



A Story Of
CHILDHOOD GOALS
AND AN ABSOLUTE BELIEF TO MAKE THEM HAPPEN!

meet your neighbors

Photos by Emily Tull Pollakowski and Aaliya Khanna

Prior to meeting Jake, I already had some brief knowledge of his achievements in both the acting and equestrian worlds, but I was still taken aback when we first met, as Jake simply lit up the room. I found Jake to be mature beyond his years, commanding, surprisingly eloquent, confident, extremely polite, and above all, very humble.

Jake has had incredible opportunities and achievements, while still having to overcome some significant obstacles, but we are getting ahead of ourselves. Here is his story...

JAKE'S AMBITION at 9 YEARS OLD

Jake was born in Australia, moving to New York City in 2010 when Jake was 5. The story really begins with the ease at which Jake was accepted into the highly competitive and oversubscribed kindergarten intake at Ethical Culture on the upper West side; it was clear then that Jake knew how to impress.

Jake's father tells the story of how in the summer of 2014, when Jake was just 9, they were sitting at the Lake Isle Eastchester public swimming pool, when Jake turned to him and said, "I'm going to be a star on Broadway!" Gary reminisces, Jake didn't say, "I want to be on Broadway" but rather "I'm **going to be** on Broadway."

The difference in use of "want" versus "going" to do something is the difference between a dream versus an objective. Gary himself had always been taught that you can achieve "whatever you set your mind to" so he said, "Okay let's do it" Having no idea what was entailed.

BROADWAY

Jake had shown an aptitude for acting and had a few acting classes in the summer, as well as some dance lessons while in Australia at 4 and 5 years old, but he didn't have any formal training and had never had a singing lesson. **But Broadway!** This was a leap, to say the least, and Jake would be competing against very seasoned 8, 9 and 10-year olds who already had years of training – kids with singing coaches, vocal coaches, acting coaches, dance lessons and most importantly, had résumés of performances or at a minimum could show the enormous amount of training they were doing under the guidance of well-regarded Broadway coaches and instructors.

Jake was undeterred and secured his first role a couple of months later that same year, in the regional production of the highly acclaimed Broadway musical *Nine* (winner of five Tony Awards,



including Best Musical). *Nine* is a semi-autobiography of Federico Fellini. Jake played Young Guido (young "Fellini") a Principal Role.

Jake was a hit! The director of *Nine* said Jake was "the cherry on top!"




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The Director was also extremely impressed with Jake’s performance and stage presence, so Gary pushed to get Jake auditions for several Broadway musical productions. Once again, Jake impressed the casting agents and directors, getting down to the number two choice for a principal role in both *Kinky Boots* and *Newsies*.

In about November of 2014, Jake started taking singing lessons with coach Amelia Demayo and, just three months later, Jake auditioned and was hired for the role of Theo (Principal Role) in *PIPPIN* – Production; First National and International Tour (USA, Japan, Netherlands).

I asked Gary what his reaction was. “If I had known then what I learned over the year touring with *PIPPIN* in terms of the meniscal odds of landing a role in a Broadway musical, I may have unwittingly tempered Jake’s belief or made him nervous for his auditions. Casting agents receive hundreds of resumes for a single role, so there’s an element of luck and genetics even getting chosen to audition. By this, I mean having ‘the look’ (ignoring the talent) that a casting agent is looking for or that inspires them to ‘give the kid a shot.’ The auditioning process is hell! You really need to be in the top 5% to stand a chance of securing a role. Putting preparation, training and talent to one side, an actor needs an element of good fortune, divine intervention – whatever you want to call it – to be chosen over the other equally talented actors.”

It seems that Jake’s self-belief that he could do it made the difference!

EQUESTRIAN SPORT

Jake started riding horses when he was just 7 years old. He started riding at Twin Lakes Farm in Eastchester and rode with them for about seven years. Jake says, “I must thank everyone at Twin Lakes for the foundation they gave me and how they fostered my love of horses and jumping.”

