



**“Together all things are possible!”**

It was May of 2007 when my wife Chris and I decided that it might be a good time to give my children’s book author ideas another chance! I had been involved in an extensive real estate and condominium project over the past five or six years as one of the partners and was now ready to start a new chapter in my life. Especially since the bottom was falling out of the real estate

market and the area that I was working in was high priced luxury condominiums. They were the first ones being hit with the major recession and the collapse in the housing market!

I had written about twenty children’s stories back in 1999 and 2000 and actually published my first book “Kind-Hearted Pig... With Wings and a Halo” back around that same time. It was a neat story about a family of piglets, sibling rivalry, and the importance of loving your brothers and sisters. It actually circulated in all of the Walgreen stores in Wisconsin the first several months after it came out. But with four young children (Erika Faith, Chelsea Joy, Shyla Hope and Luke Thomas) it began to feel that if I were to pursue this children’s book author idea I would have to travel all over the country promoting the book, doing book signings and readings to as many people and in as many states as I could... taking me away from my family for extended periods of time! That wasn’t what I really felt like doing. I am the kind of dad that loves to watch his kids participate in everything from a soccer game or basketball playoff to a softball tournament or supervise an overnight when all their friends wanted to camp out on the living room floor!

But times had changed and there seemed to be no better time than the present to resurrect the idea of becoming that famous children’s book author that I had thought about so many years ago! Well, we set off to an author’s and illustrator’s convention in New York City over the Memorial Day weekend in 2007 with hopes of doing just that! However as things unfolded while in New York, (and especially after a tour of “Ground Zero” the site of the 9/11 disaster) a new idea began to surface in my mind. The idea that kept coming back to me involved reaching out to children in crisis situations with the gift of a children’s book to help them cope with the trauma and stress of a crisis moment.

When we returned from the trip to New York, I began to try and figure out how a person could get children’s books to kids in crisis situations just as they are happening! My youngest daughter, Shyla Hope, and I tried to drive out to a disaster site in Gays Mills, Wisconsin after it was declared a national disaster because of all the flooding that took place in that area. Well, to make a long story short, we arrived at the site of all the flooding with about three boxes of my own children’s book ready to hand out to all the children affected by the tragedy... only to find a deserted town roped off by the local police and sheriff departments. So much for that idea! On the drive home it became apparent that if we wanted to reach children at the moment of a crisis the only way we were going to do that was if we teamed up with the local police, sheriff and first responders to help us get these books into the hands of children when they needed that distraction and comfort the most... at the scene of the accident or crisis!

After a call to my local Chief of Police in Waunakee, Wisconsin I got the contact information to the chairman of the monthly Dane County Chiefs of Police Association and asked him if I could come to one of their next meetings and talk to



the members about my idea .I wanted to put children’s books into a backpack and place this backpack into every squad car or ambulance for the officers and volunteers to give out ( one book at a time) to children that they saw at the scene of an accident or fire or other domestic situation where children were involved! He was more than interested and invited me to attend their meeting in November on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the month. I confirmed that meeting date and time and was now getting excited about seeing how the first responders and police would react to the idea of giving books to children in crisis!



By the time November arrived, I had already developed the idea a bit further and started to call this program the “B.A.C.K. Packets” program, ( the acronym stands for Become A Cheerful Kid... and that is exactly what we are trying to do!). In preparation for the meeting, my wife Chris and I developed the name for our organization and registered it on August 16<sup>th</sup> of 2007 as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit under the name of “With Wings & a Halo – R.E.A.C.H. a Child, Inc.” We thought of naming it after our original book series and the R.E.A.C.H. acronym would stand for Reading Enjoyment Affects Childhood Happiness, which is one of the outcomes that we are trying to achieve from this program in the first place! Just before the 8<sup>th</sup> arrived, I invited a friend of mine , Lory Goetsch, to join me! She had written a children’s journal and had it published herself and was excited about the idea that we had come up with. She wanted to share her perspective on it with the officers as well and welcomed the chance to join me at the meeting so I wouldn’t have to go in there all by myself!

