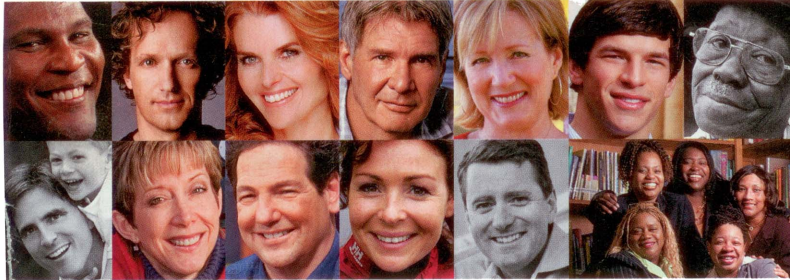


Reader's Digest

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35 PEOPLE WHO INSPIRE US



BEST OF AMERICA SPECIAL ISSUE

BEST of America

The biggest hearts, the brightest ideas—the best of the bunch



What makes America great? Let us count the ways. We're dreamers and doers. We see solutions as easily as problems.



Best Caregiver

When her son André was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, Valerie Sobel (left, with André in August 1991) says she “felt like the most unfortunate woman on the planet.” But the Los Angeles-based interior designer realized she was lucky compared with some of the other parents she’d met at the hospital during her son’s treatment. Single moms and dads often had to choose between staying to comfort a sick child or going off to work to pay the bills. After her son passed away in 1995, at

> “Valerie Sobel is an angel,” explains cancer survivor Oscar Diaz, 19. “She made sure I had my mom.”

age 19, and her grief-stricken husband committed suicide the following year, Sobel made it a personal mission to assist the most vulnerable families. The André Sobel River of Life Foundation provides grant money to single caregivers of seriously ill children at 12 U.S. hospitals, covering everything from rent and mortgage payments to wigs for cancer patients. The program has now given **\$4 million**.

