

Episode #41
 No Kid Sleeps On The Floor In Our Town: A Christmas Project
 Sparks A Second Act
 (4/22/2019)

Who	Audio Segment
Luke Mickelson	<p>I call it my Haley story. This young lady, six years old, five or six years old. Her and her mom just came out of homelessness.</p> <p>And so, of course, I walked to this house and there was nothing. And I mean nothing in the house other than...they had a milk crate, you know, with a hotplate and a can of soup on it. But this Haley was just so excited, just one of these girls that had just a beautiful smile. And she grabbed us and pulled us in her room and was showing us her...you know, her artwork that she made at school and her toys and this nest of clothes in her room, you know. And, you know, that did something to me.</p> <p>Andy: And that's the clothes is where she slept?</p> <p>And that was her nest of...that was her bed. Yeah. And I was shocked. We were all shocked. So we brought that bed in and she was...you could tell she was trying to figure it out because it was all in pieces. As we start putting it together and then she saw the mattresses, I mean, she was ecstatic. I mean, just so happy.</p> <p>But I looked over and saw the mom and that really got me, too, was here's this mom. She couldn't contain herself. This is the first bed Haley ever had...</p>
	INTRO MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST OVERVIEW
Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life and career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>I first learned about Luke Mickelson and a non-profit that he founded via the CNN Heroes Program. I immediately thought to myself "I have to interview this man." Then I found out he lives in Twin Falls, Idaho – a mere 2,369 miles away from my home in New Jersey.</p> <p>But then I found myself attending a business conference in Salt Lake City. So I rented a car and drove three hours across the wide open spaces of Utah and Idaho to the national headquarters of Sleep in Heavenly Peace.</p> <p>So what is Sleep in Heavenly Peace? It's an amazing non-profit started by Luke and his wife Heidi. Last year, the group and it's chapters across the United States built 4,144 bunk beds for children whose families can't afford a bed for them.</p> <p>That might seem like a lot of beds but here's a scary number. Sleep in Heavenly Peace estimates that between 1.5 to 2.2 million kids in America sleep on the floor each night.</p>

	Warning: you may want to grab a box of tissues to listen to this episode. Here's Luke Mickelson and the amazing story of Sleep in Heavenly Peace.
Luke	So, I grew up right here in Kimberly, Idaho and just a, you know, farm kid that worked around here. I spent most of my childhood here in Kimberly.
Andy	Did you grow up well off, poor, I mean, was it a struggle? Did you struggle?
Luke	It was struggle. You know, my real dad, he was a great guy. I mean, he was one of these guys who'll give you his shirt off his back. And I feel like I get a lot of that quality from him. But again, he's had his own struggles in life, you know, addiction and things of that nature that just ultimately ended that part of my parent's relationship. So, it was really me and my three sisters and my mom. So I was the best-dressed kid in town.
Andy	So that is the back story. So we're going to jump way ahead to 2012. Luke is 37 years old. He is still living in Idaho and raising his family.
Andy	What is life like pre-Sleep in Heavenly Peace?
Luke	You know, I thought it was great. You know, I had a great job. I had a great family. I enjoyed what I did. The people I worked with were awesome and I really liked...the beauty about what I did was I got to visit a bunch of different companies. You know, being an outside salesman and then when I came to the office and became, first, a marketing manager, and then second, vice president of sales. I really enjoyed it because I got to work salesman, I got to work with their clients and customers. So, I really enjoyed my career.
Andy	And tell me about the family side of things.
Luke	So pre-'12, before SHP started, you know, I had 3 kids. We just actually had our littlest boy, Bo. And, you know, I was coach, I did a lot of coaching, which I loved with my kids. You know, I would say we're a fairly active family with our community as far as sports and being involved.
Andy	To the outside world, everything looked terrific. But Luke was struggling with some issues.
Luke	So, when about that time, 2012, on a personal level, I really struggled with faith. You know, I was growing up in a rich religious family and my mom was a very...you know, raised the kids the best way that she could. And we were very active LDS family. You know, and I think it's just that time of your life where you, you know, kind of reevaluate. And there was a lot going on, too. It wasn't just that. It was, you know, at work I was making some big decisions on should I own the company. Is this really what I want to do for the next, you know, 30 years? And just doing some self-evaluation. But, really, I just would struggled with who I was, who I felt like, "Am I becoming a person I want to be?" You know, faith had a lot to do with that.

