



## IDAHO MOUNTAIN EXPRESS

# Foundation aids education of young girls in Nepal

By **LAURA COROES**  
For the Mountain Express

Trevor Patzer says he has lived a blessed and successful life that ultimately led to his becoming the founder of a foundation fostering the education of young girls in Nepal.

Patzer was born and raised in the Sun Valley area and went on to receive a top notch schooling at both St. Paul's School in New Hampshire and Brown University in Rhode Island. He was a competitive rower in college, and after graduation, he found success in the business world. He traveled frequently and in 1998, he set his sights on Nepal.

With chocolate eyes and dark hair, Bindhaya looked like many other girls in Nepal. Like many countries in Asia, girls are often considered a burden to their families. As a result, few of them receive an education. Child marriages are prevalent and, frequently, girls are sold or kid-napped and forced to work in the international sex industry.

Without an education, Bindhaya might not have escaped that fate.

In 1998, when Patzer met Bindhaya, two different worlds came crashing together. The resulting product was the founding of The Bahini Fund.

"My heart melted", Patzer said. "On the spot, I offered to pay for her food, clothing and education until she is done with school". On the plane ride back to the United States, at the tender age of 25, he realized that he had found the direction for his life. "I always knew that my calling and passion in life was to make a difference," he said. When he was 16, Patzer was given a rare

opportunity. A family friend offered to pay for his tuition so that he could attend high school at the elite St. Paul's School in Concord, N.H. For a project during his senior year, he studied meditation. Through the project, he was fortunate enough to meet the Nepalese ambassador to the United Nations, Jayaraj, and his wife, Usha. When Patzer traveled to Nepal in 1998 to trek to the base-camp of Mount Everest, he visited his Nepalese friends and ultimately, it was Usha who was responsible for introducing Patzer to Bindhaya.

"When I received the gift of education in high school, I decided that I wanted to give back to someone else in the same capacity. I wanted to support a child, and Usha really opened my eyes," Patzer said. Usha was born in Nepal and was fortunate enough to receive a good education. When she got older, she became an advocate for female education in her country. Usha encouraged Patzer to educate someone where it would eventually make a difference. "When you educate a boy you educate a person. When you educate a girl, you educate a family and the next generation.

After arriving back in the United States, Patzer began the process of setting up his non-profit organization to be called the Bahini "little sister" Fund. He told friends and family who immediately wanted to help. Word of the program spread and what began as a mission to help one little girl grew into a program that now supports the education of 75 young girls.

The program is arranged so that sponsors can make a one time

donation of \$2,500 which supports one girl's education for 8 to 10 years. One hundred percent of the money goes towards her education, which includes private school tuition, uniforms and books. The Bahinis range in age from 5 to 18, and they are selected based on three criteria: economic need, family support and academic promise and desire.

Usha serves as the director of the program in Nepal, and is part of the selection committee along with four other Nepalese natives. The group is also responsible for overseeing the day to day educational affairs of the girls in the program. The Bahinis learn English, which allows them to communicate with their sponsors via monthly letters. They also take computer courses. Some girls want to be doctors, while others want to be teachers, said Patzer. One Bahini is in her second year of college.

Patzer says that their current goal is to raise money to build a resource center. The center would include a library offices for the directors, classrooms, meeting rooms and a dormitory. "We want to build a place for the girls to go where they are safe, where they belong and where they can just be themselves," Patzer said.

Patzer has traveled to Nepal four times since the fund was created including a three month trip last summer. He recently established The Bahini Fund headquarters in Ketchum.

Patzer plans to schedule an information session on The Bahini Fund for people interested in learning more about the program. More information is available at [www.bahinifund.org](http://www.bahinifund.org).