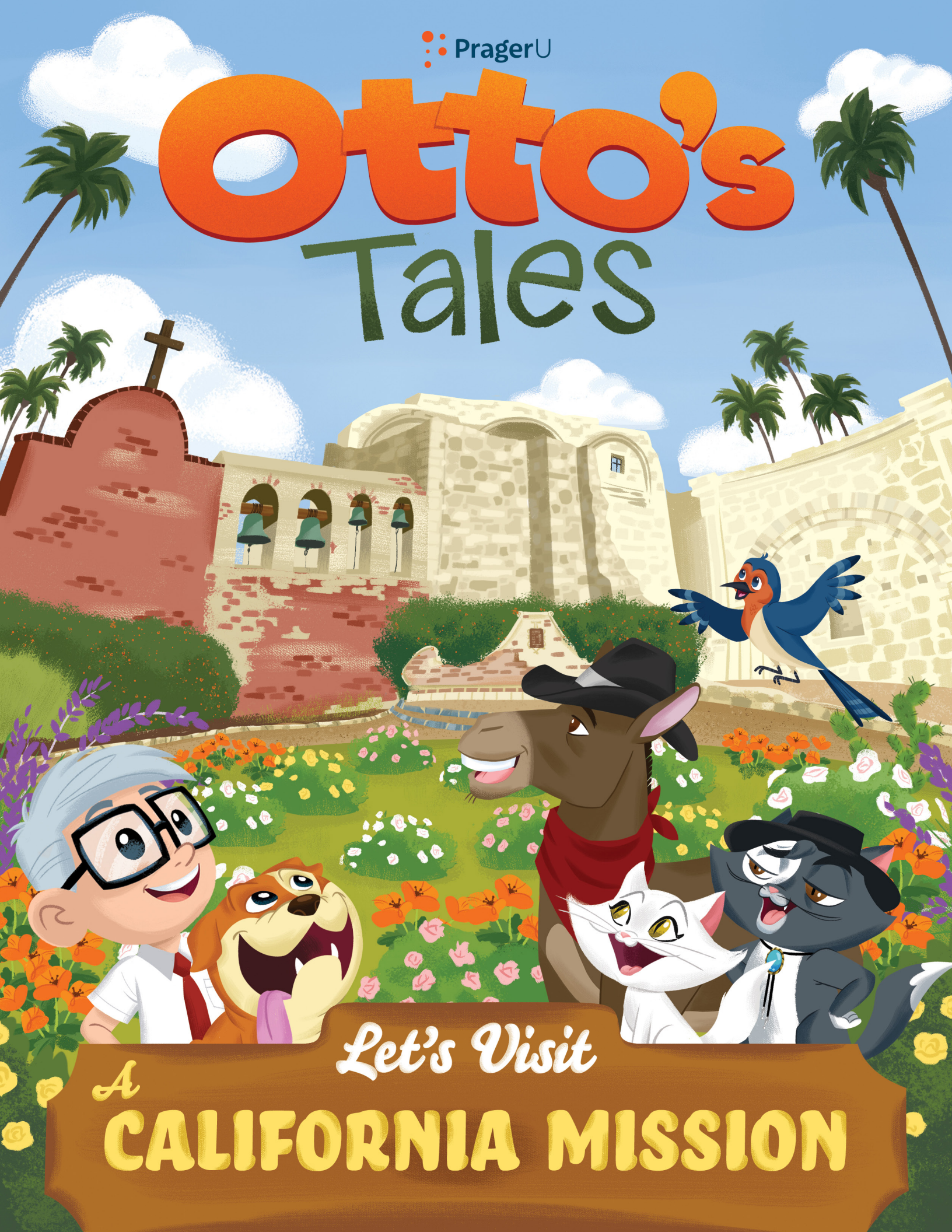


# Otto's Tales



*Let's Visit*

*A*

**CALIFORNIA MISSION**

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# Otto's Tales

*Let's Visit*  
**A  
CALIFORNIA MISSION**



**“Ruff Ruff!”** Otto barked out the window, as the mail truck arrived.

Dennis looked up from his reading. “I wonder if my books are coming today.”





