



4 Kids, 3 Jobs, Barely Making It

Any other time in America, the Larsens would be considered a middle-class family. But after a house fire left them with nothing, they have taken on three jobs between the two of them to keep their four kids, John Jr.'s mother and her boyfriend fed while they all live under the same roof. John Jr. and Victoria Larsen grew up in Union, Missouri, and have been together for 15 years. John Jr. has worked a reliable and steady job at the Silgan plastic plant for seven years, while Victoria works at a gas station and as a caretaker. Despite these sources of income, they still require help from government aid to put groceries on the table.

They are not alone. According to the Missouri Department of Social Services, over 600,000 families around Missouri receive benefits from the SNAP program. Without this and other support programs, the Larsens and many other families would go hungry. With eight mouths to feed and benefits being cut, the strain is growing for the family. However, their resilience doesn't waver, and they still make time to laugh, play and lift each other up.



The Larsens gather around a crowded table for family dinner at their home in Union. It's one of the few nights a week that the whole family can enjoy a meal together. Victoria, 36, and John Jr., 32, hold down three jobs between them to provide for their four children, Victoria's mother, Brenda, 56, and Brenda's boyfriend, Bob, 62.



The Larsen Brothers, Jordan, 8, and John III, also known as “Bubba J”, 12, play in the front yard before school at their home in Union. The two brothers love to come up with different games to pass the time waiting for the school bus that picks Jordan up.



Victoria works one of her two jobs at the new Express Mart in Union. Victoria had to find another source of income after her SNAP benefits were cut due to her husband John Jr.'s current income status.



Brenda writes a list of names as she figures out how many mouths she has to feed for the evening meal at their home in Union. After a house fire left them with nothing over seven years ago, the Larsens worked hard to save and provide for the eight mouths they have to feed. "That month lasts a long time," says Brenda on how hard budgeting is for them.



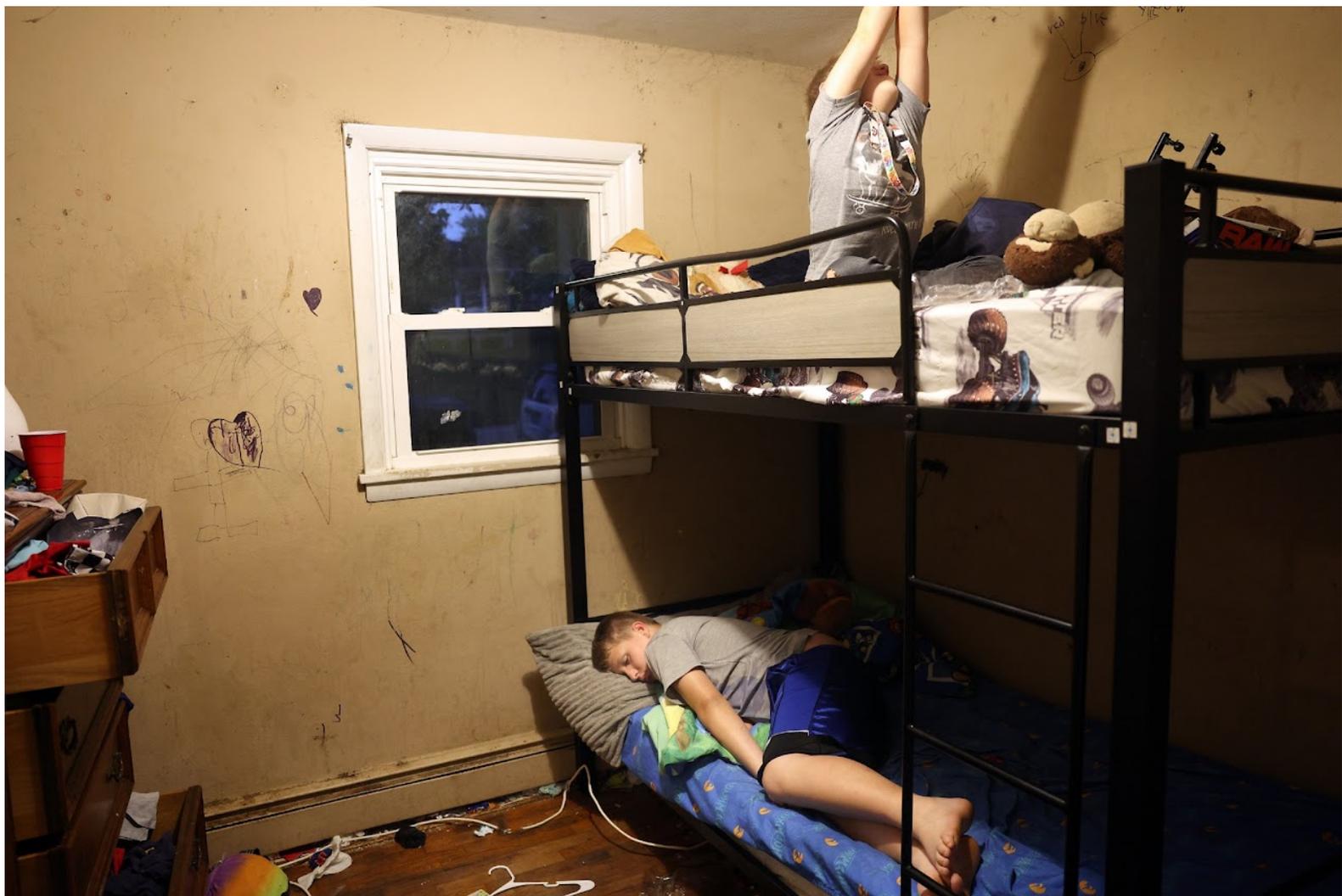
Victoria's daughter, Lillian Larsen, 3, accompanies her for errands during the time Victoria has off at Walmart in Union. Shopping may be casual for some, but for Victoria it is a calculated chore that constantly stresses the family's finances.



Lillian pushes her father, John Jr., while playing in the living room of their home in Union. Lillian loves imitating their favorite WWE moves in the living room after her older siblings leave for school.



Victoria sits with Casper, the family dog, as daughter Lillian plays on the floor while a cardboard cutout of Kansas City Chiefs star player Patrick Mahomes stands in the corner of the living room at their home in Union. The Larsens are die-hard Kansas City Chiefs fans with memorabilia in most rooms throughout their home. John Jr. remembers going to a game as a child and would love to provide his children with a similar experience one day.



At 6:30 a.m. Jordan stretches while Bubba J hides from the inevitable after their mother flipped the lights in their room to prompt them to get ready for the day in the bedroom of their home in Union. Breakfast is provided at school for the boys.



Bubba J practices his new trombone for John Jr. and his sister Lillian in the kitchen of their home in Union. Bubba J joined his school band this fall and loves to provide boisterous entertainment for the household.



Victoria and her daughter Lillian work through a tough moment in the kitchen of their home in Union. The Larsens continue to persevere despite facing hard financial times for the family. They are not alone. Over 600,000 families around Missouri receive assistance from programs like SNAP and are facing similar challenges when these benefits are removed.