

# Kids Making A Difference

Incredible Stories of What Kids Today  
Are Doing Around the World



by  
Pete Hohmann

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## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the children of Mechanicsville Christian Center. They are my friends and fellow-mobilizers. Together we are telling children around the world that kids can make a difference.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank, especially those who contributed stories to “Kids Making a Difference.” But, allow me to specifically acknowledge the following:

- Cheri Fuller, author of many books such as “When Children Pray” and “Opening Your Child’s Spiritual Windows.” Cheri encouraged and personally mentored me in my writing.
- Joyce Satter, a true visionary and writer who saw the unique characteristics of the Millennial Generation long before most others. Joyce shared with me many of the principles that are contained in this book.
- Jim Patterson, who has faithfully directed our Bridge Builders team for the past 12 years. Bridge Builders is our performing arts outreach team of over 100 children. Many of the quotes in this book are from members of the team and are a result of the principles Jim imparted to the children.





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## **CAN CHILDREN REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

What can a fourth grade class in a public school do to change the world? Ask Barb Vogel, a teacher at Highline Community School, in Aurora, Colorado. Her fourth grade class was studying the Civil War and the oppression of slavery. Barb shared how slavery is still a problem in North Africa today. She told of how Christian women and children in southern Sudan are stolen by Muslim slavers and taken to northern Sudan where they are sold.

### **WE THOUGHT SLAVERY WAS OVER**

Barb said there was terror and disbelief in the eyes of her students. The kids began to cry and say, “We thought slavery was over.” But, it didn’t occur to the kids that there was nothing they could do. After they wiped away the tears, they said, “What are we going to do about this?” You see, while adults often listen to reports like this with their heads and think that the problem is too big or too far away, kids hear with their hearts and believe they can make a difference.

So the students wrote letters, more than 1,500 of them, to media, celebrities and public officials. They wrote to the President and First Lady, to Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, and Steven Spielberg. Laura Christopher (age 11) wrote to





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Colorado Senator Wayne Allard, saying, “We would like to know if you can contact the United States government and let them know what is going on, so they can take action and put a stop to slavery!”

In their letter to Hilary Clinton, the class wrote, “You once said that it takes a village to raise a child. Now we would like you to know that it takes the whole world to save the village that will raise that child.”

### **STOP CAMPAIGN**

The class formed a group called Slavery That Oppresses People, known as the STOP campaign. Through the Internet, they learned about Christian Solidarity International, a human rights group that redeems slaves, actually purchases them back and returns them to their families. It takes about \$50 to \$100 to redeem one slave. The kids began saving their allowances and selling lemonade, T-shirts, and old toys. The money started collecting in the old water cooler bottle located in the classroom. Soon, thanks to their own efforts and some help from some corporate donors, they had enough money to buy freedom for 150 slaves. The class made brown paper cutouts representing each slave that had been redeemed and pasted them on the classroom wall.

### **GREATEST ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT SINCE THE CIVIL WAR**

Then, one of the letters hit the mark. Sumner Redstone, chairman of Viacom, responded to a letter from Barb’s class and decided to put the kids and their message on his Nickelodeon Channel. News of the crusade spread everywhere, to become what is quite possibly the greatest abolitionist movement since the Civil War. To date, the class has been covered by 250 media stories, including several primetime





network news interviews. Barb's children are, without a doubt, the most photographed class in the world.

The response has been incredible. A homeless man living out of his car in Alaska sent the children his last \$100. A class of handicapped children raised money through a bake sale. A truck driver tells people all over the country about these kids, collects donations and has sent hundreds of dollars to the STOP campaign. Classrooms from Europe to South America are imitating what these fourth graders are doing and now nine countries are involved in the STOP campaign.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many slaves have been redeemed through the efforts of Barb's class, but it is safe to say that the number exceeds 100,000. Yet, Barb says that STOP is not a fund raising campaign. The kids themselves never asked for a penny. They just made people aware of the problem of slavery and set the example through their own efforts to make a difference.

### **CHILDREN SOMETIMES GET THE GREATEST RESULTS**

It is incredible how kids can sometimes accomplish greater results than adults can. The three years before STOP was formed, Christian Solidarity was able to free only 1,500. Others have worked 20 years in human rights and never had the publicity given to Barb's class. Barb says, "This is God. We are fully aware we are His instruments."

Some people have questioned the wisdom of redeeming slaves through Christian Solidarity. Are we encouraging slave trade through these efforts? In order to answer this question, Barb traveled to Sudan in the fall of 1999 to see for herself how the redemption process works. The results? Barb is now convinced beyond any doubt that STOP and Christian Solidarity are doing the right thing. She called the arguments of opponents totally unsubstantiated. Just the publicity alone



justifies the activity of these groups. But, what really convinced her were the tears of joy on the face of a Sudanese woman who has just been redeemed and told she is free to return to her family.