At the door, a small, fluffy white kitten was waiting for them, clutching a colorful postcard.

“You’re not the mailman!” Otto exclaimed.

Smidge laughed. “No, but I bet my mail is more exciting.”

Dennis and Otto peered closer as the kitten proudly showed them what was in her paws.



“My cousin is visiting **Hollywood, California**, and she’s having a blast!” Smidge’s eyes sparkled. “Her favorite spots are Malibu Beach, Beverly Hills, and the Hollywood sign. I’m dying to see those famous sites. Want to come with me?”



“Sorry, Smidge.”  
Dennis shook his head. “I’m working on an important Bible commentary, and I have more reading and writing to do.”



She pleaded to Otto. “Will you come? Pretty please??”

“Okay, Smidge, but you have to promise not to get **starstruck**. Just because these places are famous, doesn’t mean they’re that important.”

“I promise,” she agreed. “Off to the airport!”



**CRUNCH, CRUNCH!** On the plane, Smidge finished a tiny bag of peanuts. “Why did I leave all my usual snacks in the checked luggage? I’m still hungry!”



Otto nudged her to look out the window. “We’re almost there.”

As they landed, the flight attendant announced, “Welcome to John Wayne Airport in Orange County, California.”

“Orange County?? We’re supposed to be in Los Angeles!” Smidge panicked.

Otto checked their tickets. “I think we got on the wrong plane.”

“What about our glamorous adventure? What about Malibu?!” Smidge cried.

“We’ll find our way,” the bulldog assured her.

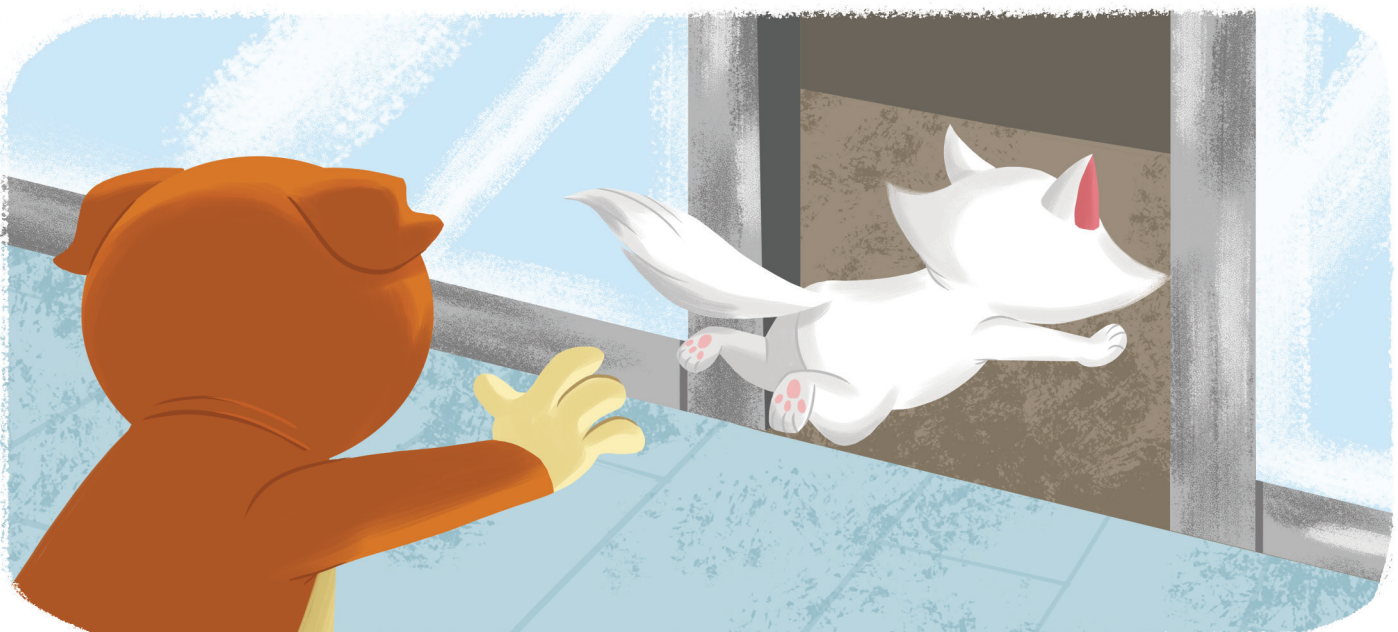




At the baggage claim, their bags weren't there. "Umm, Smidge," Otto winced, "I think our bags made it to L.A. without us."

