

Everything's Jake

By Michael Danese

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You know Jake Brophy. He was the most popular kid in your school. He was always picked first when choosing up sides, that is, of course if he wasn't doing the picking, which he usually was. He was the star of Little League -- the best pitcher *and* hitter. He was the quarterback and captain of his high school football team. He only dated cheerleaders, because he could.

Jake was tall with wavy blond hair and dimples deep enough to park a Buick. Girls described his bright blue eyes as "dreamy."

From the time he was a baby he was the center of attention.

"Yes, the world revolves around Jake!" his mother liked to say.

In reality, the world really revolved around his father, John. Jake's life is almost a clone of John's, down to the blue eyes and dimples.

After high school, the homecoming king enlisted and fought in the war. As you probably guessed, he emerged a hero, wounded saving his unit. The story made national news. The enemy had his unit pinned down in a ravine. They slowly advanced until they were almost close enough to pick off each of the men at will. Corporal Brophy crawled away through the brush and was able to elude the enemy forces. He quickly circled around and attacked them from behind, causing all kinds of confusion. His men were able to return fire and fight them off, killing most of them before their retreat. Brophy was shot in the thigh and the shoulder, but he kept on fighting. When he woke up he was in a MASH unit bed with doctors and (especially) nurses surrounding him.

After he was discharged he was greeted by a parade in his hometown. Soon he received a Purple Heart and a special commendation.

Shortly after the ceremony he ran into Janice, his high school sweetheart. The former cheerleader was tall and athletic. Her long blond hair and blue eyes made them a perfect match.

"Congratulations," she said, shyly.

"Thanks, but this is all a bit embarrassing. I was just doing my job. Any of the guys in my unit woulda done the same."

"Maybe, but you did it and saved so many lives!" she gushed.

"You wanna get a coffee or something?" he asked in an aw-shucks way.

"Sure, how about Pop's? We spent a lotta time there a few summers ago," she said.

"Pop's it is!" he agreed.

They got comfortable in a booth and ordered pie and coffee.

"So, what are you doing? I heard you became a teacher," he said.

"Yes, kindergarten. I'm living my dream," she said.

“Ah, yes, I remember! I could see you smiling in front of a group of inquisitive eyes!” he said.

One thing led to another and soon they were engaged, then married. People joked that they looked like a walking ad for Polo. The wedding made the front page of the paper and everyone wished them well.

The next year baby Jake was born to more fanfare than the Royal Wedding. John worked in a car dealership where he was the star salesman. He did well enough that Janice was able to quit her job to stay home with the baby, but she vowed to return to the classroom as soon as she could.

When Jake was three the war was still raging, and John heard news that two in his former unit were killed. He decided that his county needed him again, so he reenlisted. Janice was heartbroken, but supported his decision. John was able to join his old unit at his request and was deployed to Iraq. He wasn't so lucky this time. As his unit was traveling through a remote desert area, his Humvee hit a landmine and he was killed, along with several soldiers under his command.

There was widespread mourning, but this was also the turning point in Jake's life. You might say that this was the moment that *he* became the center of the universe. People began paying extra attention to the boy. As he grew, his group of friends increased. His mom was always busy hosting play dates or bringing him to a friend's house.

Part of Jake's attraction was that, like his father, he was a genuinely nice guy. He was a caring friend and fun to be with. And why not? Anyone would be if everything always went their way. And everything always did. Jake's favorite songs were always on the radio. His favorite professional teams always seemed to win. His favorite types of movies were always playing. The funny thing was that, like in his father's time, no one seemed to think this was even a little bit strange.

After high school Jake landed a scholarship to a small college not far from his hometown. Several of his friends also went there, which made the transition easy. As you could imagine, every fraternity wanted Jake to join. He eventually picked one of the smaller ones and was instantly comfortable there.

In fact, the party never really started until Jake strolled in. From the corners of the rooms you could hear guys and girls saying, “Broph's here! Broph's here!” Soon the party would be in high gear. The festivities would proceed until Jake eventually decided which girl he would thrill that night. When he slipped out, the party would deflate like a punctured tire, and eventually go flat.

The fact of the matter was that the world really *did* revolve around Jake. If you were to see a live satellite view of the world, you would see a circle of about two miles across, with Jake's location in the center. Outside the circle, in all directions, the globe is a murky gray. As Jake moves, so does the circle. If Jake is driving, cars materialize on the road coming towards him. After about a mile, they vaporize. The only people that exist are the ones that are around Jake.

If Jake goes to a baseball game, the stadium is filled with cheering people. The parking lot is filled with cars. When Jake leaves, they all cease to exist. The same is true for the movie theaters, supermarkets and classrooms.

Of course, Jake has no idea of this, nor does anyone else. It is just the reality that we live in. When Jake's dad died, his reign ended, and Jake became the center.

Jake continued to enjoy his college years. He majored in business, and good grades came easy to him, as you can imagine. The football team always did well, thanks to Jake, and in his senior year they won the championship. You can guess who the MVP was.

It was around this time that Jake began to get involved with Joann. She seemed to be very much his equal. She was a cheerleader, of course. She was also the captain of the debate team. She was almost as tall as Jake, with long brown hair and green eyes. To Jake, who was smitten for the first time in his life, he believed that she was the center of the universe, and for him, she was.

They were married in the chapel at the university the weekend after graduation. They had a large wedding party, consisting of football players and cheerleaders. The photographer even gave them a large discount in exchange for permission to use the wedding photos as a sample of a perfect and beautiful wedding.

They settled down in Jake's hometown. Soon Jake began a job as an accountant at a local manufacturing company. It wasn't long before he was promoted. He enjoyed the occasional travel around the country and to Europe. The two-mile circle followed wherever he went. As he flew, it looked like a large spotlight crossing the globe. The planet would go from gray to rich greens or browns as he flew over the land, then deep blue over water.

Joann worked as a pharmacist at the drug store in town. She was involved in the downtown revitalization organization and worked hard to improve the town. Of course, when Jake was away, the town didn't exit.

Two years later, Joann became pregnant. Jake was overwhelmed with joy. When little Jeff was born, Jake felt complete, as if his destiny had been fulfilled. He spent every free minute with his son. He even commented how Jeff was the center of *his* universe. From time to time he called him Mini Me, because of his blond hair, blue eyes and dimples.

Jake didn't like to travel so much because he didn't like to be away from his family. But, sometimes he just couldn't avoid it. Luckily, this time it was only a short, three-day trip. Jake finished packing and kissed Joann. Then he went over and lifted Jeff above his head. Joann joked that his head looked like another of the birthday balloons that were hovering at the ceiling after Jeff's third birthday the day before. Jake hugged and kissed his son and promised to bring something home for him.

He put his carry-on in the trunk and pulled away. He glanced in the rearview mirror and caught a wave from Joann and Jeff.

Jake entered the highway and was singing along with the radio. He looked down to turn up the volume, and when he looked up there was a truck coming straight at him. He didn't have time to react as the truck pulverized him.

The entire town turned out for the funeral. The newspaper told Jake's life story, even going back to discuss his hero father, John.

As you guessed, Jeff became the center of the universe and the spotlight hovered around him.

Does this seem farfetched to you? Think about it. Do you even actually exist when you sleep? We mark time with clocks, but what if time simply stands still? How do you know what is *really* happening two miles away from you right now?

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