

Following through

STORY AND PHOTO BY DONNA DANIELLI

The oddest set of coincidences can precede great change. Had 12 year old Craig Kielburger not been flipping through the newspaper in search of the comics page and stumbled upon news of the murder of a fellow 12 old, the "Free the Children" human rights organization might never have come into existence 10 years ago. And had Milton's Gabor Desmond not been home, taking a break from performing on Broadway, he may never have heard the radio interview with Craig in 1998 that would lead to a profound change in his life.

"Craig realized the vastness of the issues of not just child labour, but child soldiers, child prostitutes and more," explains an emotional Gab of that pivotal moment seven years ago. "He was speaking so eloquently about these things that I went right out and bought his book."

That book, simply titled "Free the Children" has become a bible of social justice since its publication. Craig Kielburger recounts the horror he felt on that day he read of the murder of Pakistan's Iqbal Masih, who lost his life after speaking out against the child labour industry that had seen him sold at the age of four to a carpet weaver. Craig held on to that horrified feeling, and gathering, first classmates, and eventually, worldwide support, created the "Free the Children" movement dedicated to the eradication of the worldwide abuse of children's rights. In the decade since Craig first screwed up his courage and spoke to his class about finding a solution, Free the Children has built over 400 schools in thirty-five countries, providing education to more than 35,000 children every day. The movement has also implemented alternative income projects

for more than 20,000 people, shipped \$9 million in essential medical supplies to 40 countries and helped 123,000 people with access to clean water and improved sanitation facilities.

Along the way, Craig has also inspired countless individuals to join his cause, including Gab and his fiancée Mylène Joly. When attending a peace rally featuring displays and information from social justice organizations in 2003, Gab felt an instant pull when he saw the name Craig Kielburger on the speaker's list. "As soon as I saw his name, it all flashed in a split second for me," reminisces Gab. "I realized that this young man had continued on in this same vein. I had felt for a while that I needed to get into something different and I knew that I had to speak to him and see how our two worlds could meet together." That meeting took place, and Gab's life irrevocably altered from that moment on. Craig shared his view that there are two different types of people in the world, those who talk about problems, and those who get things done. The only difference, in Craig's view, between those two types of people is the ability to follow through. "He said to me "I love your energy and your passion," recalls Gab. "Then he said, "I look forward to seeing you follow through.""

That follow through would begin three months later, when Gab's fiancée and fellow performer, Mylène Joly entered his life. "Nothing would have started without her," explains Gab. "I'm not even half of the story." Mylène is quick to point out though, in her charming French Canadian accent, that she and Gab are fortunate enough to form the perfect team. "We complete each other well," she

says softly. "Gab has these amazing ideas and I am all about organizing and planning. It's really a cooperation for us and we fell in love with the Free The Children Movement. It's the largest network of children helping children in the world."