"What are we going to do?" Smidge paced. "No snacks, no bathing suit, no beach towels..."

The kitten barged outside. "Wait, Smidge!" Otto ran after her.





She nearly collided with a large, brown mule pulling a cart.

“Woah, take ‘er easy there,” brayed the mule. “Mr. Wayne, California tour guide at your service...but my friends call me Duke. Where ya headed?”

“Los Angeles,” Smidge declared. “My cousin told me about all the famous spots to visit.”

Duke’s head tilted. “Did your cousin tell you about the **California missions?**”

“What’s a mission?” Otto asked.

Duke cleared his throat. “The missions are famous! Spanish **missionaries** created these communities when they first arrived in California hundreds of years ago. They’ve shaped California’s culture, the names of our cities, our food, and more.”



“If these missions are such a big deal, why aren’t they as famous as Hollywood?” Smidge asked.

“A lot of important people and events from history have been forgotten,” Duke said, “and a lot of other things become famous for no good reason at all.”





Otto and Smidge jumped into the mule's cart. "Well, we love learning about *all* kinds of history," the bulldog barked. "Could you take us to this mission?"

"Sure thing." Duke smiled.

Smidge wrinkled her nose. "Will there be snacks or a beach?"

"You'll see," Duke nodded.

“I take this route every day,” Duke shared. “It’s called **El Camino Real**, which means ‘The Royal Road.’ It connects all the missions in the state. In the 1800s, it was a support system for people traveling. It provided shelter and a way to communicate with others.”

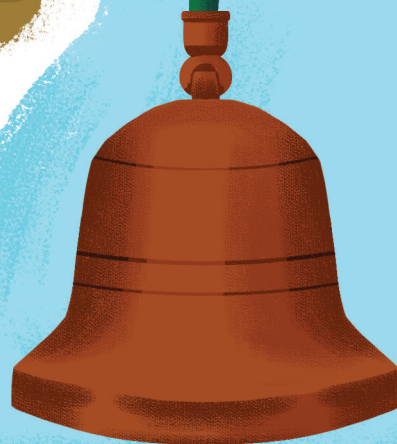


“All? How many missions are there?” Otto asked.

“Twenty-one. They’re spread out along the coast of California, and you can tell you’re on the original road when you see a special bell marker,” Duke explained.



Smidge pointed ahead. “I see one!” Duke smiled as they passed the metal bell. “Almost there.”





The wagon creaked to a stop in front of a tan building with a sign on it that read: **Mission San Juan Capistrano**. *Founded November 1, 1776.*



“Hey, this place was founded the same year as America’s birthday!” Otto exclaimed.

The two friends leapt from the wagon and waved goodbye to Duke. Above the wooden doors at the entrance, a sleek, muscular cat was humming while cleaning the arch.



“Hola, travelers,” he purred, sliding down with ease.

“Welcome. My name is Juan Catriano, grounds manager of this mission.”

“I’m Smidge.” The kitten beamed and smoothed down her fur. “You have a fabulous name, Juan.”

“Gracias. It comes from San Juan, or **Saint John of Capistrano**, the saint they named this mission after. Who’s your friend?”

“I’m Otto!” the bulldog barked.

“Nice to meet you.”

“Right this way, amigos.” Juan invited them through the doors. “This mission is known as the ‘Jewel of the Missions,’ and you’ll see why.” He led them into a building with a small chapel.

Smidge eagerly followed their handsome and charming guide.



“Welcome to **Serra Chapel**,” Juan announced.

Otto marveled at the beautiful religious artwork, but Smidge couldn't take her eyes off Juan.





**“Father Junipero Serra** founded this mission, with the goal of spreading Christianity to the Native Americans here,” Juan explained, pointing to a figure on the golden artwork. “He and his fellow padres, or fathers, taught the Natives about God, farming, building, and many other important skills for everyday life.”

