A CELEBRATION OF
Personal Heroes

A Special eBook Commemorating September 11, 2001
Produced by The Gratitude Book Project® Team,
a division of Kozik Rocha, Inc.
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Today I am grateful for...

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“Live in gratitude today and every day.”

The Gratitude Book Project

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Acknowledgments

Just like the first edition of The Gratitude Book Project: Celebrating 365 Days of Gratitude, the concept for this first-ever eBook version, A Celebration of Personal Heroes, struck and wouldn’t let go.

The light bulb went off in early July—with an anticipated release date of September 11—leaving little time to spare.

So a special thank you is owed to the entire team of The Gratitude Book Project®, who were willing to work around their scheduled vacations and once again put their skills and their hearts to work to make this project come together. Well done, team!

Yet without the co-authors, whose thoughts and feelings on heroism make up this collection, you wouldn’t be reading this now. They are the backbone of this series, and for them, our gratitude knows no bounds. Thanks for keeping gratitude in motion!

We also wish to express our appreciation to the heroes who have been cited in this book. You have touched the lives of our co-authors and the lives of our team. You deserve much more recognition than this book is capable of offering—though we are certain none of you will agree or even consider yourself a hero. Thanks for being you!

And finally, to the men and women of 9/11, who are the finest reflection of what humanity has to offer. Your deeds have not gone unrecognized, and we have not forgotten you.

May those who made the ultimate sacrifice rest in peace and may their families take a measure of comfort knowing our hearts go out to you and we appreciate all that you have given.

And to those who walk among us, may your days be filled with peace and love and the knowledge that your fellow humans have not and will not forget your heroic actions.

You have given us all much to be proud of, and you have our gratitude.
About Kozik Rocha, Inc.


For more gratitude reading, check out editions of The Gratitude Book Project® at [www.TheGratitudeBookProject.com](http://www.TheGratitudeBookProject.com), including:
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“Gratitude—keep it in motion!”
Introduction

Initially, this edition of The Gratitude Book Project® started out as a way to remember the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and all that was lost. And we wanted to do our part to promote peace in a world too often focused on our differences rather than our commonalities. We hoped to, at the same time, keep gratitude in motion by expressing it out loud and giving this eBook to anyone and everyone who wanted one.

It didn’t take long to realize that it is nearly impossible to reflect upon the events of 9/11 without stirring up our thoughts and feelings about heroism and what that means to us collectively and as individuals. So we expanded our idea to also commemorate the courageous men and women of that event who gave us all so much to be proud of—not only as Americans but as members of humanity.

As it turns out, our co-authors have a lot to say on this subject. Heroism is not a course taught in school. And yet, every minute of every day a hero emerges among us—though the majority of them do not perceive themselves that way.

In the pages that follow, you will find evidence that many of us have well-known and little-known heroes that reach beyond the scope of 9/11. They are people who possess qualities or characteristics we would like to emulate. The existence of heroes helps us to expand our perceptions about our own limitations and gives us something to aspire to—something every society needs.

Though what defines a hero to each of us may vary, the majority of people would agree that heroes have a number of traits in common:

• They are concerned about the needs of others or the defense or support of one or more moral convictions.
• They are willing to risk a potential sacrifice to their own reputation or well-being.
• They are under no obligations or requirement to do anything.
• They do not anticipate or expect rewards or recognition.
Most of them are, in fact, ordinary people. But what separates a hero from everyone else is his or her choice to take action. It is the act a person performs that is considered extraordinary. When it meets the above criteria it is considered heroic—and we believe the stories contained within will demonstrate that.

Through the compilation of *A Celebration of Personal Heroes* we at the offices of Kozik Rocha, Inc. have gained something unexpected. (It’s funny how that keeps happening with The Gratitude Book Project®.) We have discovered we have been working with heroes in disguise for the better part of a year—our co-authors. Without their support—without their thoughts and stories—without their willingness to take action—this series would just be a concept in waiting.

We couldn’t appreciate them more, and they are all our heroes. This book is by them—it’s for them—and it’s about them.

So without further delay, we deliver to the world: *A Celebration of Personal Heroes*.

In deepest gratitude,

*Michele Dimsey,*

Associate Editor

On behalf of The Gratitude Book Project® Team
As we approach the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States of America, I am reminded of the valor, bravery, and fortitude of our people. Our country was built on the blood, sweat, and tears of those who risked everything for our freedom and prosperity. As a citizen, I am thankful for the freedom to be an entrepreneur and create my own business.

America’s entrepreneurs, small business owners, and the people they employ make up the majority of the work force in America. While building their businesses, hard-working entrepreneurs often invest all of their life savings and spend their most precious commodity: time. These businesses create jobs, which bring in revenue and strengthen the economy. The entrepreneurs work tirelessly to create a better future for themselves and others. Those who have fought for our freedom, the family and friends who support them, and those who work hard to build this country one small business at a time are my heroes!

Like our beloved men and women in the armed forces, our small business owners many times don’t receive even so much as a “thank you” for their vast contribution to the advancement of our country! Running a small business is like going to war every day: you have enemies and allies. One is undermining you, whether consciously or unconsciously, and the other is alongside of you, supporting your efforts.

We as Americans are blessed to have many freedoms that people in other countries only dream of. It is time to show the rest of the world what we are truly made of. It is time to not only admire those who possess the fine attributes of valor, bravery, and fortitude, but to endeavor to develop the same within ourselves. We are all in this together, and it is time to take responsibility to help build a stronger America!

Ethicist Felix Adler once said: “The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by.”

I am fortunate. I live my life surrounded by heroes. For the past 15 years I have had the profound privilege of teaching a course in transformational approaches to community leadership. The program empowers people to design and implement projects that make a real and lasting difference in their communities. Over and over again, I watch ostensibly ordinary people shine a light on injustices, open up extraordinary discourse, build consensus, invent elegant solutions, make seemingly impossible promises, and keep those promises.

Hunter and Andrea Herz Payne are two such heroes. They began participating in a course I was leading in the winter of 2005—just weeks after a devastating tsunami hit Southeast Asia, killing 230,000 people and displacing millions more.

Moved and haunted by images of lifeless bodies, orphaned children, and heartbroken parents, the Paynes were compelled to take extraordinary action. They began what they soon discovered to be a massive task: compiling an all-star CD to raise funds to aid tsunami victims. But when Paul McCartney donated a track and President Clinton’s United Nations Office for Tsunami Recovery endorsed the project, they knew there was no turning back.

Not content with secondhand knowledge of the disaster, the Paynes spent their honeymoon touring the hardest-hit area: Aceh, Indonesia. The experience changed their lives forever. Returning to the States, they gave up their day jobs, often working 16+ hour days on the tsunami CD project as well as a campaign to bring awareness to the genocide taking place in Darfur.

Then Hurricane Katrina hit, and all eyes turned to New Orleans. No one seemed interested in the tsunami any more. Emboldened, rather than daunted, by this new kink in their CD plans, the Paynes simply widened the scope of their efforts. They founded an international non-governmental organization they called Aid Still Required (ASR), which shines the spotlight on forgotten issues and people who have been left behind in the wake of natural disasters and human crises. Today ASR project areas include not only Indonesia, but New Orleans, Darfur, and Haiti as well.

