

These Tough Bikers Have a Huge Heart for True Religion—and Not the Clothing Brand

At 16, John Rumley bought his first motorcycle, a 1974 Harley Davidson Sportster 1000. Decades later, he's fully immersed in the biker culture and one very important thing that goes along with it—a big heart for children in need.

This Saturday, John will again join hundreds of other bikers for a special ride to the Billy Graham Library. Only this time, he won't be riding his motorcycle; he'll be driving a van packed with Operation Christmas Child shoe boxes for the library's seventh annual Bikers With Boxes charity ride.

The boxes just won't fit on his motorcycle this year.

"Bikers care a lot about children," he said.

For four years, he and his wife, Brenda, have participated in Bikers With Boxes to benefit Operation Christmas Child (OCC), a ministry of Samaritan's Purse that shares God's love with underprivileged children around the world. John has done other charity rides but said this one is a little different.

"This is gonna touch a child that's going to get to know God and know the joy that I have in my heart from following Christ," he said.

Not only are OCC shoe boxes filled with goodies, but children who receive them also hear the gospel through a kids' program called The Greatest Journey.

"We love kids, and it just breaks our heart thinking about kids that don't have anything," Brenda said. "But the one

thing we love is that they get to hear about Jesus.”

This is the seventh year the library has hosted Bikers With Boxes. When Library promotions manager Sonya Johnson started working at the library five years ago, 248 bikers were involved, contributing 573 boxes. Last year, more than 1,000 bikers filled the library parking lot and stuffed a truck with more than 2,400 shoeboxes.

“These bikers have actually taken ownership in this event,” Johnson said. “It’s taken a life of its own among the biker community. ... Everybody’s coming together to share God’s love through a shoebox.”

Bikers With Boxes draws bikers from around the region, and many have become friends over the years. But that doesn’t mean there isn’t some competition going on.

For the past two years, John and Brenda have been the top shoebox contributors, bringing in 521 boxes just last year. And they’d like to hang onto that title.

“If we can get a little friendly competition going, that’s that many more children that get to hear about Jesus,” Brenda said.

But the couple can’t do it alone. They have the support of their church—Northside Baptist in Greensboro, North Carolina—as well as friends who hear about Bikers With Boxes and want to contribute. One friend’s father, Wesley Goodson, always came out to support the event but passed away earlier this year at the age of 91.

It’s not just the support that brings in all the boxes, either; it’s the planning. The Rumleys’ church starts collecting shoebox items—from toothbrushes to coloring books—as early as January, and kids in Vacation Bible School help raise money. Women in the church knit and crochet hats and scarves to include in the boxes.

So where do shoeboxes stuffed with kids' items fit into the mission of the Billy Graham Library?

While the library exists as an ongoing crusade to share the gospel, library Vice President Tom Phillips said another big part of Billy Graham's ministry has always been compassion. Bikers With Boxes allows people around the region to share both with children around the world.

It's also a chance for bikers to share the experience with non-Christian friends, Phillips said. Many who attend take the library's Journey of Faith tour, which shows how God used Billy Graham to tell the world about Christ.

And that's what it's all about, Brenda said—telling the world about Christ. One of her favorite parts of Bikers With Boxes is hearing testimonies from those who received a shoebox and how Christ has impacted their lives. She prays each box collected Saturday will impact even more lives, and from the stacks of boxes already packed, it seems that's well within reach.

"We have so many boxes to bring, we have to bring our church van," she said.

The Impact of Operation Christmas Child

This year, Izabella McMillon will help emcee Bikers With Boxes.

McMillon, who grew up in Romania, received a shoe box at 13 years old, at a time when Romania's communist regime wouldn't allow the spreading of the gospel and attending church could have brought a death sentence. Today, McMillon teaches at a Christian school in Durham, North Carolina, and works for Operation Christmas Child.

Alex Nsengimana will also share his story Saturday. As a child, Nsengimana witnessed the horrors of genocide in Rwanda

when his caregivers were killed and he fled for his life.

It was at an orphanage that Alex received a shoe box and was excited to have something of his own. He was later selected to tour with the African Children's Choir and now lives in North Carolina as a college graduate. In 2013, he returned to Rwanda to hand deliver shoeboxes at the orphanage where he received a box years before.

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