

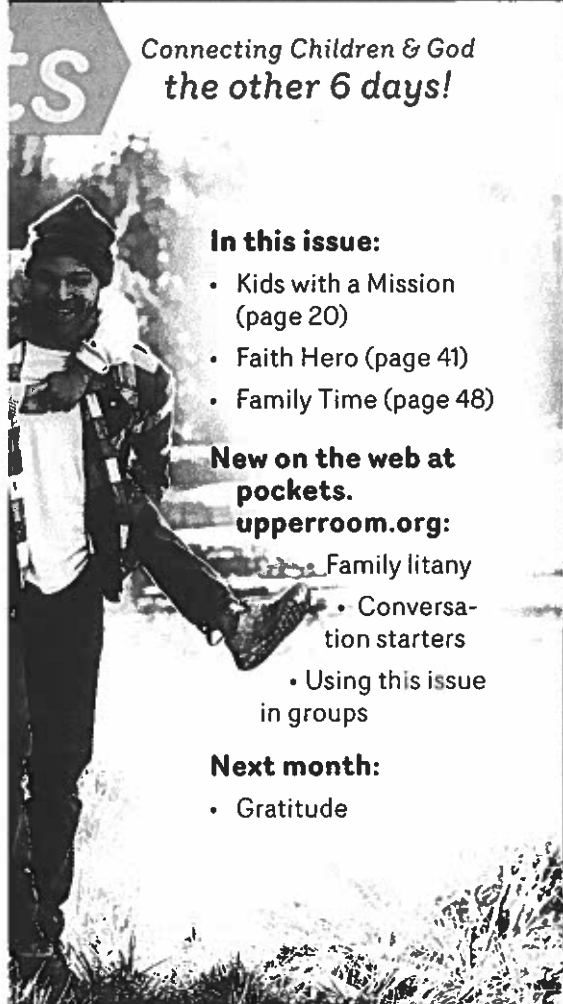
for KIDS who love GOD

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The Upper Room

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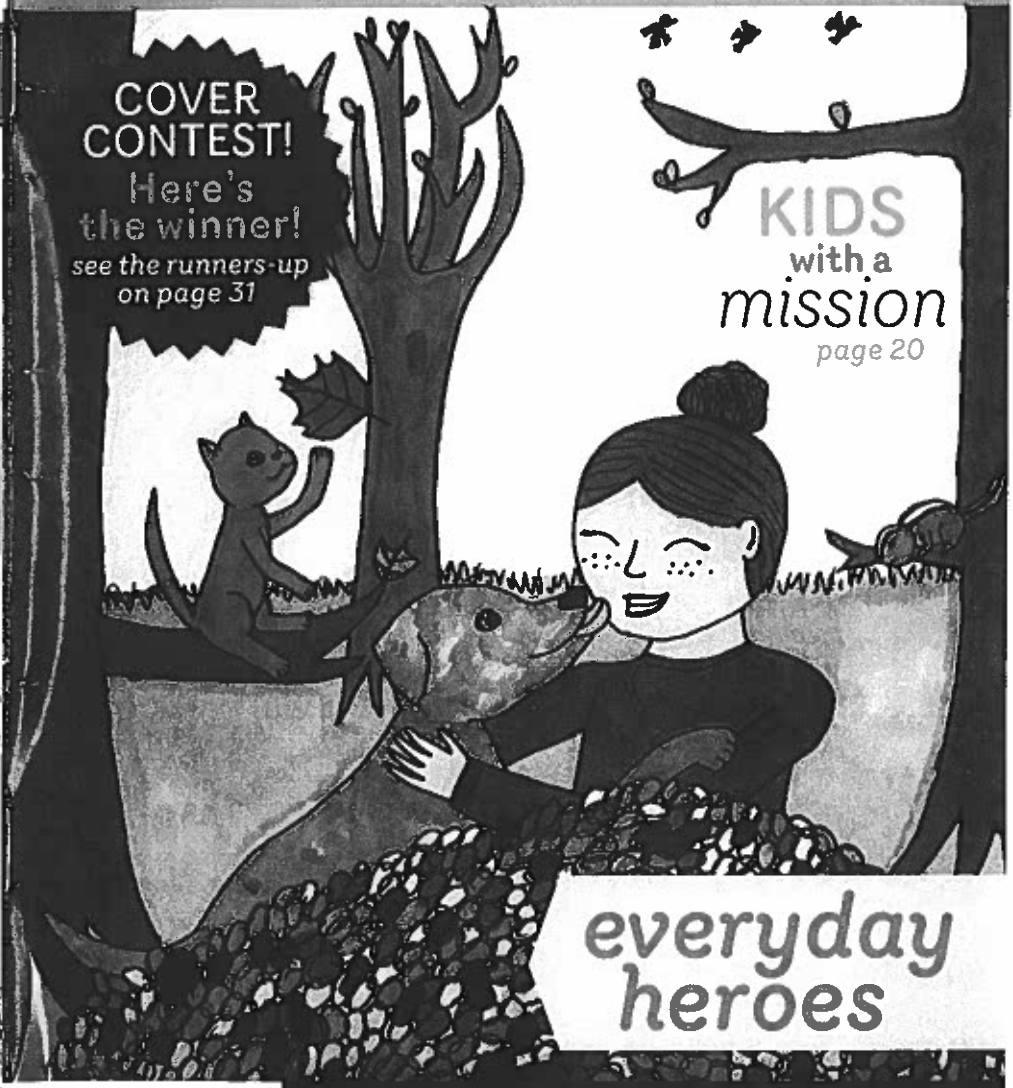
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Kids With a

Mission

Sharing God's
Love with People
in Need

by Marian
Fitzemer



Jake gets ready to spread
God's love on Christmas Eve

HOBO. BEGGAR. DRIFTER. PAN HANDLER.
You've probably heard someone refer to people who are homeless by those kind of names. But one 13-year-old in California knows that people who are experiencing homelessness are real people, people he wants to help.

