

**JN** SPECIAL REPORT: HOW JUSTIN BIEBER'S MENTOR IS TRANSFORMING LIVES

# ADAM DOES THE SCHOOL RUN WITH JUSTIN BIEBER

*Justin Bieber's mentor, Adam Braun, quit Wall Street to launch a charity that's opened 200 schools in Laos, Ghana and Guatemala. Sharon Feinstein reports*

Justin Bieber's mentor, Adam Braun, drew on his Jewish values when he walked away from a lucrative career to build schools in remote jungles. Braun, who met the teen pop idol when the singer was just 13, took him to Guatemala, where they joined isolated villagers and spent days stripped to the waist lugging bricks and building a school. The grandson of Auschwitz and Dachau survivors, Braun has always felt compelled to give a voice to the voiceless.

Speaking on the eve of his book release detailing the journey of his charity, *Pencils of Promise*,

Adam gave an exclusive interview to the *Jewish News*.

He says: "Justin came with me to Guatemala to a rural village and helped build the school. We did it together. It was fantastic."

"I hope people can see the good he's done, instead of focusing on his negative behaviour as he grows from adolescence to manhood."

"He's incredibly philanthropic and cares immensely about the well-being of other people. He came from poverty himself so understands that kind of suffering. I've watched him partici-

pate in many causes and do a tremendous amount of good."

"He donated some of the profits of his perfume sales, which made a significant difference to *Pencils of Promise*."

"I've been close to Justin since he was 13, so I feel immense pride that, with his incredible voice and platform, he's chosen to support global education, an issue he's passionate about. His help gives us an extra boost."

Braun, 30, described how his Jewish upbringing and the idea of *tzedakah* guided his choices.

He says: "My grandmother was in Auschwitz and then Bergen-Belsen and grandfather in Dachau, so I knew my family had survived through a series of miracles, and then lifted themselves out of poverty through education."

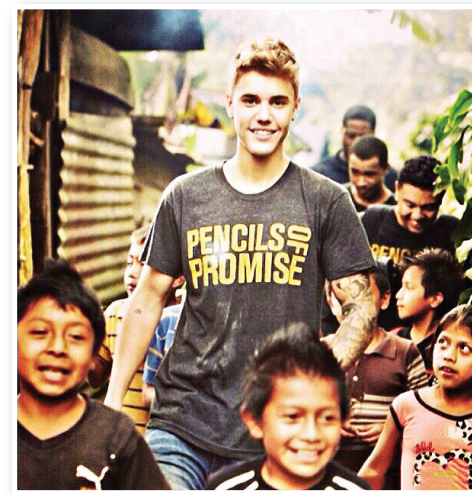
"Education and family values were at the centre of our Jewish household. We honoured Shabbat, kept meat and dairy separate, said the Shema every night before we went to sleep and celebrated the holidays."

"My sister lives in Israel so I have very close ties, but wouldn't consider myself a Zionist, even though I have a real heart for the land and people."

"I see all people as equal so try to provide a voice to the voiceless, which tends to be people in rural poverty in undeveloped areas."

"My Jewish values influence my approach to work in that we don't proselytise at all. To me, the core of Jewish values is a commitment to education and service to others – the idea of *tzedakah*. When I look at the state of global education and see 57 million children struggling to learn basic numeracy and literacy, I see that as an injustice I want to rectify. At first, my family weren't happy because I was leaving a safe lucrative job, and they'd worked so hard to get me to that point. But considering the growth and impact we're having, now they're very proud."

Braun started his charity with just \$25. His ethos has always been to enable locals to build and sustain their own schools. They are often villagers living in mud huts on less than \$2 a day, so *Pencils of Promise* enlists their labour. Once the school is open, the charity



provides teacher training and student scholarships.

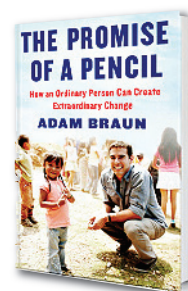
Braun says: "I'm not an Angelina Jolie figure – she's far more beautiful and famous, and she's used her fame to shine a spotlight on the issues she cares about. When I started, Justin wasn't famous at all, and by the time he started speaking about *Pencils of Promise* we had 15 schools."

They've just built their 200th school between Guatemala, Laos and Ghana.

Braun's older brother, Scooter, manages Bieber, *The Wanted*, and is the business partner of Usher.

Braun explains: "Scooter sits on our board. We are extremely close and support each other. His partner, Usher, and I are very close, and he's built a school with us. He's a very good person."

"I resonate more with people who are good and see the good in others. I want to put 10,000 kids in our school by 2016. This is a real passion of mine, the most fulfilling thing I've ever done."



• Details: Visit the website [www.pencilsof-promise.org](http://www.pencilsof-promise.org). *The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change* by Adam Braun is published by Simon & Schuster on 1 April, priced £15.10



Adam Braun on location at one of the schools he supports. Inset: Justin at a *Pencils of Promise* school