

# Sharing vision for schools

## Greg Mortenson to visit Durango for discussion

**By Patricia Miller**

Arts & Entertainment Editor

From a solitary, sometimes bewildered and endangered, figure trudging through the hills of Pakistan, Greg Mortenson has evolved into someone so intriguing that tickets to hear him Thursday night in Whalen Gymnasium are nearly impossible to come by.

The basic appeal Mortenson brings is the thrill of what one person can do – in his case building schools throughout the most remote hills of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It's the force that took his book *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time* to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. And he built the school with no experience. Mortenson, after an unsuccessful attempt to climb K-2, stumbled into a remote Pakistani village and was so touched by the plight of the children that he vowed to build them a school. He had no money. Though he is a trained nurse and used his skills to start his amazing venture, he was sleeping in his car and in student hovels to finance his climbing. He had no idea how to construct a building, get the materials for it, haggle or even get from place to place.

The book is credited to Mortenson and David Oliver Reelin, who accompanied Mortenson to Pakistan three times in the two years he spent writing it. Reelin writes of Mortenson in the third person in extraordinary detail, right down to the color of the dishes from which he ate.

The 340 pages are chock full of intriguing happenings and examples of good writing. The particulars are enchanting.

Mortenson was Mister Huzpah, diving into the Indian sub-continent for his evolving mission with no apparent thought of doing anything else. Once he was kidnapped and held for eight days. Mysterious events from far away made his kid-nappers decide to release him with a party instead of killing

# Tea: Tales describe hurdles overcome to build needed schools

*Continued from 1B*

him. He also held a meeting with Taliban fighters, who wanted him to build schools in their villages, and two fatwas were issued against him. He also saved a mother's life by re-moving the disintegrating placenta that hadn't emerged with her baby.

Another adventure happened when his car's radiator blew, stranding him in an Afghan tunnel on a curve where on-coming trucks couldn't see him and his companions. They found an access tunnel, but that led to an even more dangerous mined hillside. Finally, they hitched a ride out without being flattened or blown apart.

That's great Indiana Jones stuff, but far from the important part.

It's Mortenson's vision to achieve universal literacy within the next decade. He is especially concerned with the education of girls. He postulates that boys will simply take their education and move to the city while girls are more likely to use theirs for the benefit of their families and their villages.

One satisfying incident tells of a girl in a hill village who completed her secondary education in one of the schools Mortenson inspired. She burst into an all-male meeting of the village elders to ask for \$400 for her medical education. Mortenson said he would discuss it with her father, but she was having none of it. She emerged with Mortenson's rupees for her tuition right in her hand.

The book is a page-turner, a pleasurable read as well as an inspiring one. It has inspired Durango school children to collect money for Mortenson's work and who knows what else it may start.

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