Hunter and Andrea Payne have something critical in common with the heroes of 9/11: they live their lives in the service of strangers and for the possibility of a world where everyone can live in dignity, health, and peace.

Maureen A. Charles, a professional writer residing in Pasadena, Calif., serves as Board Secretary for Aid Still Required, runs marathons for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and leads Landmark Education’s Self-Expression and Leadership Program. She knows a hero when she sees one; look in the mirror, and you will too.
Imagine My Surprise

Ann Bennett

There I was on 11th Street, coming out of Dean and Deluca’s with a big mug of coffee—latte, to be precise. Still feeling the chill of cold words spoken by my lover. The warm sun shining on my skin. Everyone was looking up, so I looked too. People fell to the ground around me crying. I blinked over and over in disbelief. I thought, “This isn’t happening,” but it was. Shocked, I walked up 5th Avenue, tears streaming down my face. That day was the day of heroes. Each stranger I met, made eye contact with, and held in my arms has left an indelible mark on my heart. I will never forget all those brave New Yorkers.

Ann Bennett is the founder of Irresistible Marketing (www.IrresistibleMarketing.net) and currently resides in the Los Angeles area.
Inspirational Mutiny

Carol Lynn Fletcher

My hero is Fletcher Christian, who led a mutiny in 1789 on board the HMS Bounty. Once the vessel was commandeered, Christian set Captain Bligh and 18 loyalists adrift in the vessel’s launch. Christian then set sail with his fellow mutineers to find a hiding place and new home in the Pacific. After combing charts, Christian found that Pitcairn Island had been charted incorrectly. It was there they landed in the hopes of not being found by the British government. Twenty years later, quite by accident, the island was discovered. Only one mutineer remained, John Adams.

In 1962 my parents took me kicking and screaming to see Marlon Brando in Mutiny on the Bounty. I had no idea how my life was about to change.

I resisted every frame until it was time for the Bounty to set sail for Tahiti. The sails went up, the music swelled, and I gasped. I had never seen anything so beautiful in my life. I felt love for the very first time as I fell in love with the Bounty. My heart swelled with the newness of the feeling. It was now December 23, 1787, and I was the only girl living on board the HMS Bounty.

When “we” arrived in Tahiti to gather breadfruit for the King, the beauty of the land and its people took my breath away. My mind reeled from the newness of it all. I watched Fletcher’s life and admired him. I cried when we said goodbye to our Tahitian friends. As we sailed back to England, Captain Bligh became increasingly disgruntled. He was mean to everyone, including his friend, Mr. Christian. Suddenly Fletcher couldn’t take it anymore, took over the ship, and set Bligh adrift! This act went against everything he believed. Suddenly I realized if Fletcher Christian could do that, so could I.

I was too young to understand what had happened to me in that moment, but I knew passion and focus had been ignited.

My childhood became increasingly difficult, and there was nothing I could do except sail on the Bounty hundreds of times in my mind’s eye.

In 1985, I went to Tahiti. I stood where my hero mustered the passion and courage to mutiny against his own complacency and those who attempted to imprison his spirit. I rode the waves the Bounty had sailed.

In 1990 I sailed the HMS Bounty that was built for the 1962 film. I stood on the deck alone. I raised my fists to the heavens and spoke silently to those who had tried to imprison my spirit. “You said my dreams wouldn’t come true, that I would never be enough, and the Bounty was just a movie. Well, here I am, living my dream sailing on the inspiration for the beauty of my life. Yesterday, I shook hands with a direct descendent of my hero and as I did I reached back into the centuries with gratitude. Now I know anything can happen. Next stop, Pitcairn!”

Carol Lynn Fletcher is an author, intuitive, and artist. She owns businesses that inspire clients to be all that they can and want to be. Carol Lynn lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She can be reached at CL@fletcherbiz.com and www.FletcherBiz.com.

Job Well Done

Sabrina Jones

Heroism requires both mental and emotional strength in facing difficulty and adversity. It requires fortitude. Some people may not consider single parenthood heroism, but for the single parents I know, what they do does not fall short of the description. Being a parent is difficult whether you are married or not. However, there is something terrifying about being responsible for another life or lives, knowing that whatever decisions you make may positively or negatively affect them forever—and you’re doing it alone.

Perhaps you have a best friend, a single mom of two girls. One is in graduate school and one is in middle school. This friend is also a full-time college student, working full-time, and a mom full-time. Her youngest is involved in dance, basketball, girl scouts, and other extra-curricular activities. This mom is doing everything herself and doing it rather well. Or you have a sister who raised a daughter basically on her own. That daughter is now a doctor at the most prestigious hospital in the country. It wasn’t easy doing it alone, but she raised her daughter to be the exceptional, confident woman she is today. Another friend has two daughters and two grandchildren. She could probably be voted “Nana of the Year” or “Shuttle Driver of the Year.” She is always on the go, doing for her family and lending a helping hand to others. There are also some great single fathers out there as well. Maybe you have a brother. A retired military man who immediately submitted his retirement papers after his wife of 25 years suddenly passed away. He is now raising two daughters on his own and doing it marvelously. Or maybe you are a single parent yourself. You have a wonderful son. He is intelligent, talented, well-mannered, and a joy to raise. Although there have been some rough patches along the way for these parents, I know they are all doing what they have to do and they are doing it well.

Whatever the individual story may be, I’m sure any single parent you may know could use a few words of encouragement every now and then. Or maybe you could lend a helping hand here or there. Take a moment or two to let them know they are doing a great job. Heroes need validation too, especially the single parents.

Sabrina Jones resides in North Carolina with her son Jordan. She is a devoted sister, friend, volunteer, seafood lover, and sports fanatic. E-mail her at EmpoweredBeauty@aol.com.
When I think of the heroes of 9/11, both the ones living and the ones who made the ultimate sacrifice, my heart is filled with sadness, as well as pride for the heights humanity is capable of. We honor the 9/11 heroes with deepest appreciation.

Today I also want to honor a different group of people who play an important role in heroism—the storytellers.

How would we know about the heroic acts of bold men and women without the often quiet witnesses who record the deeds? Where would we draw inspiration to nourish our ability to act in our highest capacity, without the stories of heroes who have come before us, and the trials and the determination that made them extraordinary? What guide would we have to show us what heroism is, without our bards, our chroniclers, our narrators?

So today I want to honor our storytellers: the writers who tell stories with their pens, the actors who tell stories with their bodies, the songwriters who tell stories with their poetry, and the musicians who tell stories with their music.

Thank you for inspiring us to great deeds.

Thank you for keeping the memories of our heroes alive.

Thank you for reminding us to be the best we can be.

Chrissy Caeliss shows you how to write a new script for your life so you can live in your greatness and shine your light no matter what. This is how you create your own Happily Ever After! You can find her at www.BoostYourVibe.com.
The Hero Within

Linda A. Distler

We all have many experiences and challenges we go through in a lifetime. The person you are today was molded from tests like these:

The birth of your children was an experience that taught you unconditional love, patience, faith, and hope. You would do anything for your children—even die for them. They are the best gift God could have given you.

Moving far away from family was heartbreaking, and yet you learned to adjust, enjoy the experience, and meet new and interesting people because you are so outgoing.

