



Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa

Citation

Greg Mortenson, you are an inspiration, generously giving to others and working tirelessly to promote education and peace worldwide. Through your humanitarian leadership, you remind us of the true and lasting power of simple gestures, a lesson so often lost in our increasingly complex daily lives. Selfless actions and simple gestures: these four words describe your amazing journey and life's work that have inspired you and led you to inspire so many others.

You discovered the power of a simple gesture through the kind deeds of Pakistani villagers who came to your aid following your attempt to summit K-2. A world away from home and in need of aid, you were nurtured and offered the greatest of gifts – culturally sophisticated yet deceptively simple – a cup of tea.

*As described in your bestselling book *Three Cups of Tea*, the villagers taught you the beautiful lesson in a simple custom: “The first time you share tea, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family.” Once you became family with these villagers, you were determined to return their gift and did so in the most meaningful way you could imagine, through the gift of education.*

Seeing in the village no schools, and learning of the lack of educational opportunity for young people there, you returned home, founded the Central Asia Institute and began what would become a nationwide movement, “Pennies for Peace.” Through this effort, you collected pennies donated by schoolchildren and transformed them into 64 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, providing educational access to your newly extended family in Central Asia while simultaneously promoting peace worldwide. And still, you dream to do more.

Your heroic response to such a simple gesture of kindness and human decency has changed the lives of countless people around the world and provided education to a region so desperately in need. You have taught us all that generosity has no borders or boundaries and even the smallest gesture – like the giving of a penny or the offering of a cup of tea, can have remarkable life-changing results. Moreover, it reminds all of us in education that it is often the smallest gesture a teacher makes every day that has the greatest power to change the world.

For teaching us the true and lasting power of simple gestures and for your remarkable humanitarian contributions, the University of Washington is proud to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa.

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