

3 Cups of Tea Book Review

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In the co-authored book, *3 Cups of Tea*, Greg Morentson himself and an American journalist, David Relin, recount the inspiring story of Greg Morentson and his humanitarian efforts in Central Asia. What started out as a suspenseful description of a man's quest to summit K2 for his late sister, unravels into a story of self-growth and sustainable development. Morentson's journey demonstrates that sustainable development is a tangibly possible process, which above all else requires passion, cultural understanding, and patience.

Though originally born in America, Morentson spent most of his adolescence living in Tanzania while his parents were working as missionaries. Morentson recollects his first connection to humanitarianism as being when his father successfully opened the Kilimanjaro Christian medical center. Though as Morentson grew older he found his true calling to be climbing. Morentson set his "summit goal" on the treacherous K2 Mountain (second only to Mt. Everest). However, Morentson's attempt to reach the summit results in him nearly dying after being split from his group. He survives by fatefully stumbling upon a Pakistani mountain village, Korphe. The people of this village take him in and nurse him back to health. After some time spent there he grows to love the community, helps them in anyway that he can, and wants to learn about their culture as much as he can. The village leader eventually trusts him enough to show him to their village's "school" which is really just a piece of clear dirt ground. After seeing how horrible the education opportunities were for the village youth, Morentson promises that he will build them a school "not yet realizing that with those words the path of his life just detoured down another trail" (33).

From that moment on Morentson becomes increasingly engrossed in making his promise become a reality. He unsuccessfully writes thousands of people with hopes of securing some financial backing until one wealthy ex-climber agrees to give him the necessary funds to build one school. Ultimately, after completing the school in Korphe, Morentson starts the Central Asia Institute whose mission is to build schools for developing communities in the Himalayan region of Central Asia. His humanitarian efforts snowball from there resulting in him building 40+ schools, community centers, giving scholarships for girls to achieve higher education, and building clean water systems in communities all around the region. Throughout his experience Morentson finds that "if you really want to change a culture, to empower women, improve basic hygiene and health care and fight high rates of infant mortality, the answer is to educate girls [because] the girls stay home and pass on what they've learned" (209).

When he is not building schools in Central Asia, he spends his time back in America traveling around, giving talks about what he is doing and the positive impact it is having. His work is especially highlighted after the 9-11 attacks. He subsequently meets with high-ranking governmental officials and explains his idea that building schools is the best anti-terrorism measure. Morentson first-handedly observes that traditional war strategies have adverse affects on America's efforts to limit terrorist activity since it gives local civilians a bad image of what America is doing to their country. Morentson proposes education as being the most effective way to combat extremism since it gives young boys and girls awareness for other professional avenues, in turn, making them less susceptible to joining the Taliban.

Overall, his efforts in the region are hugely successful. Morentson perfectly demonstrates that sustainable development is really possible and even exemplifies a model for how one could

approach it. Morentson develops throughout his journey; he learns about the culture, how to pray respectfully in Islam, how to speak the language, and how to drink many cups of tea. He completely embraces the culture and goes in with an open mind. He never does anything without clear permission from a local community member. By embracing the Muslim culture and way of life, the communities he helps overwhelmingly embrace and grow to love him as well. This book emphasized to me how many positive things come from growing and sustaining meaningful relationships and how crucial this aspect is when embarking on any developmental journey.