Then the most devastating event in your life happened—a divorce that took you to the depths of hell physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yet, when things were so dark, you saw a light that you followed out of the tunnel of hell, finding God, hope, strength, self-love, independence, love, happiness, and freedom. Finding your self-worth showed you how much you had lost yourself in the marriage and how unloved, worthless, and lost you felt.

Cancer, the big “C” came into your life, along with the fear of the unknown. Will I live, or die soon? How am I going to get through this? You found strength and support in your family, fellow teachers, and friends. You decided that if you had to go through this adventure, you could be positive or negative. It was your choice. The biggest thing you learned was that your positive attitude helped get you through surgery, chemo, losing your hair, and radiation. You now are starting your sixth year cancer-free and a survivor.

You discovered that if you could make it through all that you have experienced, you can get through anything. Your experiences and challenges have made you the hero within yourself.

Linda A. Distler is a retired teacher, baby boomer, and creative, adventurous woman who has reinvented her life and become an Author, Speaker, Entrepreneur, and Business Owner. Connect with her at www.TheTravelPetSitterDogWalker.com or Facebook.com/LindaDistler.
What Did He See?

Joyce Heiser

To a seventh grader, he seemed ancient. In retrospect, he was probably only ten years older, a recent college graduate at his first teaching job.

Paul Carlson was born to teach. His natural love and enthusiasm for teaching flowed into his English and history classes. Those classes soon became my favorites.

I’d always loved school, made good grades, and was considered a good student. My teachers’ written comments reflected that. However, they were all concerned about my shyness. It started in kindergarten with: “Joyce is a polite and well-mannered little girl and a joy to have in class, but I’m concerned about her shyness.”

Similar comments followed each year. Although true, these comments were so hurtful to an already overly sensitive girl that I began to dread report cards.

I hoped junior high would be different...

At the end of the first grading period of seventh grade, I took my report card home. I handed it to my mother, and she looked at it immediately. As expected, my grades were good. Then she started to read the comments. First was Mr. Carlson’s, written not only as my English and history teacher, but also as my homeroom teacher.

It was short and to the point. “Joyce has great leadership potential.” Not a word about my shyness.

Me, with leadership potential? Who would have guessed? Obviously not my kindergarten through sixth grade teachers!

As I look back, I wonder what Mr. Carlson saw that my other teachers missed. Or were they just more concerned about the negative aspect of my personality, and he the positive? I guess I’ll never know. What I do know is that his words made me think. I realized that I didn’t just have leadership potential, I was already a leader. Leadership was part of my identity.

In spite of my shyness, I was always surrounded by a group of friends who instinctively looked to me to lead. I was always chosen first and made captain of any team, and I guided any group I was part of to make good decisions. I’d never thought of those things as leadership traits. To me, they were doing what came naturally, what I was good at and loved—leading.

Thank you, Mr. Carlson, for your insightful words so many years ago. My name plus four words that helped me begin to focus on a strong positive trait and learn to minimize the negative one I’d heard about for so many years. Words that helped me focus on becoming an even stronger, more capable leader in my adult years.

Joyce Heiser is an inspirational author from the Midwest who enjoys writing devotionals and personal essays. She is published in several anthologies, on the Web, and in newsletters and print magazines. Her website is www.JoyceHeiser.com.
Maybe it was the Coat of Many Colors that caught my attention at an early age. The story of a confident, skilled young man who was rejected by family resonated with me. Joseph showed leadership with his family, although they scoffed at him for his brashness. He showed leadership in private business until Potiphar’s wife got him sent to prison. Joseph even showed leadership in prison.

I am always encouraged when I read the story of Jacob and Rachel’s son, Joseph. He shows that no matter what the circumstances of life, it is our response to those events that matters the most. With God’s help, any situation can be used for good, even if others intended it for evil.

The story of Joseph can be found in Genesis 30-50. Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” (Genesis 41:38)

Margaret G. Holmes, Christian leader, author, and speaker, lives on a West Texas sheep ranch with her husband. Check out her Facebook page, Margaret’s Chalkboard.
When I first met Anna Halprin, I was immediately fascinated with her presence, her natural charisma, and her authenticity that stems from her love for what she does and her outstanding humanity. She is a pioneer, a dancer, an artist, a choreographer, a leader, a teacher, a mentor, an activist, an inspirational force, a catalyst of peace and healing, a parent, a grandparent, a humanist. But none of these descriptions lives up to who she really is. As a dancer, choreographer, and artist, she explored new paths for Modern Dance and took it to places that have been groundbreaking and influential over the last several decades. Anna has a rare and special gift to connect her students with their bodies so that they can be truly at home within them and experience healing through movement. Movement is at the heart of Anna’s work—literally and metaphorically.

Mt. Tamalpais—a spiritual place—lost its innocence in 1981. A serial murderer, called the “trailside murderer,” killed five women who peacefully walked the trails. The local community was shocked by this outrageous crime, and the mountain was closed to the public. When Anna and her husband Lawrence, who both lived and worked at Mt. Tamalpais, heard about this terrible atrocity, they decided to act: they intended to make the mountain accessible to the public again after a ritual act of peace and healing. Anna created a two-day project that became a legendary event. She gathered the dancers of her Tamalpa Institute for a powerful dance ritual “in the mountain,” dedicated to the Miwaks, the original inhabitants of this area. For the second part of the ritual that was to take place “on the mountain,” she got a special permit to access the mountain—with 80 members of her all-ages group from Marin County.

In an act of peace, hope, love, and trust, they danced, sang, prayed, and silently meditated to clear the mountain of the violence imposed upon it, and to reclaim their spiritual center. They marked the places the murders happened by performing songs, meditations, and poems to acknowledge the tragedy and to demonstrate the community’s longing to help Mt. Tamalpais recuperate. Two days after the ritual, the police received an anonymous call with critical information about the murderer, who was captured shortly after. One year later, Anna performed a gratitude ceremony resembling the first one. Don Jose Mitsuwa, a 107-year-old Native American shaman, offered his services and performed a shamanic healing ritual and tribute to nature, the Dance of the Deer, at Mt. Tamalpais. According to him, Anna and her community had performed a healing ceremony that was in alignment with shamanic rituals. He said that to guarantee sustainable healing of the mountain, she would have to perform the ritual for five years—so she did. That was the start of the “Planetary Dance,” performed all over the world ever since—for healing and peace.

Elisabeth Balcarczyk, MA, CPCC, is an Authentic Communication & Leadership Coach living in Germany and working with clients internationally. As certified coach, certified yoga teacher, and author, she integrates her vast experience in holistic leadership in the form of coaching programs, workshops, and books.
Average Heroes

Michelle Larson

I struggle to name just one personal hero because I have been blessed to know so many. My husband, our kids, my parents, teachers, coaches, friends, family, and total strangers have gifted me by touching my life with their heroism. One of the amazing things about these heroes is that they do not even know that they have done anything heroic by their words, actions, or deeds. They live their lives quietly in a way that makes sense to them, practicing the unwritten code of the hero, and the world is a better place for it.

