

Parachutes of Hope

By Jan Pinborough

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When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God
(*Mosiah 2:17*).

In 1948, the children of Berlin, Germany, knew all about bombs falling from the sky. But miniature parachutes carrying candy bars? That was something new. And it was all thanks to a member of the Church who wanted to send a message of love and hope to those children.

During World War II, bombs had destroyed many homes and buildings in Berlin. After the war, the whole city looked flattened and almost deserted. Now only 2.8 million people lived in a city where 4.6 million once lived.

But now there was another terrible enemy in Berlin—hunger! The people needed about 5,000 tons of food a day, but the city had only about 100 tons. How would the people keep from starving? Several countries sent cargo planes with supplies. They brought flour, milk, dried eggs, potatoes, and other food for people to eat and coal and gasoline to keep them warm.

One of the pilots who flew a big C-54 cargo plane was an LDS young man who grew up on a farm in Utah. His name was Gail Halvorsen. He flew daily missions to Berlin.

One day on his day off, Brother Halvorsen took his movie camera to the runway where the supply planes landed every three minutes. He noticed a group of children at the end of the runway watching the planes land. He talked to them. They were so brave! And they were very grateful for the food the planes brought.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his last two pieces of chewing gum. When he gave them to the children, they broke them into tiny pieces to share. Some only got to smell the wrappers, but none of them asked for more.

Then Brother Halvorsen had a great idea. He knew Heavenly Father loved those children. He wanted them to know that they were important and that someone cared about them. He wanted them to be happy and to have hope. “Watch for me tomorrow,” he said.

“But how will we know which plane is yours?” the children wondered.

“I’ll wiggle the wings of my plane as a signal,” Brother Halvorsen promised.

That evening Brother Halvorsen bought some chocolate bars. He made parachutes out of his handkerchiefs and attached them to the chocolate.

The next day as he neared the runway with his load of food, Brother Halvorsen moved the wings of his plane up and down. Then he dropped his candy parachutes to the children watching below.

Soon Brother Halvorsen received many letters addressed to *Onkel Wackelflügel* (“Uncle Wiggly Wings”). Other

pilots started helping too. Children and adults back home donated handkerchiefs and candy.

In all, about 20 tons of candy floated down on little parachutes to the children of Berlin. And each one carried an important message. Every child is important, and each one is loved.

Brother Halvorsen is now 90 years old and has 24 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. After retiring from the United States Air Force, he served as a missionary with his wife in London, England, and St. Petersburg, Russia. Today when he gives talks about his experience, he often meets people who received his parachutes as children.

Illustration by Ben Simonsen

May I have some of your candy bar?

Hang on. I'll parachute it to you!

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