Smidge fiddled with her whiskers. “You’re so smart...” Before anyone noticed her blushing, she blurted out, “I like farming! And...food! Can you tell me more about that?”



Juan smiled and took her by the arm. "I have a whole storeroom full of fruits and vegetables grown here. Let me show you."

"Mmm, snacks," Smidge purred.



"What about the tour?" Otto called, sadly watching the kitten skip away with her new friend. He was left all alone.





Otto trudged out of the chapel and plopped onto the ground in a quiet courtyard.

**WHOOSH!** A flock of birds whisked through the air—startling Otto. A single bird peeled away from the group.



“Hi, I’m Señor Serra,” the small swallow bird tweeted. “What are you doing over here all by yourself?”

“I’m Otto,” the bulldog answered. “My friend Smidge went off without me.”

“I’m sorry, amigo. She’ll be back, I’m sure. When I’m lonely, I find great friends in books,” the swallow revealed.

“Books!” Otto’s eyes came to life. “I love to read! So does my friend Dennis. He reads the Bible a lot.”



“I’ve come across many Bibles,” Señor Serra said excitedly. “The mission has many books. The padres taught the Native Americans their Christian religion, language, and even how to read and play musical instruments.”

“Learning new things is always exciting. Reading gives us knowledge about the world,” the bulldog shared. “Missions must have been important places for learning.”

“Yes, they were!” the swallow chirped.





***DING DONG!*** Otto's ears rang.

"Dinnertime!" sang Smidge.

Otto bounded toward his friend. "Where have you been?"

The kitten led him and Señor Serra to the ruins of a great building where a feast of fresh food awaited them.

"Please, enjoy this meal in our **Great Stone Church!**" Juan invited.

Otto whispered to Smidge, "I thought you forgot about me earlier."  
"No way!" she exclaimed.



Juan leaned forward. "Your friend wanted to make something special just for you, Otto."

Smidge beamed and presented her dish. "A cornbread bone!"

"Wow!" Otto's tongue hung out of his mouth. "I'm sorry I don't have anything for you."

Señor Serra fluttered his wings. "Hold on, I have something..." He swooped away, and when he returned, a small book was tucked under his wing.

Otto and Smidge studied the cover. "A recipe book!"

"You can take a taste of the mission home with you." Juan winked.

"Thank you!" Smidge said, grasping the gift.

Otto nudged the kitten. "Are you sure you don't want to go to Malibu anymore?"

"Nope. I'm happy right here," she assured him.



With their bellies full, Otto and Smidge bid goodbye to their new friends.

“Please visit again soon.”

Juan politely kissed Smidge’s paw.

The kitten giggled and followed Otto back to El Camino Real.



“You know you have crumbs in your whiskers, right?” He pointed, amused.

“WHAT?!” The kitten wiped her face frantically.

Otto chuckled. “Let’s go home, Saint Smidge of Crumbs.”



Dennis welcomed the friends home. "How was California?"



"We ended up at a California mission in San Juan Capistrano, and it turned out to be a beautiful place with a rich history. We had the best tour guide named Juan!" Smidge's eyes sparkled.

Otto wagged his tail. "I made a new friend too. I also learned that the missions taught important life skills while bringing many people to believe in God."



“So, it wasn’t quite the Hollywood experience you were expecting.” Dennis said.

Smidge shook her head. “No, but it helped me see that there’s more to California than famous stars and beaches.”

“That was my favorite adventure yet!” Otto howled.

“You say that every time, Otto.” Smidge rolled her eyes and opened her recipe book. “Now, who’s hungry?”