To my mind heroes never boast of being a hero; they simply are heroes, inspiring others with their persistence to step in and step up to whatever challenge is presented to them. If the challenge knocks them down, they show a hero’s courage by picking themselves up and trying again until the challenge is vanquished. Challenges come in all shapes and sizes, just like heroes. One of the other incredible things about heroes is that age is never a factor. It does not matter how young or old heroes are, they are still heroes as long as they have the heart to stand for their convictions and the mettle to see their dreams come true.

It is important to remember that heroes are not perfect. Heroes cannot be expected to be heroic 24/7. There are setbacks and disappointments even for the brightest and the best of heroes. There are times when heroes feel less than heroic—they feel downright average. But when the going gets rough, the heroes amongst us are the ones giving it their all.

Michelle Larsen lives in Santa Rosa, Calif.
The Great Alchemist

Stephanie Mullani

My grandmother had an extraordinary culinary gift. Baking was her specialty, and no matter what she whipped up, the result was pure gold. People always came to her when they wanted help celebrating a special occasion. She was officially known as “the cake lady” in our town, but to all who knew her best, she was so much more.

As a child, I certainly lapped up all the goodness she heaped on me through her delectable gifts, but as an adult I came to see that food was merely one of the many ways she served people.

I tried many times to mimic the flavors of grandma’s recipes, but it always seemed like I was missing an ingredient. One day, it finally dawned on me. What I was searching for that eluded me was not something that could be found in a book, or stored in a recipe box. It was not something you could pull out of the pantry for a special occasion. The perfect ingredient I searched for that she added to every recipe was her love, which she dispensed daily in every undertaking, big and small. The time I had spent with her in the kitchen or on the phone asking about ingredients wasn’t about a cup of flour or a tablespoon of sugar after all. All these years, she had been giving me a living recipe that was beyond measure. It was the greatest recipe she possessed by far—her recipe for life itself.

Grandma showed me that we have all the ingredients we need to become heroes. Through her, I learned that it is one thing to keep a recipe in a box and ingredients in the pantry, never putting them—or us—to the test. It is another thing altogether to take the ingredients life gives us and do something extraordinary with them. My grandma had an incredible understanding that the trials of life are unavoidable “ingredients” that we must use in our life recipe. I discovered that it was through the challenges of my grandmother’s life that she became a masterpiece. She was an alchemist of the highest sort, able to transform anything life handed her into something better.

A great messenger may die, but the message never does....or in the case of grandma, her great recipe. Though I miss her physical presence in my life, her spirit is kept alive whenever I remember and pass on her greatest recipe:

Anything can be transformed with love. Take the stuff of this life, and do something extraordinary with it.

Stephanie Mullani is a wife, mother, and inspirational author. She can be reached at StephanieMullani@gmail.com.
Jump into Your Dreams and Become a Hero

Luz Liliana Garcia

saw myself walking the trail up to the entrance of a cave high upon a mountain. Usually, at the entrance, guruji Paramahansa Yogananda greets me enthusiastically. However, on this day, something seemed different. Yogananda did not greet me, and as soon as I reached the mouth of the cave, I heard a voice, but no words. It was a “knowing” deep inside my head that sounded like an echo resonating throughout the entire cave, saying: “JUMP!” I thought: “Did Yogananda say jump?” Then I heard it again: “JUMP!” My head was filling up with all kinds of reasons for not doing it. Then, I thought: “If Yogananda said jump, then I must jump.” Then, without hesitation, I turned around, took off running, and jumped from the mountain!

As I reflected on who my heroes are, I concluded that all the people I admire and consider my heroes had a few things in common. Most of them had ordinary lives, but at some point they felt dissatisfied with their lives and found themselves doing jobs that they did not really enjoy. They felt they were selling their souls in order to pay their bills. Their dissatisfaction became unbearable, and they had to make a choice: live an unhappy and unfulfilled life, or trust the small inner voice urging them to take a resounding leap into the unknown. That voice urged them to follow their dreams without a guarantee that their dreams could ever be fulfilled. However, these individuals listened with conviction, summoned their courage, and jumped. So thank you Robin Lynn, Doreen Virtue, Carolyn Myss, Dr. Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra, Baeth Davis, and all the others who have followed their inner voices and taken the leap to follow their dreams. It takes courage to go against all odds, against all conventions, and against what others think to follow one’s own vision. Thus, my heroes’ examples have been an inspiration for me to gather my courage slowly and surely to make the leap and jump into the unknown to follow my own dreams. My heroes’ lives have been an inspiration to me.

THANK YOU TO MY PERSONAL HEROES!

Luz Liliana Garcia, PhD, helps people heal themselves from self-imposed limitations wherever they show up, such as in their careers or relationships, so they can just take action without excuses and stand in the brilliance of who they are. Find her at www.HealYourLimitations.com.
Throughout the year, and especially on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we remember and celebrate the brave firefighters, police officers, and workers in the New York City Twin Towers. We remember the first responders at the Pentagon, the civilians and military personnel who lost their lives. Who can forget the airplane full of people who chose to sacrifice their lives in a violent crash into a Pennsylvania field to keep the terrorists from succeeding? We will never forget their heroic act of bravery. Sadly, I lost friends and former colleagues on that day. I mourned for the families that they left behind. Not one of these everyday people woke up that morning planning to be heroes. These everyday heroes had the sense of purpose and the fortitude (OK, guts) to do what they knew they had to do. That day’s events brought out a pride and patriotism that hadn’t been seen since the end of WWII. (My wardrobe began to fill up with lots of red, white, and blue. Did you start wearing patriotic colors too?) People everywhere began to help others and to change their own lives in the process.

As the families, co-workers, and survivors left behind coped with the shock, they went on with their lives in a million different ways. Some continued with their normal work and activities. Others suffered such loss and fear that even today they are still trying to cope and still can’t move on. Some found new purpose and made big changes in their life. They chose new careers, went back to school, or rented a moving van and moved on. People realized the importance of having strong and healthy relationships with their friends and families. I read that there was a rush of marriage proposals after the attack, as couples realized how much they loved each other and looked for commitment—an unexpected gain for bridal consultants and jewelers.

My heroes are the everyday people who decide to make a commitment to live their life well, to find their true purpose, and make a difference. After 9/11, people stood up, brushed themselves off, and began to make a difference. Some young men and women joined the armed forces, others chose to become police officers and firefighters, and others felt a calling to the medical field or divinity schools. Heroes bloomed everywhere. Sometimes these heroes would fail in their new mission in life, but they didn’t give up. As I work with clients making transitions and adjustments in their life paths, I see strength and clarity in their life’s purpose build. The way they live their lives fits the old proverb, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” These are real heroes in my eyes. They don’t give up on themselves or others easily, they believe in doing the right thing, and they believe that persistence pays off in the end. I salute these everyday heroes.

Cat Traywick is a Life Success Coach working with midlife people to create strategies and make life or career changes. She also works with adults with ADD, to develop self-management skills, improve self-image, and realize goals. Reach Cat at www.CCTCoaching.com, Cat@cctcoaching.com, or on her Facebook page, CCT Coaching.
Otto, My Grandfather

Lee Ann Seaman

My most vivid memories are of sitting in his lap in the huge wooden rocking chair next to the dining room table—a little whisker-rub here, a little tummy-tickle there. I remember the way he sorted puzzle pieces onto boards before the family arrived so that everyone could build their part of the puzzle. I remember the cart he built for the grandchildren to ride in behind the oversized lawn mower on Sunday afternoons in the summer.