Andy	Was there anything that triggered that?
Luke	Not really. You know, there was just...you know, I think everybody has doubts in their mind and they sweep them under the rug and just, "I'll deal with them later," or whatnot. It just got so much to where I probably got to face it because I couldn't sweep...the rug couldn't hold anymore.
Andy	And you're sort of doing this privately?
Luke	Oh, my wife didn't even know. I mean, this is by myself and it's...that probably was my first mistake is I didn't share it with her.
Andy	So during this time of struggle, Luke is heading up a youth group at his church. It was a few weeks before Christmas and Luke had heard about a family in town that didn't have a bed for their two kids.
Luke	At first, we kinda talked about, "We'll just go buy 'em a bed," or, "Can we get one donated?" I don't know. The thought came to me. I said, "You know what? This would be a good opportunity for these boys to learn how to build a bed."
Andy	Over a couple of nights they built the first bunk bed in Luke's garage. Luke actually didn't get to deliver it to the family. He stayed behind to clean-up with a few of the younger kids. It was a few nights later that Luke was sitting at home watching tv.
Luke	Anyways, I was just sitting on the couch and kinda remember, I'm in this state of struggle, internal struggle. No one knows about it and, you know, I kept thinking, "Look, I just..." I'm searching for that feeling I had, you know, that I grew up with, that fulfillment of doing what I'm supposed to do. And I remember the thought coming to my head going, "You know what? No matter what you believe in, no matter what your religion or your entity or whatnot that you decide to believe in, right or wrong, there's one thing I did know that was right and was the right thing to do was build a bed for a kid. I mean, I don't care who you are, that's the right thing to do. And so, I mean, immediately, it was like 7:00 at night, immediately got up. My wife was cooking dinner. And I started going out the garage and she said, "Where are you going?" I said, "You know what? I'm just going to build another bed." And she says, "You're kidding me?" I said, "You know what? I just...I got to do this." And then, you know, the next couple of three days, I brought my kids out. My wife came out. We built and sanded this bed.
Andy	So Luke and his family have built this second bunk bed. But he didn't know what to do with it. So he posted about it on Facebook.
Luke	I threw it on there, I said, "Hey, look. I have this bunk bed." And I took a picture of it. I said, "You know, my family built it. It's Christmas time. We just want to give it to someone in the community that had kids sleeping on the floor." Because we didn't know anybody else, you know.

	<p>And it went out. And I fully expected every, you know, Tom, Dick, and Harry calling in saying, "Hey, you know, I need a bunk bed," or, "I need a bed," or, "I'll take it." And, really, what happened, Andy, was quite the opposite. I had more people say, "Hey, great idea. Here's some sheets. Here's some quilts. Here's some pillows and mattresses." And, "How can we help?"</p>
Andy	<p>They also heard from lots of people saying "I know a family that needs a bed." Luke, his wife Heidi and Luke's best friend since third grade, Jordan Allen, ended up delivering the bed to a single mother and her young daughter.</p>
Luke	<p>I call it my Haley story. This young lady, six years old, five or six years old. I actually can't remember, but she's just the cutest little girl. Her and her mom just came out of homelessness. They were sleeping in their car.</p> <p>And so, of course, I walked to this house and there was nothing. And I mean nothing in the house other than...they had a milk crate, you know, with a hotplate and a can of soup on it. That was what was in the house. But this Haley was just so excited, just one of these girls that had just a beautiful smile. And she grabbed us and pulled us in her room and was showing us her...you know, her artwork that she made at school and her toys and this nest of clothes in her room, you know. And, you know, that did something to me.</p>
Andy	<p>And that's the clothes is where she slept?</p>
Luke	<p>And that was her nest of...that was her bed. Yeah. And I was shocked. We were all shocked. So we brought that bed in and she was...you could tell she was trying to figure it out because it was all in pieces. As we start putting it together and then she saw the mattresses, I mean, she was ecstatic. I mean, just so happy.</p> <p>We finally got it all done. She was helping us with the drills. And it was just fun and she couldn't stop hugging us. She couldn't stop hugging the bed, kiss the bed. I mean, it was just neat deal.</p> <p>But I looked over and saw the mom and that really got me, too, was here's this mom. She couldn't contain herself. She was crying and I don't know. The thought came to me growing up as, you know, family of a single mom. You know, I could only imagine what she thought for many, many years. This is the first bed Haley ever had of...</p>
Andy	<p>I got to speak with Luke's friend Jordan Allen, who eventually became the Chairman of the SHP's Board, about that moment.</p>

