

## LAW REVIEW

Published in the Sierra Sun  
October 23, 2009

By: Jim Porter

### **GREG MORTENSON'S WELL-DESERVED STANDING OVATION**

---

Greg Mortenson, whose book "Three Cups of Tea," which has been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 100 weeks, spoke Sunday to two overflow crowds at the Hyatt Regency in Incline Village. If you missed his remarks, too bad. Go out and buy the book or C.D. You won't be alone; it's required reading for our Special Forces and U.S. troops heading overseas.

#### Praise for Our Military

The biggest surprise of the evening, for me at least, was Mortenson's high praise for General Stanley McChrystal, Admiral Mike Mullen, General David H. Petraeus, and our top military leaders in Afghanistan. He glowingly described General McChrystal's 66-page report on Afghanistan as as much of a sociology and anthropology college thesis as a military report.

#### Education and Literacy

According to Mortenson, our military brass understands that any success in Afghanistan must be based on local community initiatives and buy-in. Mortenson states that rather than showing arrogance, we must educate and work with local communities and, in particular, educate Afghan girls. "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual; if you educate a girl, you educate a community."

Might is not the answer, education and literacy is. Above all, do not kill civilians. Mortenson noted that throughout 2,000 years of history, no invading army has ever remained in Afghanistan.

### Standing Ovations

Mortenson spoke and answered questions for almost two hours, receiving two standing ovations. The appreciative crowd was good for at least another hour.

His speaking style is not polished, just as any reader of “Three Cups of Tea” would expect—he is “a normal guy,” as he described himself, unassuming and self effacing. (But what normal guy marries eight days after meeting his future wife?)

The book title comes from the symbolic gesture to do business in Pakistan and Afghanistan: it takes three cups of tea—the first cup you are a stranger, the second cup you are a friend, and the third cup you become family.

Over many years Mortenson developed a warm and respectful rapport with village elders and the common villagers, many of whom have never left their homes. Mortenson has established more than 130 “community center” schools in rural areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, emphasizing education of young girls who historically receive little schooling, “Only the educated are free.” The success of his schools is living proof; Afghanistan has the highest rate of increase in education in any country over the past 10 years.

Mortenson has a new book coming out before the end of the year titled “Stones into Schools,” which as best I could tell, is an extension of “Three Cups of Tea”—with a crossover into politics with military nuances. But that’s just a guess. We’ll have to read it.

### Squaw Valley Institute

Congrats to the Squaw Valley Institute—they’ve hit their stride. John and Barbara Wilcox, the inspiration and drive behind the Institute, deserve their own standing ovation. Sunday night we got a glimpse of the skills of executive director Erin Casey, and Pete Bansen, who is a close second to Jim Simon with a microphone.

If you liked Greg Mortenson, you’ll love upcoming S.V.I. speakers like, *The Kite Runner* author Khaled Hosseini, and Michael Pollan, author of the best-seller *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (and must-see Mark Wellman and Mark McLaughlin programs).

*Jim Porter is an attorney with Porter Simon, with offices in Truckee, South Lake Tahoe, Incline Village and Reno and a licensed California Real Estate Broker. He was the Governor's appointee to the Bipartisan McPherson Commission on political ethics and the California Fair Political Practices Commission. He may be reached at [porter@portersimon.com](mailto:porter@portersimon.com) or at the firm's web site [www.portersimon.com](http://www.portersimon.com).*

© 2009