To his grandchildren, he was jovial and kind, his large-print bible in German always nearby on his bureau. To his children, he was a strict father with high standards for dress, decorum, and achievement. To the US government, he was a willing soldier in World War I. To the farmers surrounding his small town, he was an inventor who provided machinery they needed. To the down-and-out, he was a job- and shelter-provider until they got their feet back on the ground. To the wildlife, from the geese at the lake to the squirrels in his yard, he was the lifeline to free corn. To his younger sister, he was a savior who pulled her clear of an oncoming train that killed his mother.

In my adult life, he has become my hero. Perhaps in my childhood he was already my hero, as I can remember the moment my mother told me he passed, the date never forgotten. He never talked about the large or small events that shaped his being. He just loved. He reached out. He built bridges as he built inventions.

He was son and stepson, brother to thirteen siblings, husband, father of five, father-in-law to three, grandfather to eleven, inventor to countless farmers, employer and landlord to numerous men, soldier to millions, and my compassionate hero.

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My Best Friend!

Linda Williams

My personal hero is my blue-eyed husband, Stephen, who served in the Air Force for 27 years. He was stationed at the Pentagon on 9/11, and I am so grateful for his safety and continued presence in my life. As a member of the military, he belongs to the group of people who are devoted to the safety, protection, and betterment of others. You see this belief manifested in many people, such as firefighters, policemen, teachers, soldiers, and search and rescue teams. They create the quality of the society, because they do their work out of belief in the mission, not for the dollar reward. The respect shown by their behavior embodies the belief that we are all on this ship called Earth, and if we work together we increase the benefits for all who live on this planet.

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”
—John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Most people think of heroes as those who have done something grand. Done something brave. Done something, well, heroic. I get that. Sometimes, though, these acts of heroism occur more subtly, spanning many years and many miles. Sometimes these acts of heroism are understated, not grand. I am honoring a few who are, to me, heroes of the heart.

I am fortunate to know many heroes and have a few friends who I believe have led extraordinary lives. I happen to know people who have sacrificed greatly and “lived simply so that others could simply live.” Three “yokefellows” of mine stand out for their contributions.

My friend Tracy, who started her career as a registered nurse, is now a human rights general of sorts—a force to be reckoned with—leading well-trained teams of medical people to Burundi, Kenya, and other remote regions of our world to set up medical care for people who have none, for people with an infant mortality rate 15 times that of that of the United States. She births hope to those without any hope...a true genesis project. Tracy’s humility and sharp-minded analysis, coupled with the mercy and energy she brings to all she does is awe-inspiring to me.

Diane works for NASA by day, but her heart is completely given over to adoption. She is creating methods of adoption that are way outside the box. Her vision is big, and her heart of gold is driving this passion to find homes for kids previously considered to be “unadoptable.” She is herself a mother of three adopted children whose lives have been profoundly changed by Diane’s heroism. Her business acumen, brilliance, and heart inspire me every time we talk.

Third in this triple crown of friends is Jeannie. She is amazing, talented, creative, dedicated, smart, and wise. She has, with raw courage and undaunted perseverance (another “superhero trait”), written a unique musical of the story of Noah like nothing ever seen before. It was a heroic effort, a tireless pursuit, and a dream realized. Moreover, she has raised three superhero children who definitely WILL change the world they live in, without any doubt! She has heroically allowed each of her children to be fully themselves—giving them opportunities to grow, learn, and express their talents in ways I cannot imagine occurring in my own upbringing. I admire the gift she has given them. Her bravery, insight, encouragement, and consistency have greatly inspired me in my own parenting.

These three women, just by being who they were created by God to be, are superheroes to me. I’m changed for knowing them. They are part of an entourage of heroes I have known and loved, learned from, and been greatly enriched by. People who inspire me to rise up to be my best self in moments when I feel like giving up are a big part of what a hero is to me.

Carol Meade is a Life Coach, helping Baby Boomer women get their lives back! Friendly and faith-based, she creates customized solutions for each client. Carol imparts common sense, wisdom, and clarity, assisting her clients to overcome hindrances to success and create balance in their lives. You can find her at www.CarolMeade.com.


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To me, heroes are those who make a difference and inspire others. I am very grateful to those who continue to inspire me every day. But I don’t have just one person who inspires me. The world is filled with inspirational people. Some of these individuals are within my own circle of family and friends, but we are all inspired by those individuals who have changed our world. I speak of the inventors of products, artists who dazzle us with their art, people who devote their lives to helping others, those who work countless hours to help cure diseases, those who join the military to protect our country, others who go into professions that help protect the community, people who had to go through enormous pain to conquer physical and medical obstacles, those who teach and empower us, those who write to educate us, and those who entertain us.

As the tenth 9/11 anniversary approaches, we are reminded of the individuals who lost their lives and those who we call our heroes. This moment gives us the opportunity to be thankful to those who have passed and for those who continue to be our personal heroes.

I don’t need to turn on the TV or have a tragic event happen to find inspirational heroes. Inspiration is found everywhere you look. The people in my own circle of family and friends are my daily inspiration. They inspire me through setting a good example, caring for others as well as themselves, encouraging and supporting others, sharing their experiences, both good and bad, communicating their personal stories, and challenging me whenever possible. The inspiration, empowerment, and education we receive from our personal heroes are the ultimate gifts—gifts we receive on a daily basis.

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Heroes of Law Enforcement

Lynn Jordan

Writers know that a reader must be able to identify with a hero or heroine. Heroes are ordinary people who step up in times of crisis to perform extraordinary acts. The men and women in law enforcement are our friends, neighbors, and family members. They are people we see every day in stores, walking their dogs, at worship, or at school committee meetings.

Writers also know that true heroes must face conflict. Heroes of law enforcement are no different. These brave men and women go to work every day to face dangerous situations so that we may live our lives in safety and ignorance of the most sordid acts of our fellow men.

While it’s true that most officers never fire their service weapons, they can walk into danger in the most routine situations. A traffic stop can become deadly without warning. An unknown person in a vehicle could be simply a distracted driver, a felon with warrants, or even a driver under the influence of dangerous drugs. Anything can, and does, happen, in a matter of seconds.

Domestic violence calls can cause both parties to unite in their efforts to harm the responding officers. Every knock on a door takes the officers into an unknown situation. Yet they keep stopping cars and knocking on doors.

I learned to appreciate these heroes from my father, who served as a deputy sheriff in a rural Texas county. In those days, alcohol was the drug of choice for most, especially in this dry county. Manufactured drugs were virtually unknown and not pervasive as they are today.

Still, as the only deputy in the western half of the county, he served on call 24/7, ready to face any problem that arose outside of the city limits of our small town. Many nights, after patrolling for hours, he would be awakened to respond to an emergency. One such emergency was a serious automobile accident involving my best friend, although he didn’t recognize her because her face was covered with blood.