Jordan Allen	<p>We gave her, her very own bunk bed.</p> <p>She latched on to that bed and hugged it. She hugged it as tight as she held us. And it was a very profound moment. I don't use the phrase life-changing very often. But it did change my life. I committed right then that this organization, which really wasn't even an organization at that time, but this cause was something that I was going to be a part of with Luke and his family. And my family latched on to that same commitment as well.</p>
Andy	<p>Luke, his wife Heidi and Jordan Allen said goodbye to Haley and her mother.</p>
Luke	<p>It was about 30 minutes away in a town about 30 minutes from my house. So, we all got in the truck.</p> <p>Anyways, we sat in the truck for I don't know how long, pretty much the whole ride home. And we really didn't say much to each other. You know, the emotion from that was still just so rich in us. And we got home and I remember telling my wife, I said, "You know what? There's not going to be a kid that sleeps on the floor in my town if I have anything to do with it.</p>
Andy	<p>Luke, his family and friends built nine more bunk beds in his garage that Christmas. And that was the start of Sleep in Heavenly Peace. "No kid sleeps on the floor in our town" remains the organization's north star.</p>
Luke	<p>Our mission statement is totally reversed. It's meant to be said by the volunteer. Because that's what it is about. It's a community helping a community or humans helping humans. It's not SHP helping you, it's this community. They've taken the SHP program to help the community they live in.</p>
Andy	<p>And I'm looking at the map behind your desk here with how many pins in them?</p>
Luke	<p>There's quite a few. It's about 150.</p>
Andy	<p>Those are the number of Sleep in Heavenly Peace Chapters around the United States. A turning point came in 2017 when "Returning the Favor," a program hosted by broadcast personality Mike Rowe profiled Sleep in Heavenly Peace.</p>
Mike Rowe from Returning the Favor	<p>So the crew and I are back on the road. Welcome to the Pacific Northwest searching America for bloody do-gooders. People who are slightly better than us, doing nice things for their community in a completely selfless way. It's pretty simple. We find them. And we meet them. And then we surprise them. I'm Mike Rowe and this is "Returning the Favor."</p>
Luke	<p>And when it aired, that's when it blew up. And we had nine plus million views. We had totaled the year, we had over 3,000 people wanting to start chapters both in this country and other countries.</p> <p>"Returning the Favor" was just a megaphone. I mean, the massive megaphone. And it went everywhere.</p>

Andy	And that's when Luke faced a difficult decision. There was a conflict between his job – which was of course how he provided for his family -- and Sleep in Heavenly Peace – which had become his passion.
Luke	<p>But 2017, it was just very clear that this was going to be...this could be something very big. And I remember it was about February of 2017, you know, I approached my employer.</p> <p>They were concerned, you know. All of this stuff I was doing in my spare time, taking vacation time to do it, stuff like that. And I was worried. I wanted to make sure I was focusing on work. And so, in February, they asked me to kind of, you know, watch that. And so, I actually tried to step back a little bit from SHP. I told Jordan, I said, "Look, I can't go to all the builds anymore. I can't do all this stuff. You know, can you take over?" And him and a couple of buddies said, "Oh, yeah. Absolutely. We got this."</p> <p>But, Andy, dude, the next six months, I couldn't...how do you stay away? It was a total passion of mine. I thought about it every single day. I'd like to say I did step back a little bit. And I don't think my work didn't suffer.</p> <p>But it really was unfair to them, you know, because it wasn't where my passion was and my heart was. And so, about November, it came back up where we needed a talk.</p> <p>And I really learned that I couldn't do SHP staying with that company. And so...</p>
Andy	Because the job was just too demanding?
Luke	It was just too demanding.
Andy	There was too much pressure from each side.
Luke	<p>Correct. Yeah. You can't serve two masters type thing. And they were big masters.</p> <p>Well, I first came home, you know, and I said, "Heidi." I said, "It's time. We need to make a decision. You know, this SHP thing is an unstoppable train. You know, the more people hear about it, the more they want to do it. I either have to say, 'Okay. We're done growing,' or we unleash the dog, if you will. But to do that, you know, I'm going to have to quit my job."</p>
Andy	I got to ask Heidi about that moment.
Heidi	Of course. It wasn't much of a discussion, it was more like...he said, "I need to decide what to do. Do I quit my job or do I pursue this charity that's growing?" And I said, "You quit your job." That was it.
Andy	It was just very apparent to you that that was what was the right thing to do?
Heidi	Yes. Exactly. At that point, we've been doing it for six years.