Needless to say, standing in front of a group all dressed up in blue and brass with badges and handcuffs can be a bit intimidating! However, after our ten minute presentation to the group the President of the Association, Assistant Chief Randy Gaber, stood up and said, “Paul , that is the best idea I have ever heard!! How soon can you get the program going?” I looked at Lory and she kind of gave me that ...what are we going to do now, look! I asked the president of the association when their next meeting was going to be held... only to find out that they were having their next meeting on December 13<sup>th</sup> in Mazomanie... and they were wondering if they would be able to get it launched before Christmas. My next question was, “How many squad cars and ambulances are we talking about?” Randy thought a moment and then replied, “About 350, give or take a few!” I did the quick calculations in my head and figured out that with about twelve books in each backpack we would need about 4,000 books to kick off the program! Yikes! I thought it is either now or never! So I gave them all a big thumbs up, even if I had to go and buy the books myself we were going to launch it next month!

Our prayers were answered and it now seemed that we were soon to be off and rolling with our new initiative! In fact, I remember walking into my home office when I returned from that first meeting to find the phone ringing on my desk. I answered it and was delighted to find out that the person on the other end of the line was a local woman that had read about our program in an article that was published in the local “Waunakee Tribune” that had just come out that day. She wanted to donate 500 children’s books to help us get started! Believe it or not, one of the next phone calls came from an old friend of mine that I used to work with in the Boy Scouts of America and he wanted to tell me about an organization that donates books to children! I quickly made the call to “First Book”, the organization that he was talking about, and they, too, were happy to supply us with over 3,000 books for our start up efforts! Now... to get some backpacks and volunteers to help assemble all of these “B.A.C.K. Packets”!

Fortunately for us, Lory was quick to line up half of the varsity football players from Waunakee to help stamp, sticker and stuff the backpacks! Together, we managed to assemble them all and

after several long days and hard work, we were able to load up a Penske truck with all of the 350 “B.A.C.K. Packets” and headed to the “Kick Off” meeting in Mazomanie!

During the course of getting this program up and running, I remember one time at the dinner table in our home when I first shared the idea of what we were about to involve ourselves with... to all of our children. I was telling them that things were about to change for us in quite a dramatic way! I was no longer going to be making any money starting up this non-profit organization, and as a result we were going to be simplifying our lifestyle somewhat. There wouldn't be any more of those vacations to warm places in the winter, or dining out as much anymore, and likely, we would be moving out of this home and into one that would be somewhat smaller and less expensive. When I said these words, the room became very silent. The two older girls in college offered to stop going to school and help out if that was something that might help the situation. Their selflessness in this comment nearly brought tears to my eyes! I quickly assured them that that shouldn't be necessary and I told them that I am hoping and praying that good people will help this program become what God wants this program to be... and that every day is a gift... and we will see where this path leads us!

As you likely imagined, the “Kick Off” went without a glitch and today this “B.A.C.K. Packets” program is in over 14,000 squad cars and ambulances in over 12 states and growing daily! In fact, the local police have begun to call this initiative, “The fastest growing crime prevention program in the country” because of the positive relationships that are developed between an officer and a child, through the gift of a children's book, in a time of a crisis! One officer commented to me the following, “You know Paul, these kids that we are giving books to who are 6, 7 and 8... will in ten years be 16, 17 and 18 and either running from the law or embracing it!”

Our hope is that you will want to join our efforts of expanding this initiative across America and into every squad car and ambulance in this country! We are hoping to take this initiative to the national level within the next three years and globally within the next ten! For further information on how you can help out our organization visit our website at [www.REACHaChild.org](http://www.REACHaChild.org) or contact us by email at [paul@REACHaChild.org](mailto:paul@REACHaChild.org) Together all things are possible!

Submitted By:

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