Jake Berlin is an 8th grader at Glick Middle School in Empire, California. Jake likes the same things a lot of kids his age like: the electric guitar, basketball, and Boy Scouts. But he also has a passion for others that many people ignore. **Jake's mission: helping those who have no homes.**

Jake's compassion for people experiencing homelessness began when he was 10 and his family was visiting San Francisco. At the end of a fun day, they rushed to catch the local commuter train. But Jake saw someone and called, "Mom, we need to go back. We need to help him." He begged, "Please, we've got to go back."

Jake's parents were in a hurry and didn't want to miss the train. But Jake couldn't forget the words of the man they had passed: "You didn't have to give me anything. You could have just said hello."

Jake's mom, Christie, remembers, "Jake was absolutely heart broken. The homeless man's words bothered him for weeks."

Instead of just feeling bad, Jake decided to take action. "My mom helped me start a summer project to help the homeless," he said. "I called it **Project SGL** (Show God's Love). I chose the name because the Bible says that love is shown through action or deed, not just through language" (See 1 John 3:18).

How does a ten-year-old get money to buy supplies for the homeless? Jake started by convincing his extended family to help. "I keep track of all the donations in a computer spreadsheet and create computer receipts," he said. "I started with \$80."

Jake's parents and older brother, Matthew, helped Jake with the day-to-day details of gathering supplies. The kitchen table at their home became

covered with bags and items to be given to people who were homeless.

Jake began buying items he thought people who were homeless would need during various seasons. "What they need in winter is warm clothes," he explained. "In the summer they need more cool water. I always include a hygiene kit with toiletries like toothpaste, toothbrush, and soap. I add bottled water, healthy snacks, and a Bible."

Jake said, "At first I gave them small Bibles because they take up less room." But he soon learned that many of the people had poor eyesight because they have eye infections or don't have glasses they need. "So now I buy Bibles with larger fonts." He finds the Bibles and many of his other supplies at dollar stores. When a family member can drive, Jake and



Jake and his brother, Matthew,
get bags ready for delivery

friends pack the car with his bags of supplies and cases of water. Together, they go "on patrol" to find people who need their help.

"As a Christian, I believe in God," Jake says. And he knows that many of the people he helps also believe in God as much as he does, but since he has more resources he wants to share with his friends who are homeless.

"My friend Marcos is a Vietnam veteran with tumors. It makes me happy that I can help him," Jake says, "I collect cans for another man who uses recycling money to pay for his medicine."

Helping those who are homeless isn't always easy. "When people say



Jake's friends help with the
deliveries sometimes



Jake delivered stockings and bags of love on Christmas Eve

no to taking a bag it lowers my courage," Jake said. "It hurts my heart. Sometimes the homeless don't trust us. Some think they don't deserve it."

When Jake wondered if he'd done enough to help, his mom reminded him of something. "Remember when you asked me for \$5.00 to buy food for a man who was homeless?" she said. "The man behind you bought gift cards and took them to the man. Sometimes you don't know the impact when someone sees what you have done and decides to help, too. It's like a ripple effect."

Despite challenges, what means most to Jake is when one of the people he helps smiles and says, "God bless you," or he sees one of them

reading the Bible he gave them. These experiences motivate Jake to continue helping—even in cold, pouring rain. Jake and his friends don't just give away food and necessities. They give hope.

Jake keeps a notebook with the names of those he helps. "I ask each person, 'Can I have your name so I can pray for you?'" If they have pets, he records the pets' names, too.

"Sometimes we get to pray with people on our patrols," he adds. "If they don't give me their name, I make one up and write a detail so I can remember them. I used to pray for all of them every night, but now there are too many. Now I group them together. I pray that God will help them and for those with diseases."



Jake and Matthew get ready to spread God's love on Christmas Eve

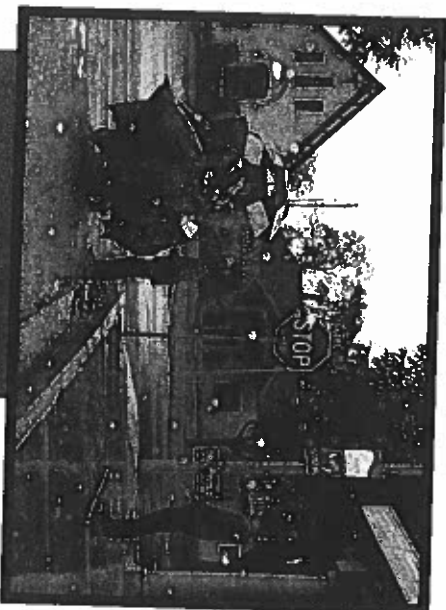
What advice would

Jake give to other kids who want to be everyday heroes for people in need?

"Think about something that needs to be different in this world. Then put your mind to it. You can help the world be a better place," Jake said. "Ask an adult to help and encourage you. Put your own money into the project; get others to help."

Jake says sometimes friends who help him with his mission are, "nervous or excited or both because it's something new. They don't know what to expect. But we go out and make a difference. You can, too."

To learn more about Jake's journey, you can check out the Facebook page for Project SGL with a parent. ■



A rainy day doesn't stop Jake



Jake includes hygiene items, healthy snacks, water, and a Bible in each bag

Photos courtesy of the Berlin family