greg's makeup. When Greg sees that the children desperately want to learn and are working in the outdoors, using a stick to write multiplication tables in the dirt, and are working, despite it not being the day they have a teacher to help them, Greg wants to help. He sees his role as bringing a school building so that the children will not have to face down the elements in order to learn. This same attitude is seen later when Greg learns of refugees pouring into a nearby area. He asks a man there what is needed and immediately sets out to try to help answer the need. From a place for women to meet and sew to a hydro generator plant, Greg's desire to help is a driving force of his personality.

Respect of Culture

Greg finds himself fitting in with the people of Pakistan from his first hours in the care of the guide named Mouzafar. Mouzafar makes Greg a hot beverage called "butter tea." Greg notes that the tea contains a rancid-smelling yak butter and that Mouzafar stirs it with his fingers which are not clean. However, Greg does not object and takes the offering in the spirit in which it was given. The attitude is important throughout Greg's career building schools in Pakistan and gains his approval from many village elders as he struggles to respect the culture. This is seen in the Korphe village where Greg is treated as an adopted son by the village elder, Haji Ali. Haji's son, Twaha, says that Greg never questions the food served to him and is always gracious when he accepts whatever is expected of him. This respect is what makes it possible for Greg to give up on his original plan to have the materials for Korphe's first school carted in when the village elders declare that they must have a bridge before they have a school.

This effort to respect the culture is seen early in Greg's career when he tries to learn about the prayer rituals so important to the people of the country. Greg admits during those early lessons of the religious culture of the country that he does not believe but that he is surrounded by men who do, and that the belief is a powerful thing.



Providing a Means of Self-Help

While Greg could easily have set out to create a charitable foundation, his goal was never to simply give something to the people of Pakistan. Greg seems to have learned this lesson from his parents who did mission work of a similar sort in Africa. Greg recalls that his father had told the people that a teaching hospital built in Africa belonged not to the people who had funded its construction but to the people of Africa. Like his parents, Greg seems to realize that pride in ownership is what will make the schools and other structures important to the people of Pakistan. Greg's desire to provide this means for self-help is seen by the emerging mission of the CAI—to provide education for children up to the fifth grade, to focus on educating girls, and to provide things other than schools. The reasons for these goals are to create a mechanism for the self-help Greg sees as necessary for the survival of these people. He notes that girls generally remain in their own villages or nearby and that if they are armed with the knowledge they obtain in the first five grades of school they are more likely to become productive, informed citizens who are a benefit to their villages. Greg also makes it a point to create vocational centers. In Korphe, the center is used by the women who meet to sew in order to earn some extra money for their families.

Style

Perspective

The story is written in third person, almost exclusively from the perspective of Greg Mortenson. The limited perspective means that the reader is given only the information that Greg knows. Interestingly, the perspective is altered by presenting the information sometimes out of order. As an example, Greg talks to the leaders of Korphe and learns that he has jumped the gun by buying the supplies for the school without figuring out how to get the materials to Korphe. When the Korphe leaders say that they want to have a bridge built before they start work on a school, Greg is initially upset but then realizes that they are right and returns home. The details of his conversation with Korphe leaders, his reaction to their decision and his own decision to agree with their terms are all related as Greg's memories after he returns home to California. The perspective and the means of relating information is sometimes distracting in that it is not presented in chronological order. Another interesting aspect of the perspective is that the author seems to write almost as if the story is a newspaper or magazine article. This presentation of information makes the perspective somewhat more limited in that all aspects of Greg's life are not presented. For example, Greg is in Pakistan soon after beginning a relationship with Marina. He does not say anything about his communication with Marina until his arrival back in the United States. Then he admits that he had not called, other than a single call that was cut off early, and Marina notes that he had not sent letters other than postcards that focused entirely on his work. Greg's shortcomings are outlined by those working with the board, meaning the author holds a realistic view of Greg and his abilities as he works on the various projects.