The qualities that made him a good officer also made him a good man. These qualities exist in abundance in the ranks of law enforcement heroes everywhere. He believed the best about people, even in the face of ample evidence to the contrary. He acted fairly toward all. He held fast to a true desire to see justice done. He did his best to pass these values on to me. I really hope he succeeded. I know that every day I’m grateful for him and for all the heroes of law enforcement.

Lynn Jordan empowers writers to use technology to write and promote better, faster, and easier. You can find her at www.AuthorsToolsBlog.com.
Heroes in the Family

Winnis Chiang

Four days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, three of us arrived at our son’s college and lined up for freshmen move-in service. When we reached the front, strong college students unloaded the belongings of our teenager into a canvas container and rolled the huge container through winding pathways connecting different buildings.

Before long, everything was in the upstairs suite where Scott would live with five other guys. He eagerly set up his PC and printer with Dad watching. To make sure everything worked, they took turn checking e-mails and surfing the Web. As soon as I finished making his extra-long bed, my husband James said, “It’s time to go.” Caught by surprise, I replied, “Let’s help him get his books.”

The bookstore was packed, but Scott quickly found all his books and paid for them. When James said, “Let’s go” again, I looked at my watch. “Hey, it’s almost noon, let’s have lunch. We can stay a couple more hours.”

As we walked toward the cafeteria, somehow we all grew quiet. I wondered, “Why the rush? Why are they so eager to part?” but didn’t say anything. I remembered some friends telling me how their teenagers begged them not to leave. Going to college was supposed to be a happy event, and we had prepared for it. However, with what had happened just four days earlier, I couldn’t help worrying. I also thought about how I never saw my mom again after I left Hong Kong to attend college in California.

Suddenly, I panicked about never seeing my son again.

I was still hiding my feelings when we sat down. But Scott noticed tears welling in my eyes and asked, “Mom, what’s wrong?” As soon as I opened up, we felt like our family again. As it turned out, James and Scott had tried to go about doing what needed to be done, yet my unspoken sadness, disappointments, anxieties, worries, and fears caused them to feel stressed. They sensed my frustration and anger and withdrew to avoid conflicts.

After lunch I suggested, “Let’s take pictures of your campus. Mom will be on her way in a couple of hours.” We all started laughing at my delay tactic. Two hours later, James took our last photo. My almost six feet tall son wrapped his arm around my shoulders. I had tears in my eyes and a smile on my face. I acknowledged the blessing of having him at home for 18 years. I had no regret as I accepted, “It’s time to let him go.”

James and I arrived home at almost midnight, and there was an e-mail waiting for us. “Dear Mom and Dad, Hope you get home safely. Thanks for everything. I’m going to church tomorrow morning with the guy we met this morning. Good night.”

My heroes are parents who are committed to: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

Winnis Chiang, MA, LMFT, is the founder of www.ParentingABC.com. She specializes in helping Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking parents to get along with, enjoy, and influence their American-born Chinese children according to their Christian faith. She also works with her husband to train, mentor, and coach couples towards lifelong intimacy.

Compassionate Heart
Facing Death

Arnina Kashtan

He was a pediatrician and an author.
She was a scholar and an author.
Both died during the Holocaust, refusing to desert their closest ones, moved by the highest call of the human spirit.

Janusz Korczak, 64 years of age at the time of his death, chose to go with the 196 children of his orphanage when they were evacuated by the Nazis and sent to the extermination camps. A respected personage, he was offered refuge by the Nazis. But the teacher and mentor of these orphans marched with them through the city streets—all dressed up for what they believed, as he had told them, would be a fantastic trip to the countryside—mounted the transportation train with them, and disappeared forever.

“The very stones of the street wept at the sight of the procession,” wrote an eyewitness.

Etty Hillesum, 29 years of age at the time of her death, chose to remain with her family and serve the Jewish community in Westerbork detention camp in Holland, until she was deported and exterminated at Auschwitz in 1943. In her breathtaking diaries, written between 1941 and 1943 and published in English in 1983 as An Interrupted Life, Etty utters the impossible. She finds, in her heart, what a young, frightened man—a Nazi soldier—might be feeling, that enables him to perform the most atrocious acts towards another human being.

What is it that enables some of us to climb to such spiritual heights that we can reject the intense instinct to preserve life?

I pray that more of us practice compassion on such a regular basis that we won’t need to challenge our hearts under horrendous circumstances, and those who forget their humanity will have felt enough understanding for their cause that they will not resort to unspeakable acts at all.

Arnina Kashtan, Israeli facilitator, writer, and performer, practices and teaches NonViolent (Compassionate) Communication and Byron Katie’s “The Work” around the world. She guides thousands into inner liberation from guilt, fear, and anger through deep empathy and laughter. Want to reclaim your authentic, courageous self? Long for great, compassionate relationships? Find Arnina at Facebook.com/Arnina.Kashtan.
Two Women Thinking Ahead

Kerry Patterson Capps

Many wonderful people throughout history can be defined as heroes: Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., JFK, Margaret Sanger, Oprah, stay-at-home moms, working moms, the men and women in uniforms of all types.

What would our world be like today without their contributions? It is scary to even contemplate!

Choosing whose contribution is most important or made the biggest difference is unnecessary as well as impossible.

While I appreciate all the heroes out there, personally, I always go back to two women who helped change the life experience for American women forever. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

These two courageous women were instrumental in creating the momentum needed to bring about the right for women to vote. Each did it in her own way, and in teaming together, they paved a solid path for those following after them. They are also a great example of women working together and using their complementary skills to achieve a worthwhile goal. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a married mother of six, was the writer; the never-married Susan B. Anthony was the organizer who constantly traveled to spread the word. (It was said that Susan B. Anthony had all of the train schedules memorized.)

Unfortunately, Susan and Elizabeth did not live to see women receive the right to vote. That would come in 1920, nearly two decades after their deaths.

It should be remembered that these women, abolitionists as well as suffragists, were well ahead of their time. In devoting so much of their lives to the causes they believed in, women today are blessed to be living a life that these women could only dream of. For that, I am eternally grateful, and that is why these two brilliant women are my heroines.

Kerry Patterson Capps is a Body-Acceptance Mindset coach and the creator of the DECIDE YOURSELF Weight Loss Mindset system. Remember, what you put in your mind is just as important as what you put in your body. Reach her at Kerry@DecideYourselfWeightLossMindset.com.
Heroes Among Us

Kris Friend

Karain, Sarah, and Julie of the Wednesday Morning writing group embody the quote by Marjory Stoneman Douglas that states, “Life should be lived so vividly and so intensely that thoughts of another life, or of a longer life, are not necessary.” Long after a workshop, I remembered the clear descriptive passages: the handsome young love wearing a yellow V-neck sweater, the pooled light from a street lamp with a menacing character hunched below, the sandy porch deck and swinging hammock of a childhood summer memory.

These writing women faced the demons of chemotherapy, the loss of hair and the swelling from steroids, yet each Wednesday morning they gathered to share their love of writing and storytelling. Their courage in the face of illness provided examples of heroism with quiet dignity. Although there were days when pain etched their faces, their pens wrote beautiful passages about the wonder and mystery of the birth of a son, the magical reunion with a reclaimed childhood friend, or wry memories of an awkward family picnic. They shared emotions and traumas by putting pen to paper and writing from their hearts.