Gary knew that Jake was going to continue riding after the following incident: He was competing in a local show when he was about 8, on a horse named Greta. With Jake on her, Greta had a heart attack and collapsed with a huge thud. She hit the ground in the same manner that a person does when they faint. Luckily, she threw Jake off first. Greta was revived and taken back to her stall but unfortunately died later that night. Jake was asked if he’d like to continue. Gary was sure that he was going to say “no way,” and that would be the end of riding. Instead Jake said “sure,” so they got him another horse, saddled up and Jake finished the show. Jake has nerves of steel.

At the end of 2019, Gary asked Jake what his goals were for horse-riding and said that if Jake wanted to continue in any serious manner, they should research trainers who could meet his objectives. Jake said, “I want to compete in the Olympics.” Again, Gary said, “Okay, let’s do it,” once again having no idea what was entailed.



Given what Jake had said about Broadway and what he had achieved, Gary had to say “okay,” and began his research. Long story short, they ended up at Enrite Farm under the very capable, guidance and training of Nicole Wright and her daughter, the extremely talented professional rider and trainer Jenny Wright.

Jake is currently competing at high children’s level of 1.10 m but has jumped at 1.30 m in training. The Olympics is set at 1.65 m. This winter Jake is competing in Wellington, FL, at WEF, where some of the best riders from all over the U.S. and Europe come to compete from January through April every year. Jake has been



ranking in the top 10 in his competitions to date. The plan is Los Angeles, 2028!

RELIGION AND LIFE AT HOME

“Even though I never attended a Jewish day school I’ve been raised in the orthodox tradition, and we keep Kosher at home. It was a bit of a change moving from the upper West side to Bronxville and finding a complete lack of Jewish community and very few other Jewish kids at school. I invited the entire grade to my bar mitzvah, and we had a blast!” Gary tells a funny story, “When Jake was just 6 years old, we were walking down Madison Avenue looking at the stores and we wandered into a jewelry

store. While I was looking for a gift, Jake wandered off and looked at some of the jewelry by himself. A young sales attendant asked Jake if he saw anything that he liked and he asked to see a particular silver chain and ‘pendant.’ The young sales attendant asked Jake if he wanted to try it on, which he did. A couple of minutes later Jake came over to me wearing the necklace, which was a Star of David on a silver chain. He hasn’t taken off that necklace since!”

Jake is proud of his heritage.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

When the Bermans moved to Bronxville in 2012 there was no synagogue or any Jewish services offered in the immediate area. Gary got involved with a young Rabbi and his wife, who had also moved to Bronxville about the same time and set up the Chabad of Bronxville. Jake has become actively involved in helping this community grow and took a substantial portion of his bar mitzvah gift money and donated it to Chabad of Bronxville to be used towards the writing of a new Torah, which was completed in 2015.

In 2021 Jake became an ambassador for *LifeTown*. *LifeTown* is a 53,000 square foot facility, offering a myriad of opportunities for recreation, education and therapeutic play aimed at providing a comprehensive slate of programming for individuals with disabilities and their families. Jake was asked to star in a marketing video and made

“I Am” (music video) as the main vocals and guest appearance ambassador.

CTeen is the worldwide teenage arm of Chabad and Jake performed for 5,000 teenagers from countries all around the world with the Israeli pop sensation Yaakov Shwekey. Jake also performed at the Barclays Center in 2018 during a Brooklyn Nets Game for a *Cteen* Hannukah event.

COLLEGE

I asked Jake what his initial thoughts were regarding college. “Firstly, the entire process is so unnecessarily stressful, but it is what it is. Like everyone else, I have about 15 colleges on my list. I’m planning to get my Bachelor’s degree with two majors, Acting and Business. If I had to provide a top of the list wish list, it would be Harvard, Yale, UCLA, USC, University of Miami, Northwestern, University of Michigan and many more.”

Lastly, I asked Jake if he had just one mantra to live by, what would it be? To which he replied, “With regard to goals we set ourselves, if you truly believe it’s possible, if you can actually see it happening and if you are prepared to commit yourself to train, train and train some more to achieve these goals, anything is achievable. **JUST BELIEVE!**”