Tone

The story is written in a straight-forward style that most readers will find easy to follow and to comprehend. Any reader with an average vocabulary will likely find few words that are unfamiliar. Those are generally explained through the context of the story. The tone of the story is generally one of hope though there are points of despair along the way. These are not prevalent and the ideals, goals and missions of Greg and those who become associated with him are obviously aimed at inspiring. There are foreign words and phrases scattered throughout the book though these are generally explained by the use of the English words and phrases immediately after the foreign words. The main plot of the story is fairly easy to follow: a young man who is in Pakistan waging an attempt to climb a mountain known as K2 becomes enamored with the people and wants to find a way to help them, settling into a life of working to build schools for the people of Pakistani villages. Along the way the young man learns many lessons about life, and these are passed on to the reader. This makes the book something of a coming-of-age story though the larger themes are humanitarian in nature.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-three chapters. These are titled "Failure," "The Wrong Side of the River," "Progress and Perfection," "Self-Storage," "580 Letters, One Check," "Rawalpindi's Rooftop at Dusk," "Hard Way Home," "Beaten by the Braldu," "The People Have Spoken," "Building Bridges," "Six Days," "Haji Ali's Lesson," "A Smile Should be More than a Memory," "Equilibrium," "Mortenson in Motion," "Red Velvet Box," "Cherry Trees in the Sand," "Shrouded Figure," "A Village Called New York," "Tea with the Taliban," "Rumsfeld's Shoes," "The Enemy is Ignorance" and "Stones into Schools." The chapters range in length up to twenty pages with about twelve or thirteen pages being the average. The chapter names provide some insight into the contents of that particular chapter. For example, the chapter titled "580 Letters, One Check" outlines Greg Mortenson's efforts to raise money to build a school in the small rural village of Korphe. He mails out a total of 580 letters and receives a single check in response. That check is not nearly enough to make the project a reality but Greg later receives a single large donation to fund the construction of the school. The book also includes two maps of the areas referred to in the book, specifically the region around Pakistan.



Quotes

"After brewing green tea in a blackened tin pot, he added salt, baking soda, and goat's milk, before tenderly shaving a sliver of mar, the aged rancid yak butter that Balti prize above all other delicacies, and stirred it into the brew with a not especially clean finger." (Chapter 2, p. 22)

"Children had taken the first step toward building the school,' Mortenson says. 'And they did it with something that's basically worthless in our society—pennies. But overseas, pennies can move mountains.'" (Chapter 6, p. 52)

"He hadn't cried since Christa's death. But there, alone in a windblown goat pasture, he buried his face in his hands and swabbed furiously at tears that wouldn't stop." (Chapter 8, p. 93)

"Could it be that even a partially employed American who lived out of a storage locker could seem like little more than a flashing neon dollar sign to people in the poorest region of one of the world's poorest countries?" (Chapter 8, p. 95)

"Well, you're thirty-one and you've kissed a lot of toads. If you think he's your prince, then I'm sure he is." Tara's mother upon news of Tara's marriage, (Chapter 11, p. 135)

"You have to understand, in these villages, a ram is like a firstborn child, prize cow, and family pet all rolled into one,' Mortenson explains." (Chapter 12, p. 152)

"Jean Hoerni had the foresight to lead us into the twenty-first century with cutting-edge technology,' Mortenson told the assembled mourners. 'but he also had the rare vision to look behind and reach out to people living as they have for centuries.'" (Chapter 14, p. 183)

"But I looked into his heart that day at the petrol pump and saw him for what he is—an infidel, but a noble man nonetheless, who dedicates his life to the education of children." (Chapter 15, p. 191)

"They also focused on repairing the environmental damage done at the Baltoro each climbing season, constructing stone latrines at campsites along the glacier, which they hoped would eliminate the fields of frozen turds expeditions left in their wake." (Chapter 15, p. 196)

"When he wasn't bouncing down dirt roads in Pakistan or hauling his bags to slide shows in his own country, Mortenson jealously guarded his time with his family in Bozeman and cloaked himself in the silence of his basement." (Chapter 18, p. 229)

"We know about Dr. Greg build school in Pakistan so you can come build for us? We give land, stone, men, everything. Come now and stay with us for the winter so we can have good discuss and make a school?" (The horsemen of Kirghiz, Chapter 19, p. 251)

"I expected something like this from an ignorant village mullah, but to get those kinds of letters from my fellow Americans made me wonder whether I should just give up." (Chapter 20, p. 275)

Topics for Discussion

Describe how Greg Mortenson comes to be in Pakistan for that first visit. How does he come to visit the Korphe village? What is his reaction to the welcome he receives there?

What does Greg do upon his return to America from that first trip to Pakistan? What is the response? Where does he finally get the money for that first school in Korphe?

Describe the steps Greg goes through to make the school of Korphe a reality. What are the roadblocks he encounters? What are the sacrifices he makes personally in order to construct the school? What is the reaction of the people of the village to the work?

List three projects that Greg helps complete. What are the results of each? What does Greg fear might be a negative point of building the bridge at Korphe? Are his fears founded?

What is the CAI? How is it created? How is it initially funded? What are the limitations of the organization? What are the goals and missions?

Who is Jahan? Describe her life. What is Greg's theory about providing education to the youngsters of Pakistan? What happens in the life of Jahan that makes it seem that Greg's ideas are correct?

Who is Tara Bishop? Marina Villard? Christa Mortenson? What is the relationship of each to Greg? How do the relationships develop? What impact does each woman have on Greg's work?