



Kevin Frank's new cartoon strip, *Heaven's Love Thrift Shop*, is a heartfelt homage to Christian thrift stores.

There's a new star in the funny pages, and he's not your run-of-the-mill comic character. As Dag sits on a crowded bus, he loudly professes God's love on a cellphone. His most recent blog entry promotes a theology of recycling. And he wants to tattoo "What Would Jesus Do?" on his arm because wristbands are *so* temporary.

Dag is part of the staff of Heaven's Love, a charitable thrift shop that supports outreach efforts including a soup kitchen and a homeless shelter.

*Heaven's Love Thrift Shop* is the brainchild of Kevin Frank. Born and bred in Peoria, Ill., Kevin moved to Chicago in his early 20s, where he worked as a graphic artist for the publishing department of an inner-city mission organization. "I also helped out in the soup kitchen, shelter and thrift store," Kevin says. Along the way, he met Katherine, a Canadian girl who was working in the soup kitchen. They married, had children and eventually moved to Canada, where Kevin plied his trade as an illustrator and cartoonist.

Kevin had been working on the concept of a Christian comic strip for 10 years but it never seemed to gel until he thought of basing it on his own experience and setting it in a thrift shop. "It gives me a chance to say the things that I want to say about faith," says Kevin. "*Heaven's Love* is about Christians at their best, doing something good and glorifying God. It took 10 years, but it finally clicked."

As part of the King Features Syndicate, *Heaven's Love Thrift Shop* is published in more than two dozen newspapers in the United States and Canada, with a combined readership of over 25 million people. And the numbers are growing, so much so that the *New York Times* recently included *Heaven's Love* as part of a larger article on "Faith and the Funny Pages."

*Faith & Friends* interviewed Kevin at his home in Lindsay, Ont.:

### **How long have you been a cartoonist?**

I've been drawing cartoons my whole life — ever since I first picked up a pencil. It wasn't until someone explained to me that cartooning was a unique discipline that I thought, "This is what I want to do professionally."

### **What are your influences?**

*Peanuts* has been my favourite cartoon strip since I was a boy. In fact, I have an original hanging on my wall that Charles M. Schulz sent me before he died.

### **What is the secret of *Peanuts*' enduring appeal? Is this something you're trying to do in your own strip?**

In my dreams! (laughs) Charles Schulz was a person of faith, so for me, as a Christian and as a cartoonist, *Peanuts* is the gold standard. Schultz was able to imbue it with both humour and Christian truth. And he was ahead of his time. If you look at, say, the Charlie Brown Christmas special, the heart of it is Linus quoting from the Gospel. He did that 40 years ago! My goal has always been to somehow follow in the trail he blazed.

### **What are your favourite strips now?**

I love *Zits* and *Adam@Home*. Having been a teenager and now being the parent of a teenager, I can laugh at *Zits* from both directions. And Adam reminds me of myself: He works at home, he loves coffee, he's got a pot belly. (laughs)

### **Why did you base your strip on a thrift shop?**

There's something about the idea of recycling that speaks to me as a Christian. That's the underlying theme of the whole strip. It's not just about recycling clothes, it's about giving people a second chance, too. The thrift store takes cast-off goods that are about to be thrown onto the trash heap. They're rescued, cleaned up and made useful again. And that's what being a Christian is all about, how a person can be redeemed, made new again, through God.

### What is your experience of Salvation Army thrift shops?

I'm a huge fan! Where I live in Lindsay, there's one on the main street. There's another close by in Fenelon Falls that's simply spectacular. So, yeah, I'm well-acquainted with Salvation Army thrift shops. You might even call me a connoisseur! (laughs)

### Do you believe you're doing God's work?

Absolutely. I see it as a ministry. Basically, the gift I was given is drawing cartoons. It's a reflection of who I am as a person of faith. I naturally write about what I know, what's important to me.

### What are your hopes for the cartoon strip?

My goals are simple. I want people who pick up a newspaper and be reminded that there is a God who loves them. I'm not trying to do anything controversial. My strip is more about community and relationships, how people work with each other and serve God in their day-to-day lives.

by *Ken Ramstead*

To learn more about Kevin Frank, Heaven's Love Thrift Shop and his other creations, visit him online [www.kevinfrank.net](http://www.kevinfrank.net)

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