

## Jonathan Paterson on "Tikun Olam"

By MARTIN ZEILIG

University of Winnipeg student Jonathan Paterson calls the time he, along with other students from the University of Winnipeg Collegiate, spent in Costa Rica in February, 2011 the "best two weeks of my life."

One might even term it "a life changing experience."

Paterson, 20, who is studying International Development and Human Rights, was on a volunteer project, mixing cement and cleaning water tanks, in a small community in that steamy Central American nation.

The work made him see, in a very real and personal way, the value of "Tikkum olam", the Hebrew phrase meaning "world repair" or "repairing the world"- social action to help build social justice, said Paterson during a fascinating power point presentation, "Tikkun Olam: Lessons From Rural Kenya", before about 10 people on March 3 at the Limmud Festival of Jewish Learning in a classroom at the Asper JCC.

"I was doing something physically to help people in a small way," added the son of Gail Asper, head of the Asper Foundation, and Michael Paterson and the grandson of the late Winnipeg businessman/philanthropist Israel H. Asper.

"I also got to live with a Costa Rican family, and to see that at the core we were the same kind of people. There were only surface differences. We had the same core values."

The work reinforced Paterson's desire to continue doing Tikkun Olam.

So, the following year, when a friend suggested that they go to Kenya together with "Me to We" and its sister organization, "Free the Children", Paterson jumped at the opportunity.

Both organizations were founded by brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger - social entrepreneurs, humanitarians, social activists, best-selling authors and renowned speakers.

"Me to We" is an innovative social enterprise that offers socially conscious and environmentally friendly products and life-changing experiences, noted Paterson.

"Save the Children" is the "leading independent organization creating lasting change in the lives of children in need around the world, including in North America."

"Recognized for our commitment to accountability, innovation and collaboration, our work takes us into the heart of communities, where we help children and families help themselves." says the organization's website.

"We work with other organizations, governments, non-profits and a variety of local partners while maintaining our own independence without political agenda or religious orientation."

Paterson pointed out that in 1995, when he was 12 years old, Craig Kielburger saw a headline in the *Toronto Star* newspaper that read "Battled child labour, boy, 12, murdered."

The accompanying story was about a young Pakistani boy named Iqbal Masih who was forced into bonded labour in a carpet factory at the age of four, became an international figurehead for the fight against child labour by 12 years of age, and was murdered in 1995.

"Angered by the article, Kielburger began researching child labour," says Wikipedia.

"He took the article to school, gathered friends his same age and together founded a group called the 'Twelve-Twelve-Year-Olds.' This group evolved into "Free the Children", an international organization that has 45 countries participating in helping the world become a better place."

Paterson insists that Craig Kielburger "exemplifies the spirit of tikkun olam."

So, with memories of Costa Rica burned into his brain, Paterson and two friends hopped on a plane in July, 2011 and flew off to East Africa to work on a project for three weeks.

"I arrived in Kenya and drove through the streets of the capital city, Nairobi," he said.

"The poverty was immediately apparent. I was heartbroken, but didn't know how to react to that. But, it's a beautiful country."

He ended up working in a village located in the legendary and spectacular Maasai Mara region of Kenya.

"Our group got this amazing welcome from the local community upon our arrival," he noted.

"It started to hit me as I watched them dancing (in celebration). I expected the community to be poor and everyone to be sad. But, I could see the incredible value of life. I knew I would be gaining as much from this experience as I would be giving."



JONATHAN PATERSON

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Note: In the above article, "Free the Children" is once incorrectly called "Save the Children."