Vivid and intense life stories were shared in our “kula,” or community. We heard passages about fear and worry while the authors smiled serenely as though they had never stared down terror. As women, mothers, sisters, aunts, and daughters, the authors taught us to revel in the thrill of the everyday event, the routine, and also to notice the spectacular moments of discovering love, reunions with missed friends, and the thrill of the ballet. Heroes influence our lives with their courage and commitment to life, with their example of fortitude against adversity. These women influenced us with their powerful life experiences and reminded us that heroes live within everyone.

Kris Friend is a hospice volunteer who writes for The Southport Times as well as her “FeatherBlues53” and “AGardenFriend” blogs at www.Wordpress.com. At work on her second novel, Kris leads writing workshops for women at Pen, Paper & Prose in Wilmington, NC. You can contact Kris at PenPaperProse@gmail.com or www.BountifulGiving.wordpress.com.

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My Real-Life Heroes

Cecilia Matthews

Heroes, in my opinion, are those who display Christ-like qualities in their character and actions. For the last 15 years, I have chosen to uphold and practice His high standards in my personal life.

There are three extraordinary heroes I wish to share with you. Their contributions made me the person I have become today.

My mother takes first place in the list. A woman unlike any other I’ve ever met, she had an amazing range of qualities and gifts. She never criticized or intruded in my personal life, but rather embraced me as I am, and supported me even when I knew I had made the wrong decisions. Can you imagine that?

She taught me to give respect, appreciate, and honor others, even if they were unkind. She always said: “Do the right thing, without judging others.” She was adored by everybody she met; her attitude and her laughter were simply contagious. She enjoyed everything and everybody!!

Even though we lived far apart most of our lives, we shared this “Siamese-twin” connection that has never been broken, even now after her passing. The times we visited each other were a total celebration of joy and childlike play. We felt as one. We never tired; we were simply ageless. Her spiritual wisdom continues to guide me now, knowing one day we will meet and rejoice once again.

My father follows in my hero list. A man like my mother, who never had any vices or addictions, his passion and obsession were our health and education. What a teacher he was! He knew how to fix everything. I don’t recall anybody coming home to repair anything in the short 18 years he was with us before he went to heaven.

I’m blessed to have experienced such extraordinary parents. No words can describe my eternal gratitude to them.

My husband is the hero closest to me now. He ranks #1 in the “work ethic” category. His work and expertise are valued globally. He is a fearless leader who delivers what he promises. Even though he is best in his field, I give him the greatest credit and recognition for the strength, courage, and determination he demonstrated in not allowing two of the worst “legal sports” in the world to conquer his life: drinking and smoking. He defeated both—I call that a true miracle. I couldn’t be more proud of such a huge achievement, and truly appreciate a remark he made to his friends: “With the support of my wife, everything is easy.”

It wouldn’t be fair to leave out my “mini-heroes“: my cats. In the last 20 years, these little creatures have totally enhanced and filled my life with their unconditional love. I thank them for allowing me to heal them naturally.

As long as we look up to high-standard heroes, we don’t need to worry about our legacy; all we need to do is emulate our superheroes so that we may become somebody else’s heroes someday.

Cecilia Matthews is an entrepreneur, natural healer, health coach, and intuitive. Twenty-five years of research in health, personal development, and spiritual growth allow her to use talents to help people and animals heal naturally. Uncovering the body’s power to heal itself, she creates customized programs to help clients get results.
Heroes for Our Times

B. E. Thompson

Gay military men and women who have served our country with distinction while often being challenged, compromised, and ironically silenced. By this I mean there has been an expectation that the social, biological, and spiritual needs that would be a given for their comrades must be sacrificed if a person who is “same-gender attracted” wanted to serve their country.

As long as there is a need for a military, we need good leaders. Under the leadership of our current commander in chief, President Barack Obama, we are beginning to see a redefinition of what makes a good military leader and how we deal with power, conflict, intervention, and promoting national interests, as we begin to transform the direction our military will take in the 21st Century and beyond.

These fathers are heroes in my eyes:

Fathers who reflect upon and examine their thinking and beliefs.

Fathers who can feel or imagine the hurt, pain, and fear when their gay sons or daughters are confronted with conflicting beliefs and emotions, misinformation, and the daily barrage of toxic messages, disrespect, and ridicule.

Fathers who will protect, defend, and support their gay sons or daughters.

Fathers who create or co-head a home and family that is a place for safety, nurturing, and guidance.

Fathers who fight the establishment—schools, government entities, religious institutions, and the justice system—and engage communities and families to make a change for a better world for all.

A father like this is not only a hero in my eyes, but, more importantly, is a hero in the eyes of his son or daughter! Our gay youth who were lost to suicide, having experienced such deep pain and fear that they could not feel or imagine their way out. Our brave gay youth, men, and women around the world who were murdered and killed for just being who they were meant to be, walking in their light and faith, and doing their part to save or make the world a better place for all humankind. These too are heroes to me.

“Courage is the most important of all virtues, for without it one cannot practice any of the others with consistency.”

—Maya Angelou

Plato

My hero is Plato, the one and only dog I have ever had the privilege to “own” and live with for six years. From the moment he was adopted, I knew we had a very special bond. Little did I know, though, how our relationship would unfold over the years.

When the day was gray, looking into his loving eyes would bring out sunbeams. Nothing seemed to bother him, other than missing a treat! If it was sunny, it was perfect to go out and play ball. If it was raining, it was equally perfect to go out and play ball. And if it was snowing...it was absolutely perfect to go out and play ball.

He would ride with me everywhere I went and would wait patiently for my return in the driver’s seat. If he couldn’t come along, he would wait behind the door, checking frequently from the window to see if my car had pulled in. When things were tough at home, he would sit by my side until it was all over, and when I was sick he would lie with me on the bed till the early morning.

He reminded me that each moment was different—each moment I had a choice regarding how I would respond, how I would react, what I would say. He didn’t hold grudges; when I would correct him for something and sent him to his room, by the time he was allowed to come back all was better than before.

When it was time to leave him and move out, he knew days and days ahead what was coming, and his eyes clouded with sadness. Through his subtle tenderness and need to be close constantly, he asked why I was leaving. My heart, fully open, conveyed the truth.

Plato taught me what unconditional love feels like: when you love without expecting to be loved back or because there is an ulterior motive. He taught me how to feel at peace within, by sharing his love. He is my hero, and because of him, I have grown in love.


In Celebration of Heroes

Donna Buice

It happened the first time I saw him in his decorated military uniform equipped with rank insignia, specialty badges, a blue plastic name tag, and his garrison cap, the flight cap of the USAF. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. I saw him stand at attention, salute our nation’s flag, and raise his hand over his heart. As we stood together during the playing of the National Anthem, I knew my dad was something special. And, that’s when it happened; that’s when I knew my ordinary dad was remarkably extraordinary.

I could tell he loved America. I could see it in his eyes as he told stories of freedom and liberty and the possibility of a better tomorrow. I could sense his true spirit of what it means to live in America. What it means to celebrate living in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

It was my dad who taught me that the human spirit is resilient. Liberty matters. In the tragic, look for the triumph. Rise and shine. In the ordinary—be extraordinary. Create hope, cling to hope, choose to fight for hope. And always celebrate a new day.