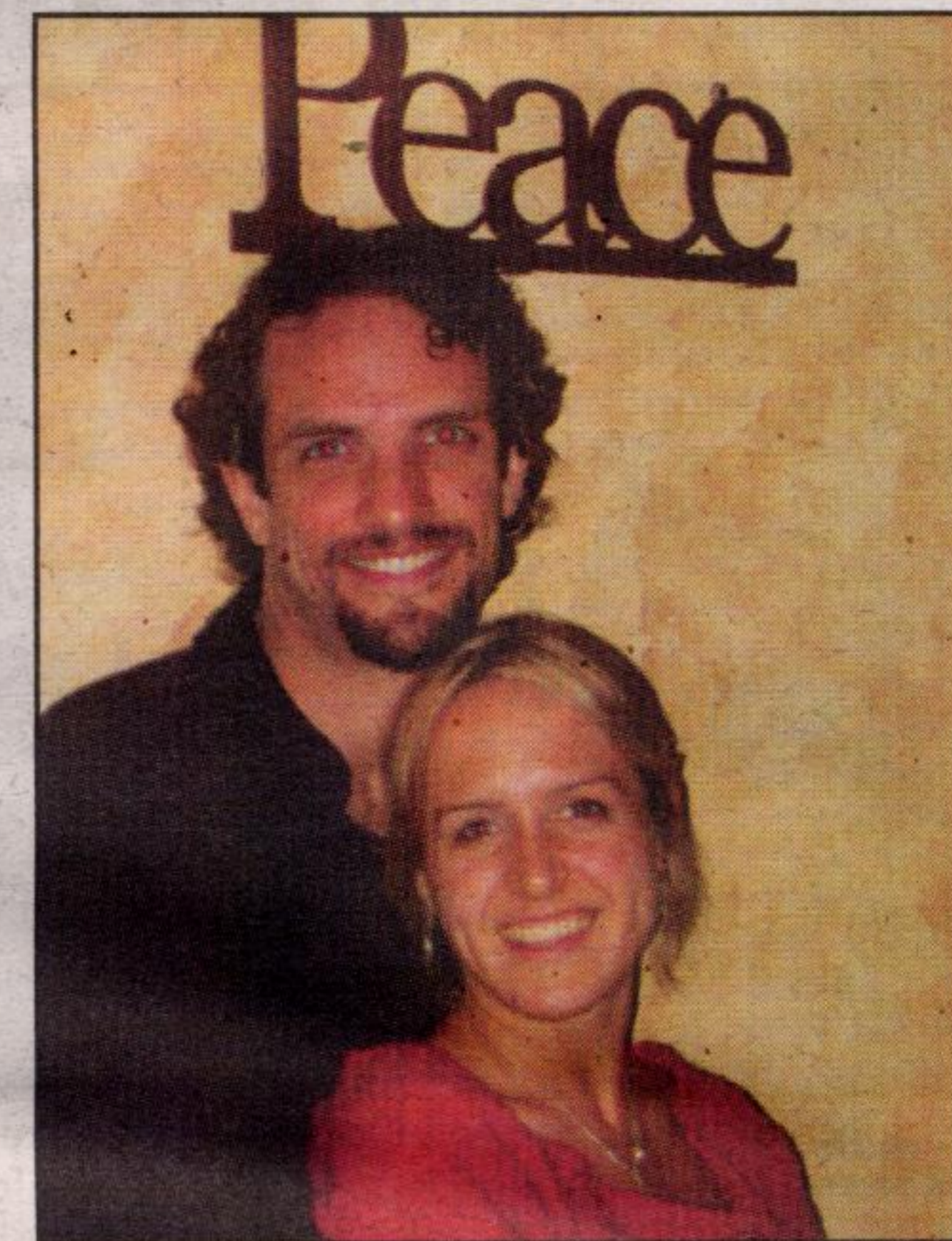
That cooperation led them to organize a series of highly successful shows, entitled CHILDLIKE InaSENSE, in Montreal and Toronto in support of Free the Children before travelling to Japan to continue their performing careers. "We were the perfect duet to represent Canada, both the French culture and the English culture, and we had a glamorous career with chic hotels and good money" explains Mylène. "But we realized it felt good to share our music with people, but nothing made us as happy as organizing those benefit concerts."

Gab and Mylène have organized four benefit concerts, in partnership with Free the Children, since the beginning of 2004, 2 in Montreal, 1 in Toronto and 1 in Tokyo. They have raised over \$40,000 for Free the Children through the concerts, and recently toured Indonesian refugee camps to see first hand where some of the funds they have raised have been put to good use.

A second Toronto concert will take place at The Great Hall (1087 Queen Street) on Monday, September 19 at 7:30 pm. and will be a fundraiser for a school building project in Sierra Leone, Africa. "It's a celebration of art," says Mylène of the concert that will include African drummers, Broadway performers, jazz singers, actors, dancers and more. The highlight of the evening though may come with the special appearance by Craig Kielburger and his brother Marc, who is also the executive director of Free the

Children. Tickets for the event are \$20 and all proceeds go to Free the Children. More information is available by calling Gab at 416-986-4151 or e-mailing him at gabormylene@yahoo.ca.

"Our goal is to eventually form our own non-profit organization that would be an international cooperation of artists and non governmental organizations," muses Gab when asked about the future. "Until all of the children in the world have food and shelter, the world will be out of whack. This is what we are passionate about. This is what we want to do with the rest of our lives."



Milton's Gab Desmond and fiancée Mylène Joly enjoy a quiet moment amidst preparations for their fifth benefit concert in support of Free the Children.

An Exciting Community Event

Being held at

Mill Street Crossing Pub and Restaurant

(Formerly the Station Hotel) 137 Mill Street E Acton



In Support of

The New Acton Skate Board Park

All Proceeds will be Donated to A.S.A.P (Acton Sports Action Park)

Saturday October 1 2005 6:30 PM

Dinner/Dance* Door Prizes* Raffles

Tickets Dinner and Dance \$50 per person

Dance Only \$25 per person

Tickets available ONLY at Mill Street Crossing

For Further Information or to Book Your table Please Contact

Sue (Event Coordinator) 519 853 0620

Deb (ASAP Chair) 519 853 9003

Many Thanks to our Sponsor **THE HALTON COMPASS**



Acton Sports Action Park



Acton Sports Action Park