

PATZER, from page B1

She introduced him to a young Nepalese girl named Bindhaya. "She looked up at me with her big brown eyes and my heart melted," Patzer said. "I said, 'What can I do to help?'"

"I was so excited. When I got back to the States, my friends asked what was the best moment, expecting me to say something like watching the sun rise at 19,000 feet at the base of Mt. Everest. I told them it was wanting to change a child's life."

When his friends started asking how they, too, might help, Patzer co-founded The Little Sisters Fund with his friend Usha.

The first 13 girls who started with the program in 1998 graduated this year. Five are teachers, two are in nursing school, two work for Save the Children and four are working in the private sector.

It's a big contrast to what might have been.

Finished by 25

In Nepal, a country of 27 million, girls are often seen as a financial burden. While boys stay with their family when they marry, the daughters go with the family they marry into so there is no incentive to educate them so they can help support the family.

Consequently, 14 percent of Nepali girls are married by the age of 7 and 40 percent by 14.

Those who are not married off

are often made to work in the fields or forced into indentured servitude. Nepal is also the largest per capita exporter of girls to the sex trade, with about 10,000 girls as young as 7 sold, stolen or forced into the brothels of Kathmandu or Bombay each year.

There they may be chained to a bed and forced to service more than 20 clients a day. They contract every venereal disease imaginable and by the time they're 17 or 18 they're washed up and dumped onto the streets where they scrounge out a meager existence until they die at age 25.

"I was 25 years old at that time, finally ready to take control of my life and I realized that many of these girls were coming to the end of their lives at 25," recalled Patzer, now 33. "I also realized that there is a tremendous need for education in a country like Nepal and it is also terribly inexpensive. For a small amount you can make a tremendous impact on the life of a child in Asia."

Today Little Sisters Fund is supporting 430 girls in Nepal and Bhutan, sending them to schools in cities like Kathmandu, Pokhara, Lamjung and Kaski.

It costs \$2,500 to send one girl for eight to 10 years to an English-speaking private school where they learn English, computer, math, science and other skills. The amount includes transportation, lunches, books, uniforms, school supplies and medical care.

Smaller donations are pooled to send girls to Nepali-speaking schools where they are safe until they turn 18 or 19.

The program also supports two to three additional years of schooling for those who wish professional training, such as nursing or engineering school.

A matter of choice

In 2005 Patzer won the Alumni Association Award recognizing his work in improving the quality of life for others. It's the highest honor St. John's School bestows.

"He's a humanitarian. He gives back. He always has," said his mother Midge Patzer. "He's always, always, always been very sensitive to

other people. And he's always loved education, as well. For him everything is about education."

Patzer modestly lays the credit at the donors. That includes 30 Wood River Valley residents and a handful of local foundations. It also includes three donors who have committed to match dollar-for-dollar every donation up to \$50,000 given to the Little Sisters Fund by the end of July 2007.

"There's no reason for poverty anywhere in the world," said Patzer. "There's plenty of money, plenty of food. It's just a matter of choices. We can choose to hold onto our money, we can choose to war with it. Or we can choose to improve people's lives."

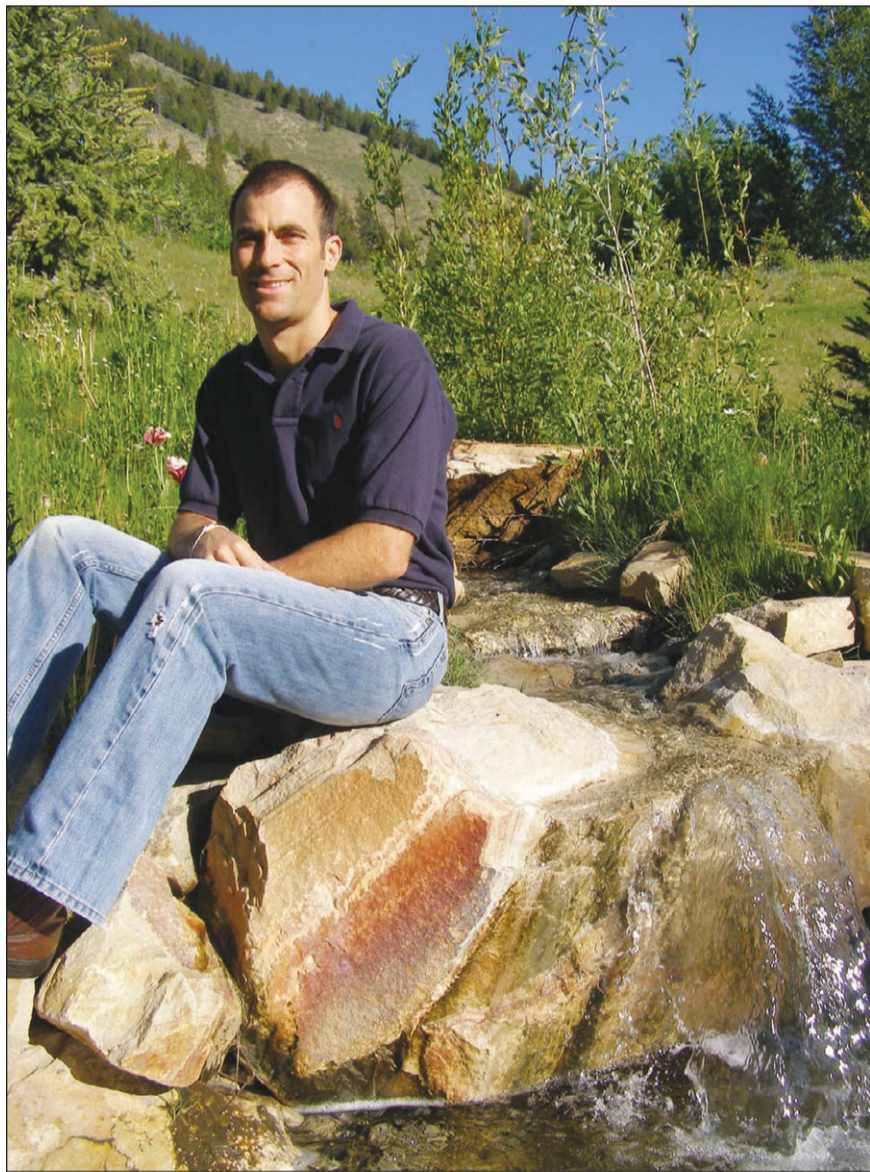
"Those of us with the ability have the responsibility to make a positive difference" ☺

Trevor Patzer will discuss his experiences in Nepal with an emphasis on the current political situations during a free presentation at 6, tonight, Wed., June 6 at The Community Library.

He will be joined by Usha Acharya, wife of the former Nepalese ambassador to the United Nations and co-founder of the Little Sisters Fund, a school scholarship and mentoring program for impoverished Nepalese and Bhutanese girls.

The free presentation is titled "Journey to the Himalayas—A Story of Friendship, Culture and Philanthropy."

For more information, go to www.littlesistersfund.org. ☺



Karen Bossick/WJR

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