



Assistant Director of Admissions

Trevor Patzer helps educate underprivileged girls in Nepal who are living each day in the face of adverse conditions.

Shining LIGHT

Bindhaya, a young Nepalese girl, was like so many other girls in her native country. Without an education and lacking profit-making skills for her family, she was viewed as a burden in her traditional Nepalese society. Bindhaya was at risk of being sold, stolen or forced into indentured servitude, including the international sex industry.

Half way around the world, in the fall of 1989 an enthusiastic high school sophomore, Trevor Patzer, started the year at St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H. A family friend had paid for Trevor to leave his home in Sun Valley, Idaho, to attend St. Paul's. Even though he knew he would have to be well into his career before he could afford it, Trevor vowed that he too would help others and provide them with the lasting value of an education.

In 1998, two years after completing his undergraduate study at Brown University, Trevor started out on an exciting journey to trek to the base camp of Mt. Everest. Neither he nor Bindhaya had any idea that this vacation would turn out to be so much more.

The Beginnings

During Trevor's senior year independent study program at St. Paul's School, he studied meditation. Through his study he had the pleasure of meeting Usha Acharya and her husband, Jayaraj, who was the Nepalese ambassador to the United Nations at the time. This friendship proved to be a

lasting one and Trevor, Usha and Jayaraj kept in touch through the years, even after Jayaraj's term as U.N. ambassador ended and the couple returned to Nepal.

After graduating from college and entering the busy corporate world, one of Trevor's quality-of-life promises to himself was to take one amazing vacation a year. Nepal, with its draw of the trek to Mt. Everest and being the home of his friends Usha and Jayaraj, was a natural choice for a vacation destination.

In Nepal, Usha worked as a director in the Save the Children, U.K. office. She is considered a world expert on women's and girls' issues in South Asia. Usha showed Trevor around Kathmandu and familiarized him with the duality of beauty and hardship that are present throughout Nepal.

Trevor asked Usha about helping someone with their education, and she introduced Bindhaya to Trevor. Usha was concerned about the future of this intelligent, hard-working, young Nepalese girl and knew how much an education would help her realize her potential. "I met Bindhaya, and she looked up at me with her big brown eyes and my heart melted," said Trevor of their first meeting. "What can I do to help?" was his immediate response.

Upon returning to the U.S., friends asked Trevor about his most exciting experience in Nepal, to which he would respond,

The girls supported by the Bahini Fund range in age from six to 16. By the time they graduate from secondary school, all of the Bahinis will be fluent in English and have studied math, science and Nepali.

“Greater than watching the sun rise between Everest and Nupse from the top of Kalapatar at 19,000 feet, was meeting Bindhaya.” Immediately, his friends wanted to know how they could help, too. Hence, the birth of the “Bahini Fund” (Bahini means “little sister” in Nepali).

Working Towards A Solution

Women in traditional Nepalese society are seen as second-class citizens, forced to obey their fathers, brothers and husbands. Male children are viewed as being able to provide for the family, but females are seen as a financial burden.

In a country where the annual income is a mere \$200, families in this very poor region are desperate for a solution to the problem of paying to raise female children. The pimps and brothel owners have provided that solution. Some families willingly sell their daughters into the sex trade, others are taken by force or lured with the false promise of jobs or marriage overseas.

Trevor discovered that 7 percent of Nepalese girls are married by age 7 and 40 percent by age 14. During his initial visit with Usha, Trevor also learned that Nepal is the largest per capita exporter of girls to the sex trade worldwide—approximately 10,000 girls from the ages of 9 to 16 are sold, stolen or forced into the brothels of Bombay or Kathmandu annually. Current estimates are that upwards of 200,000 Nepalese girls and women are currently being forced to work in the international sex industry.

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Trevor learned that one way to end this grotesque practice is education. “No country has gone from being a developing nation to developed status without a movement to educate women,” noted Trevor. He immediately sponsored Bindhaya’s education for the remainder of her primary and secondary schooling. And, thanks to the enthusiasm of friends, he went further by setting up the Bahini Fund to provide an education to other Nepalese girls.

