

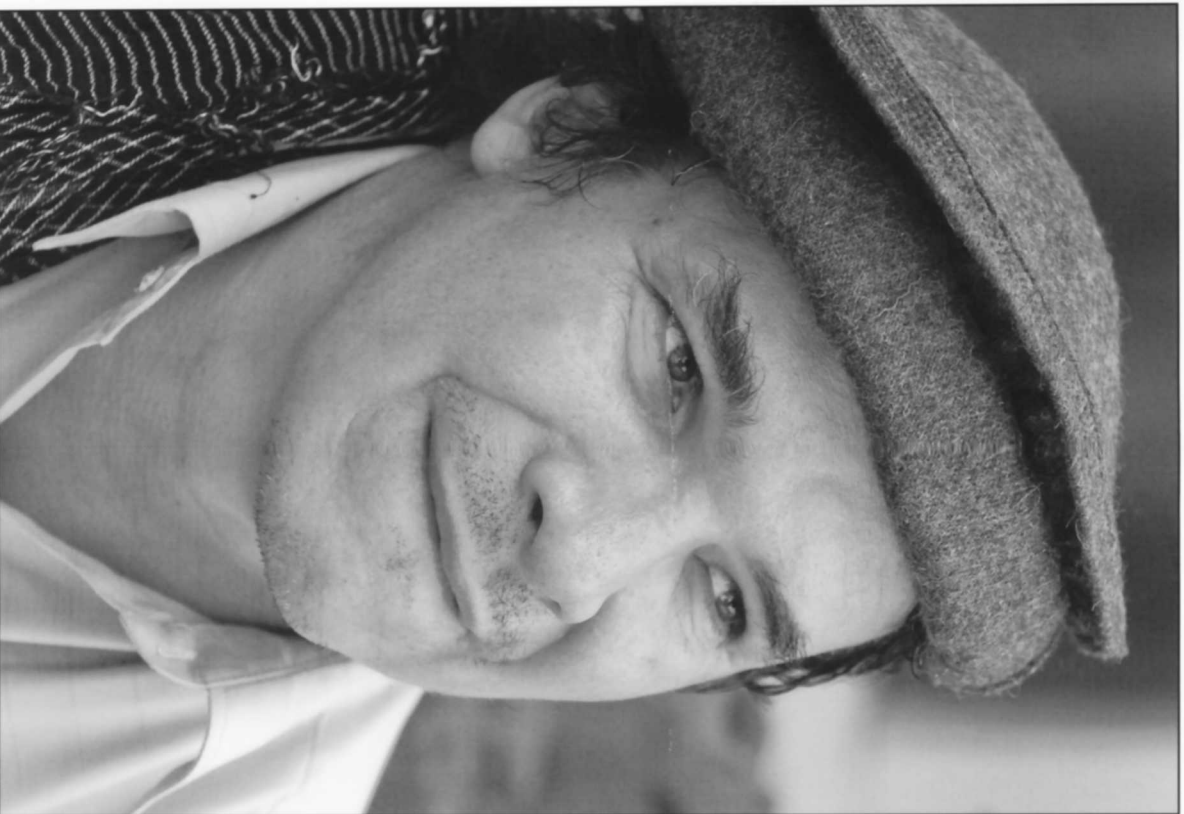








Journey of Hope



Greg Mortenson, founder and executive director of Central Asia Institute, began his work building schools in a remote village in northern Pakistan in 1993. Since then, his mission to educate the rural poor in the mountainous regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan has matured and expanded quickly, giving hope and opportunity to some of the poorest of the world's poor.

Setting CAI apart from other organizations is its focus on educating girls. CAI adheres to the belief that educating girls to at least the fifth-grade level will improve the standard of living for the entire village. These future mothers, who tend to stay in their villages, will be able to understand the importance of basic hygiene and sanitation, reducing the rate of infant mortality, and will be better able to make informed decisions for themselves, their families and their communities. With CAI's help, girls are given the opportunity to move from the bottom rung of the social ladder, to become village and civic participants.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of CAI's operating philosophy that contributes to its success. Establishing trust and friendship comes before the first shovelful of earth is moved. Sometimes it takes years for all the competing voices in a village to agree to build a school that includes girls, especially in religiously conservative areas. CAI works closely with each community's school committee to ensure the schools meet the villagers' needs as well as CAI's mission.

In the villages where CAI built its first schools, promising graduates are being trained as teachers and health care providers. These young women will return to their communities with valuable skills and knowledge that will be passed along to the community and to the next generation of students. Taking this long-term approach to education takes patience and constant support, but ultimately empowers the community.

In recent years CAI has also focused on new construction in rural Afghanistan, building and supporting 13 schools in the remote Wakhan Corridor where literacy is in the single digits, and two schools in the volatile Kunar Province near the Pakistan border. The organization has also constructed and continues to support projects in and around Kabul.