

Sunday, April 17, 2001

Greg Mortenson's response to "60 Minutes" questions

GM: Following is the second set of questions asked by producers of the program, "60 Minutes." The first list of 16 questions was sent to the Central Asia Institute Board of Directors. The second list of three questions was sent to me on April 14, 2011. Below are the questions exactly as they were asked of me, and the answers are what I provided to "60 Minutes."

1) Did you really stumble into Korphe after failing to summit K2? The two porters who accompanied you on your journey down from K2 have told us you did not. We have three other sources that support the porter's accounts. The evidence suggests that you did not step foot in Korphe until a year later.

GM: Yes. In September 1993, in Korphe village, Braldu Valley, Baltistan, Pakistan, I first met Haji Ali, a long-time mentor and dear friend. My second visit to Korphe was in 1994. I made two visits to Korphe in 1995, the year we built the bridge over the Braldu River. And I again made two visits to Korphe in 1996, the year we built the Korphe School. The elements of the Korphe story occurred over a three-year time period and in the retelling some off the more complex and lengthy episodes were necessarily simplified or combined.

I was reminded while double-checking this information that the Balti people have a completely different notion about time. Even the Balti language -- an archaic dialect of Tibetan -- has only a vague concept of tenses and time. For example, "now" can mean immediately or sometime over the course of a whole long season. The concept of past and future is rarely of concern. Often tenses are left out of discussion, although everyone knows what is implied. And if a person is a day or week late or early it doesn't matter. The Balti consider the western notion of time quite amusing.

2) Were you kidnapped for eight days by the Taliban in Waziristan in 1996? Three of the men in the photo you published in Stones into Schools deny that they kidnapped you and say they are not Taliban. We have two other sources of information that support their account.

GM: Yes, I was detained for eight days in Waziristan in 1996. It was against my will, and my passport and money were taken from me. I was not mistreated or harmed, but I was also not allowed to leave. A blanket was put over my head any time I was moved by vehicle. "Talib" means student in Arabic, and yes there were Taliban in the region. Waziristan is an area where tribal factions and clan ties run deep. Some people are Taliban, some are not, and affiliations change overnight often on a whim. The Pathan people of Waziristan are proud people who I greatly admire. In speaking to American audiences, I often talk about my admiration for their concepts of *Pashtunwali*, their unwritten code of honor and conduct, and *Nenawastay*, hospitality.

3) When we checked on some of the schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan that are listed on CAI's website, and that also appeared on a list CAI filed with the IRS last year as part of its tax return, we discovered that a number of the schools were built by somebody else, did not exist at all, were not currently functioning as schools, or had not received any support from CAI in years. Can you comment of explain why this was the case?

GM: We are interested to know the specifics of your check, your sources, who guided your person on the ground on this tour and when. We have a former disgruntled manager in Pakistan, who was involved in some discrepancies, and we believe he may have been the source of your information, and we would want to contest his credibility as a source. CAI empowers local communities to: build schools from the ground up, expand existing government schools, provide teacher training, school supplies, health care, libraries, women's vocational centers, and a variety of educational opportunities depending on the needs of the communities. In addition, there have been cases where schools built by organizations, including the World Bank, had financial problems and we were asked to help support those schools to keep them running.

Additional notes:

GM: This year alone (2011), just in Afghanistan, CAI plans and already started work to establish and build 63 to 68 more, mostly girls' schools, based on the significant donations received in 2009-2010.

After I rehab from a surgical heart procedure this week, I plan to visit Pakistan and Afghanistan (this summer) to drink more tea and continue my life's work to provide educational opportunities, especially for girls. Our mission will effect generations.

And as I have shared with our supporters many times: When it is darkest you can see the stars.