Bahini sponsors are encouraged to commit to a girl throughout her primary and secondary education with an annual donation of \$250 or a one-time donation of \$2,000. When the numbers were first presented to Trevor in U.S. dollars, he was amazed that such a small contribution could change the life of a Bahini permanently. The Fund is set up so that 100 percent of the donations received from individual sponsors go directly toward educating Bahinis.

With the Bahinis’ education (including transportation, lunch, books, uniforms, school supplies, and a yearly gift of clothing) paid for, the families are secure in the promise of the girls’ future economic self-sufficiency. The education provided by the Bahini Fund has helped to remove the motivation and need for families to marry their daughters off at a young age or sell the girls into prostitution and is working to create a sustainable family environment, one girl at a time.

The Bahini Fund

Trevor quoted Usha saying—“When you educate a boy, you educate a person. When you educate a girl, you educate a family.” Now in its fourth year, the Bahini Fund is currently educating 50 girls. The girls are screened by Usha and the other support staff to assure their desire for an education, their family’s support, and to confirm that they are hardworking, intelligent girls who are willing to give back to the program and help support the other Bahinis.



A group of Bahinis pose for a photo during Trevor’s yearly visit to Nepal. Trevor travels to Nepal once a year at his own expense to meet with the current participants in the Bahini Fund, as well as those candidates for the coming year.

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The girls attend schools in and around the Kathmandu Valley with most attending schools near their homes for their comfort and ease of transportation. Upon reaching the top 10 percent of their class, Bahinis are encouraged to change schools, should they desire, to the next “better” school according to the local administrators. Seventeen of the girls were given that opportunity in 2001 and moved to Nobel Academy, a top-notch private, coed school in Kathmandu. The goal of the Fund is to eventually obtain the financial support needed to build a Bahini School, as well as a resource center where the girls can meet for daily study hall, tutoring and a career counseling program.

All of the girls are fluent in English by the time they graduate and have completed advanced courses in math, science, history, and Nepali. With only 25 percent of women in Nepal literate, educated girls are more able to contribute to society and obtain jobs as teachers, social workers, or work in the tourism industry after high school. Most of the Bahinis, said Trevor, want to be doctors or teachers. The Fund also endeavors to partially or fully support all Bahinis who complete high school and wish to obtain an undergraduate degree. Currently, one Bahini is in her second year of college.

Additionally, the Bahini Fund recently received three grants to provide for the sustainability of the program. The grants, from the Weyerhaeuser Family Foundation, the Joan Leidy Foundation and another independent donor, will be used to help fund the goal of creating a library and resource center for the Bahinis, to provide tutors/mentors for the girls, for post-Bahini Fund development and training for the girls, and to employ Usha as the

full-time administrator, beginning March 1. Trevor is looking forward to utilizing a portion of the grant money to purchase supplies and provide additional transportation, as well as help finance Bahinis that would like to go on to college and to bring more young girls from outside the immediate Kathmandu area into the program.

Trevor travels to Nepal once a year at his own expense to meet with the current participants in the Bahini Fund, as well as candidates for the coming year. “It’s so magical,” said Trevor. “The girls are so appreciative. They are wonderful, kind, thoughtful, eager, beautiful...the hardest thing is to leave.”

“When I came back from my first trip to Nepal, I was ready to start my life at 25,” said Trevor. “These girls have been through so much and many die by the time they are 25. I thought that was a very stark difference. It’s amazing how \$2,000 can save a life and help change the world.”

“The girls look at me as their savior when I visit,” stated Trevor. “But the *sponsors* are truly the ones making the difference for the Bahinis. It’s just incomprehensible to the girls that someone would believe in them and give them so much.”

For additional information about the Bahini Fund, visit www.bahinifund.org.

As a part of their guidance and support structure, the Bahini girls meet once a month to discuss their progress and to write letters to their American sponsors.



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