**“Ruff Ruff!”**





## We Love Our History

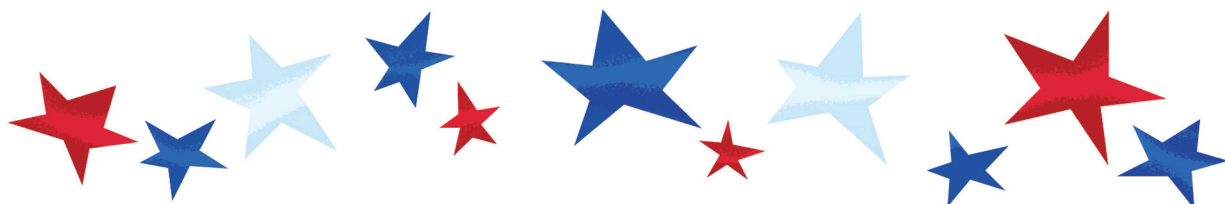
**Hollywood, California:** A neighborhood located in Los Angeles, California. It's also synonymous with the glamor, power, and money of the entertainment industry.

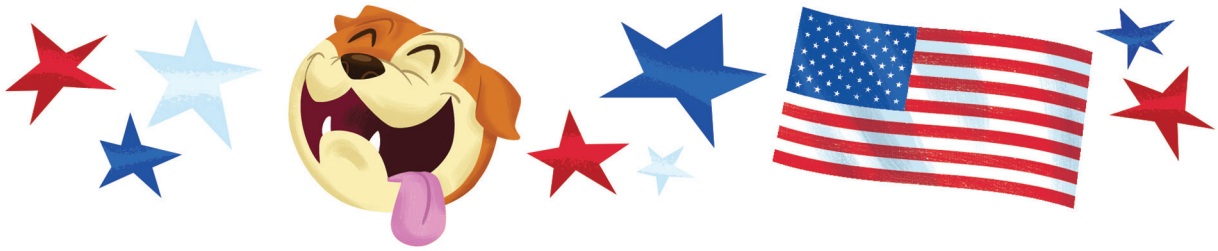
**Starstruck:** Fascinated or impressed by famous people, particularly celebrities associated with the entertainment industry.

**The California Missions:** A series of 21 religious outposts or missions established along the coast of California. They were built from 1769 to 1833. The goal of the missions was to settle the territory that is now the state of California and spread Christianity to the Native Americans in the region.

**Missionary:** A person who travels to a foreign country on a religious mission, typically to do charitable work or convert people to their faith.

**El Camino Real:** Also known as "The Royal Road," this historic route connects the 21 missions established in California. The road is over 600 miles long, stretching from San Diego in the south to Sonoma in the north. Historic marker bells can be found along the route.





**Mission San Juan Capistrano:** The seventh mission founded by Junipero Serra with the goal of settling the territory and spreading Christianity to the Native Americans. This mission is considered the “Birthplace of Orange County” and the “Jewel of the California Missions.”

**Saint John of Capistrano:** The saint that the mission at San Juan Capistrano is named after. Saint John was a Franciscan friar from Italy who led a crusade against the Ottoman Empire in the 1450s. He is the patron saint of jurists and military chaplains.

**Serra Chapel:** A small chapel at the San Juan Capistrano mission. It is the oldest building still in use in California and the only surviving church where Father Serra held mass.

**Father Junipero Serra:** A Catholic priest who personally founded 9 of the 21 California missions. He was on orders from Spanish King Charles III to explore the territory of what is now the state of California and settle it.

**Great Stone Church:** A church that was constructed due to the Serra Chapel being too small to accommodate visitors. It was destroyed in an earthquake in 1812 but wasn’t restored. The ruins remain to this day. The bells that once hung in the church survived the earthquake and now hang in a beautiful bell wall.



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**See you in  
our *next* adventure!**

- Dennis, Otto,  
*and* Smidge

**ABOUT**

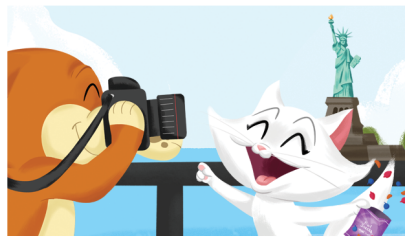
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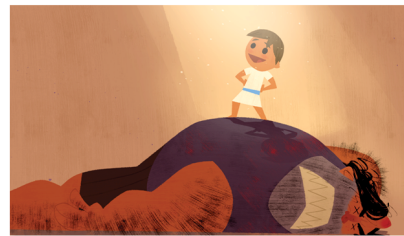
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