### **SLAVERY IN SUDAN ELIMINATED**

The publicity given to Barb and her students raised awareness around the world of how slavery is still practiced today. It also opened doors for them to appear before Congress on several occasions. There was even talk in Congress that Barb's class should be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although this didn't become a reality, they did receive 14 national and international awards.

On one of their visits to Washington, D.C., Barb and her class met with then Secretary of State, Madelyn Albright. She and others in Congress pledged to do what they could to address the problem of slavery in Sudan.

In June 2000, Congress passed the Sudan Peace Act, which placed economic pressure on Sudan to stop the slavery. Included in this bill were incentives of 100 million dollars of aid a year that were only to be given to Sudan if the fighting and slavery stopped. Today, in 2004, slavery has been just about eliminated in Sudan. I am convinced this would not have happened if it were not for the kids in Barb's class.

### **GIVING EXTENDED TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

I asked Barb Vogel how her children were different today as a result of their involvement in STOP. She told me that they have extended their giving to local needs. Her students fed 45 homeless for Thanksgiving. They gave 900 canned goods to the food bank. They made flower arrangements for the elderly in a nursing home. They collected hats, mittens, and gloves for the needy. They helped feed people for Christmas. They





also helped establish newly immigrated Sudanese families in the community. The class provided Christmas presents for seven new Sudanese families who had almost nothing. One child in the class even dressed like Santa Claus and distributed gifts to the Sudanese children. Barb says they cannot give enough. She says, “I’ve never known children to give so much.”

### **BARB’S MESSAGE TO US**

I was scheduled to speak at the National Children’s Pastors’ Conference the following month, so I asked Barb, “What would you want me to say to the children’s workers?” Barb told me, “The voices of children ring true because they have no political or religious agenda. They just love God to love God, or love people to love people. They see a need and they want to meet it. They see suffering and they want to end it. It doesn’t matter who it is happening to.”

Barb continues, “God is my dearest friend, but I can’t talk about this in the public school classroom, so I follow what St. Francis said, “Go preach the word of God and use words only when necessary.” The kids will talk about God. They know what they are doing. This is about doing unto others what you would have them do unto you. It’s all about loving God and loving your neighbor. It is pitiful that we take for granted the children that God has put on the earth for us. We don’t value them or prioritize them. It’s shameful.”

### **KIDS WITH A PURPOSE**

One of the reasons I have special interest in Barb’s students is because I was a public school teacher for twelve years before becoming a children’s pastor. I am aware that classes and even entire schools develop their own unique characteristics and personality. I wondered if Barb’s class was composed mostly of gifted and talented overachievers, the kind of class that





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teachers with the greatest seniority and qualifications are sometimes awarded.

What Barb shared surprised me. She said, “I didn’t get the bright ones. I had the most learning disabilities impacted class last year in the fourth and fifth grade. Yet, my class has never been beat in the Iowa basics. They outscored everybody! It’s because they have a purpose. Helping others has become a priority and they have found such joy in giving to others.”

Barb says, “God is mobilizing kids today because they are listening. They will listen to God. They will come unto God. They have no ulterior motives. Isn’t it wonderful that it is children? Doesn’t it make sense? The Bible says for us to come unto God as a child.”

Barb’s original students are growing up, but she meets with them once a month. Their involvement did not stop just because slavery in Sudan has been almost eliminated. Now they are helping former slaves adapt to their newfound freedom.

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In the following chapters you will read more stories like the one of Barb’s fourth graders. Some of these stories will tell about children making a difference through prayer and through sharing their faith in Jesus Christ. In other stories you will see children making an impact in their churches, in their communities, and in issues that have worldwide influence. You will also see how the present generation of children is a generation of destiny, designed by God to accomplish His greatest purposes. We will refer to them as the “Millennial Generation,” those born in the last 20 years. The Millennials may be the most important generation that has ever lived. But, if that is true, we are the most strategic generation because it is our responsibility to train and equip them to fulfill their destiny.

Each chapter will also include a “Next Step Readings.” This will include recommended books, web sites, and free articles





and handouts from presentations at national conferences that you can receive upon request from the author of this book.

### **NEXT STEP READINGS:**

- ★ [www.iabolish.com](http://www.iabolish.com) has good information on STOP, including ways that you can be directly involved.
- ★ “Dream Freedom,” by Sonia Levitin, is a novel based on a true story and real-life contemporary events concerning the life of a teenage girl in Sudan. It is for ages 10 and up and is available through Silver Whistle Harcourt Inc.. Log onto [www.harcourtbooks.com](http://www.harcourtbooks.com) and enter “Dream Freedom” into the search box.









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## **KIDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PRAYER**

### **HOPE FOR MONGOLIA**

Far-reaching events were being set in motion by God as a nine-year-old girl selected Mongolia to be the topic of her report for a home school assignment. One of the sources of information was an article about Mongolia she found in “Mountain Movers” magazine. This monthly publication was the official foreign missions magazine for the Assemblies of God, and it often contained articles on peoples and countries that had no strong Christian church. The article she used for her report described how there were very few believers in all of Mongolia. She read about how Mongolians sometimes placed Buddhist altars in the felt tents where they lived.