Luke	Yeah. Yeah.
Heidi	Six years. We had seen the growth so much just in those six years that we knew big things were going to happen. And there was no way we wanted to slow it down or stop it at all. And we couldn't let it go on without us either. He needed to be a part of it and he needed to be living the life that made him happy.
Andy	So Luke quit his job. Jordan Allen wasn't surprised the decision.
Jordan	I knew where Luke's heart was. This mission is important to me. It's a part of who I am. But it is who Luke is through and through but he was going to walk away from his job in a heartbeat if it got between him and what he needed to do to see that no kid slept on the floor in his town. So I wasn't surprised one bit.
Andy	In the short term, he sold his motorcycle and a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle to help support his family. Luke was eventually offered a new and less demanding job. The salary was about half of what he made previously. But it would allow him to focus on Sleep in Heavenly Peace. I asked him if he had any regrets about that decision.
Luke	I look at it like this. I'm so grateful for SHP for, I mean, countless reasons. But probably the biggest one was I realized my focus for success, my measurement for success before 2012, and certainly before 2017, was totally skewed. You know, I worried about how much money I made. I worried about how many toys I had. You know, all these things...you hear about your whole life that it doesn't mean anything.
Andy	So, how do you measure success today?
Luke	How many people we help, for me. And I think it's different from everybody but, you know, true joy comes from helping others. You know, once you stop looking at yourself and looked to help others, there's something that comes inside of you, or at least inside of me, I'll say, that I don't care if I have a motorcycle. And I don't care if I have the best-looking house or what have you. Because, you know what? I would much rather leave this life knowing that I helped thousands of kids or whether it's kids or animals or the ocean or whatever, that I left a footprint that made this world better.
Andy	So, big question, what does the future look like for Sleep in Heavenly Peace?
Luke	That is a big question. I'd like to say I know the answer specifically, but I what I do know is SHP will not stop growing, it can't. And, you know, 2019, we'll put on another 60 chapters. So we'll be over...pretty close to 180 chapters by the end of the year. And we're starting up Canada. We fly to Canada here in about a month to help get that position rolling and that agency rolling.

	<p>So, I see in the next 10 years, we'll be in quite a few different countries putting this program together. I mean, the whole point here, Andy, is we want to teach the community how to help itself.</p>
Andy	<p>Sleep in Heavenly Peace has been profiled by CNN Heroes, The NBC Nightly News and a bunch of other news outlets. It's a story that really grabs your heart.</p> <p>I want to leave you with Luke's parting comments from "Returning the Favor" with Mike Rowe. Standing on two bunk beds, he addressed a crowd of volunteers and supporters from the organization's new warehouse.</p>
Luke	<p>I look back at where we started in our garage. And to think about where we're at just now. I'll promise you this – it wasn't just me. SHP is bigger than one person. It always has been. It's bigger than the people who are here.</p> <p>I know that in my heart. I'm just glad that we have the opportunity to share that with more people. Cause I know that there are more people out there that are looking for ways to give back to their community. And there certainly are more kids, that you see on the walls here. There are more kids that need our help.</p> <p>We get phone calls everyday from every single state in the country of families, of moms that need help and have kids on the floor. Mike and Sarah and your crew, thanks for giving us the opportunity to get that word out. Thank you for coming today and supporting us.</p>
Mike Rowe	<p>Thank you. (applause)</p>
	<p>OUTGOING MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST CONCLUSION</p>
Andy	<p>Over the past year, I've been able to share some amazing stories. But I'm hard pressed to come up with a better one than Luke Mickelson and Sleep in Heavenly Peace.</p> <p>After delivering a bunk bed to a young girl named Haley, he was hooked. He developed a really simple guiding principle for Sleep in Heavenly Peace: "No kid sleeps on the floor in our town." And over the past six years, hundreds of other people around the United States have joined him in that mission.</p> <p>As Sleep in Heavenly Peace grew and grew, he reached a decision point: do I focus on my day job or do I focus on my passion? And with his wife and family's full support, he chose to focus on his passion. And they have no regrets.</p> <p>His experience is very consistent with others I've interviewed. Purpose is so much more important than the number of zeros at the end of your paycheck. Yes, we all have to earn a living and support ourselves and in many cases support a family. But purpose and making a difference is a powerful motivator that money can't compete with.</p>

Our special thanks to Luke Mickelson, Heidi Mickelson and Jordan Allen for taking the time to speak with me. The Sleep in Heavenly Peace story is powerful and inspiring. It was an honor to profile it for this podcast and share it with all of you.

We hope you'll keep listening. There are more second act stories just around the corner.