



Sylvan Sugar, 8, asked that money his friends would spend on his birthday be donated to buy gifts for children at a homeless shelter.

# Thinking of others on his 8th birthday

Oregon boy helps homeless children

By TOM HALLMAN JR.  
*The Oregonian*

As his 8th birthday approached in September, Sylvan Sugar was interested in the party, but also the gifts he expected to receive from his friends.

“He’s in the second grade and into the usual stuff,” said his mother, Christine Sugar. “He loves cars.”

But a few weeks before the party, Sylvan told his mother that he didn’t want any gifts. He said he wanted his friends to use the money they planned to spend on him to buy birthday gifts for homeless children.

When his mother asked him why, he said he remembered watching “Little Red Wagon,” a movie inspired by a Florida boy who collected supplies for those who lost their homes in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, and then later decided to help homeless children.

“Not that he doesn’t have his moments of huge selfishness at his age,” his mother said, “but he was serious about this.”

Sugar notified parents of the kids invited to her son’s party about his request. Then she began looking for a charity and found the idea of kids giving up birthday gifts to help children experiencing homelessness.

“I think it’s pretty amaz-

ing,” she said.

Sugar, 46, who lives in West Linn with her husband and their two sons, grew up in a small California town.

“I never saw any homeless,” she said. “What my kids see is so extreme, and they’re aware of it. We were in Portland and my kids saw a homeless camp where there had been a fire. It’s important that my children realize how fortunate they are.”

Her son boils it down to just a few words.

“I just wanted to do it.”

Will it be an ongoing habit?

“Hmmm. I don’t know if I’ll do it next year.”

Christine Sugar ended up receiving \$335 from parents to fulfill her son’s birthday wish. When she couldn’t find any charities in the Portland area that specifically helped with birthday parties for homeless children, she expanded her search area and found Light the Way Birthdays in Dallas.

Sandra Stewart, the founder of the charity, said she was “blown away” when she heard from Sugar. She started her small nonprofit — just her and two friends who volunteer — 18 months ago because she remembered the pain of her own childhood. She said she does it for free, paying all her fees and expenses, using any money raised just for birthday gifts and celebrations.

“I was born homeless,” she said. “My mother was

addicted to meth and my father was in prison. We were always moving. I don’t think I ever had a birthday party. It was a time of stress and struggle. My mom finally got clean when I was 16 and we moved to Oregon.”

Stewart eventually attended Linn-Benton Community College, where she earned an associate degree to be a medical assistant. Now 33, she is a supervisor in an Albany medical clinic. She also takes online classes, majoring in English and political science, at Arizona State University.

“I wanted to pay my good life forward,” she said. “I wanted to focus on birthday parties for kids. When parents are homeless, there just isn’t the energy or capacity to throw a party.”

She works with Jackson Street, an agency that works with homeless youth and has shelters in Corvallis and Albany.

“They’ve had six parties there this year,” she said.

Shelter officials contact Stewart when they know of an upcoming birthday and send her a wish list of a child living in the shelter.

“We’re shopping this Saturday for a party,” she said. “I can’t describe how it makes me feel. I reflect on my childhood.”

Stewart said Sylvan Sugar made an impact on her life.

“He fills me with hope,” she said. “He reminds me that we can all do something.”

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UWCAUH ZAIUH WS JHNVTRM  
YQNTVAYW TRCR XDTM MDA  
RITVWRD XQZO SQZ "VQMDWVJ"

WR: "VTOT, VTOWT."  
**Saturday's Cryptoquip:** WHAT COULD YOU CALL REALLY TINY BRAIDS THAT A PARENT WOULD PUT IN A BABY'S HAIR? PLAITLETS.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals H

**10-26 CRYPTOQUIP**

YS UBP CTMN TVTOXBONX  
VBIC BS UBPJ ZJTIN QHTLL  
INTQCNJL, UBP'MN ITZNO  
HNTMN BS UBPJ LNOLNYL.

**Yesterday's Cryptoquip:** LIKELY REPLY IF GYMNAST COMANEKI ASKS WHAT THE SPANISH WORD FOR "NOTHING" IS: "NADA, NADIA."  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals S

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**the Astorian**