This nine-year-old was so burdened for Mongolia that she prayed for two years that God would replace the Buddhist altars in their felt tents with Bibles. After two years of intercession, she saw the words “Hope for Mongolia” on the cover of a recent issue of Mountain Movers Magazine. The “Hope for Mongolia” article described a revival in Mongolia where 500 people had come to Christ. She knew this article was God’s way of telling her He had answered her prayer. You see, this girl’s name is Hope, Hope Smith. She said, “That day, I learned there was another ‘Hope’ for Mongolia.”

During the following year these 500 Mongolian believers





grew to 1,000 and have started a church. Can you guess its name? “Hope Assembly,” of course. As many as 2,000 have attended services at Hope Assembly and they have even pioneered another church. Several years later, two Christian orphanages were started in Mongolia with the names H.O.P.E. #1 and H.O.P.E. #2, each with about 15 children. H.O.P.E stands for “Homes of Peace Enterprises.” Amazing! I doubt whether all the use of the word “Hope” is a coincidence!

### **HOPE BECOMES A MISSIONS MOBILIZER**

Shortly after this, Hope gave her testimony in children’s church at Mechanicsville Christian Center. She shared how she knew God had answered her prayer through the title of the article. I had never written to our headquarters before, but I decided to write up her story and send it to the Department of Foreign Missions. They recognized her intercessory role regarding the revival in Mongolia and they published an article about Hope Smith in *Mountain Movers*, the same magazine where she saw the other two articles about Mongolia.

Before the magazine was printed, however, Joyce Booze, the editor of “*Mountain Movers*,” called me and said that I had forgotten to include Hope’s last name in the article I sent. I believe I was out of the country and unavailable when she called. Joyce was pressed for time and had to send the article on to the printer with a fictitious last name, hoping to change it later if time permitted. She inserted the name “Smith,” not knowing it was Hope’s real last name. This just served as further confirmation to me that God really did use Hope Smith to stand as an intercessor for a nation.

Later that year Hope’s story was also published in the World Edition of the “*Pentecostal Evangel*,” which is the official magazine of the Assemblies of God Movement around the world. Such interest was generated in her story that the Assemblies of God decided to feature her in a segment of their



video magazine called “Mandate.” They sent someone to our church from headquarters to tape Hope.

### **BRIDGE BUILDERS OUTREACH TEAM RECOGNIZED**

In the course of my conversations with headquarters, I shared with them that our church also had an outreach team composed of children, called Bridge Builders. At the time, Bridge Builders consisted of about 50 children with an average age of about 11. They minister in the community through the performing arts and practical service projects. The Department of Foreign Missions decided to include Bridge Builders in the “Mandate” video magazine, along with Hope’s story.

The articles and video generated many calls to headquarters from people wanting to know how to involve their children in missions and outreach. In order to respond to these requests for information, I was asked to conduct workshops at our national missions conferences and to write a book called “Mobilizing Kids for Outreach.” I was also asked to produce a video called “Mobilizing Kids for Ministry.”

### **THE GREAT COMMISSIONARY KIDS**

While all this was happening, Sandy Askew was the national director of Boys’ and Girls’ Missionary Crusade (BGMC), which is the missions education program for children in the Assemblies of God. But Sandy’s vision extended beyond the children of her denomination. In the late 90’s, about the time when Hope’s story was really circulating, the doors were finally opened for Sandy to start a new daughter ministry called The Great Commissionary Kids. This ministry is dedicated to involving kids in missions and outreach in all denominations. Although Sandy had the Great Commissionary Kids concept in her heart for many years, no one would question that Hope



made a contribution towards its birth and development.

Through the faithfulness of a nine-year-old girl praying for Mongolia, doors were opened for people to hear about how God is using kids to make a difference today. Hope actually impacted two nations; Mongolia by her intercession and America through her missions mobilizing. Isn't it just like God to use the small and weak to contribute to great movements?

### **CHILDREN WANT TO PRAY**

Within every child God has placed a desire to pray. According to Esther Ilnisky, founder and director of The Global Children's Prayer Network," it is the responsibility of parents and children's workers to release and mentor children to pray. To "release" means to "set free from restraint." For a child, restraints may include fear or just not knowing what to pray. Children tend to be egocentric in their prayers, but not selfish. Egocentric means their world is small. Their prayers are limited to pets, family and friends. It is our job to enlarge their world and also mentor children how to pray. Without this coaching, the prayers of children remain the typical bedtime prayers that never change until eventually, the desire itself to pray is lost.

### **THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

When children are properly coached, they can be even more effective than adults when they pray and intercede for others. In her book, "When Children Pray," Cheri Fuller makes the following observation: "Kids have not yet learned the caution and cynicism that too often accompanies adulthood, most children naturally possess 'big faith.' I believe that it is their wide-eyed wonder, openness, and expectation that Jesus found so endearing, that prompted Him to say that all of us should maintain those childlike qualities in our prayer lives with Him."

I have observed that the children's prayers are usually simple,