We are a nation of celebration honoring accomplishments and achievements. We dedicate buildings, boats, and bridges. We observe holidays and special days. We pay tribute to heroes. We remember anniversaries. Especially the ones that make us proud—pride to be an American—like the birth of our nation and joyous celebrations of our freedom and independence.

And, tragically, we remember the not-so-good anniversaries like the 10-year anniversary of 9/11. The day America was stabbed smack in the middle of her heart by cruel, calculating terrorists. It’s the day our nation stared in shock and horror. The day the hurting and the heroes emerged. Unsung heroes. American heroes. Heroes like my dad.

Just as the human spirit is resilient, our nation is resilient. We pull triumph out of tragedy, healing out of hurt, and hope out of moments of hopelessness. We press on. Just like Dad said, we recover from tragedy. Because America is made up of people who rise and shine—people like my dad—people with strong faith who cling to hope and who sacrifice their lives for a better tomorrow. Those are the heroes. America’s heroes. Real-life heroes.

You know the ones—great lives inspiring us to do better, climb higher, and stand taller. The ones with passion, persistence, reliability, and adaptability; the ones with endless strength, relentless determination, and limitless courage; the ones who surrender their all for our good and muster up courage under fire. They’re the ones from whom we draw glimpses and whispers of life lessons about hope, courage, and sacrifice. They’re ordinary people with extraordinary qualities, just like my dad.

He is my hero because I saw him be a hero. An ordinary person possessing extraordinary qualities, who changed my life because of his life. That’s why I celebrate my hero, my dad.

After all, we are a nation of celebration.

Donna Buice lives in Simi Valley, Calif. She is co-creator of Inspired Living, LLC, an organization that encourages and inspires all people to live a life of passion, balance, purpose, and fulfillment. You can friend her on Facebook at Facebook.com/donnabuice or follow her on twitter at Twitter.com/donnabuice.
A Simple Hero

Patricia Drury Sidman

It seems to me that there are two paths to becoming a hero. I have a particularly soft spot in my heart for the second one.

The first path is better-known. Extraordinary circumstances, from war to natural disaster, create opportunities for heroism. On 9/11, all the firefighters, police officers, and civilians who risked themselves to help or try to help another person were this kind of hero.

The second path to heroism is more subtle. It is the path of heroes who take seemingly small actions that defy the culture in which they live because something bigger, deeper, and nobler calls forth the hero in them. My father was this second kind of hero.

When I was in elementary school in the 1950s, there was a boy in my class whom I will call Danny (not his real name) who was always dressed in dirty, ill-fitting clothes, who had messy, chopped-off hair and broken-down shoes, who smelled sort of musty, and who always sat apart at lunch and in our classrooms. Other kids, including me, were happy to keep Danny at a distance, almost as if his obvious poverty were catching.

My father found out by chance that Danny had six brothers and sisters and a father who had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. Danny’s father had lost his job and, I was told, had no way to pay for antibiotic treatment, so he was sent to rest and, hopefully, recover in a public sanatorium. Danny’s mother had only a small income from mending clothes, and with it she was trying to care for seven children. Danny’s family lived in a deteriorating house surrounded by a yard full of weeds, and they were generally ostracized by their neighbors.

My father jumped in. He began mowing the lawn, repairing the plumbing, and paying for haircuts and shoes for Danny’s family. He took leftovers from every church supper to the family and began rebuilding their fence and creating makeshift toys for the children. I remember that some of our neighbors mocked my father for spending time at the “bad” house in the neighborhood, but this was of no concern to him.

At first I was mortified, I admit. My classmates learned about my father’s involvement with Danny’s family and some of the mockery aimed at my father also fell on me. Only when I went with my father one day and saw the desperate circumstances in which Danny lived did I begin to understand both the extent of Danny’s need and the depth of my father’s compassion. And I began to understand that being mocked is no reason to fear responding to another’s need.

Now, more than a half century later, I clearly see my father’s heroism. By adding a measure of kindness to a punishing world, I think he, and others like him, save not only particular lives but, in a way, save all our souls.

Patricia Drury Sidman believes in the power of love and compassion and is a professional life and relationship coach helping spiritually-minded people live their lives with integrity and create lasting, loving relationships. She is available by phone to work anywhere. Reach her at www.PatriciadSidman.com.

Heart Wide Open

Lynn Morrell

"She's got a champion’s heart." I’d heard that phrase often as a tennis kid, hanging out at the courts. I’d think: I want that—a champion’s heart. Sounds good—sounds important—sounds strong. I’d wonder: What’s that really mean, having a champion’s heart? What’s so great about sweat rolling down your body while hitting a fuzzy yellow ball just to beat someone on the other side of the net?

Then it hit me. A tennis champion’s heart wasn’t what I wanted. Nope. Instead, I want to act AS IF I had the heart of a champion. But how? That’s a puzzling question for a 7-year-old.

The closest I ever came to seeing a champion’s heart in action was at the Charleston Tennis Club. Her name was Peachy. Her wrinkle-free skirt swung as if it were in perfect harmony with that chippy backhand and ripple-free forehand. I’d watch her play for hours on end, wondering what it felt like to have those red strings meet yellow upon yellow, spin upon spin, arc upon arc, effortlessly. Her footwork was full of glide, pivot, and gentle strike—footwork that seemed to mirror life—constantly changing, adjusting to make that pure and flawless final connection. Maybe I could trace her steps. Place my feet within her footprints.

Boldly, I asked Peachy to hit with me—hoping her champion DNA would rub off on me—finding any excuse to shake her hand. I ate countless bowls of the breakfast of champions so my wee hand might fit her mighty hand. But I was no closer to understanding the DNA of a champion’s heart.

Then in 2010 I read these words: “I’ve played Martina, Chris, and Steffi...tops in the world...who I hung in there against, but was defeated. Now, I have an opponent greater than them, yet I KNOW I can beat this opponent. I KNOW I will win.”

The author? World-class tennis pro, hall of famer, and philanthropist, Jaime Kaplan.

Her diagnosis? Acute myeloid leukemia.

Cancer DNA meets champion DNA.

Jaime rallied with her personal mantras: “Beat Leukemia. Let Go. Let God.” Reading those words, I began to actually hear the beat of a champion’s heart for the first time. I’d never seen Jaime play, but I was filled with white-knuckled hopeful anticipation. Her life-death strategy was risky but brilliant.

Though, like me, many had never met her, 30,000 supporters and I wondered what would happen with the tie-breaking bone marrow transplant—would it change her champion DNA? We waited—hushed, poised, and ready to cheer her on. Why? Jaime’s heart is a beacon. It’s a heart wide-open—pumping courage, inspiration, and hope. She has spent her life embracing family, friends, and strangers with boundless love.

Jaime’s mom, Letty, says it best: “So, little girl sitting on a cloud, you had your reasons for wanting ‘to come down.’ We have learned so much from you about the goodness and sweetness in life.”

So have I, Jaime. My hero with a champion’s heart.

Her Path I Honor

Kathy “HiKath” Preston

This tribute is to an unsung hero, my daughter Kelly. Like most heroes, she never asked for the opportunity to stand out nor had a choice in the circumstances that created her background. It is her response and what she created for herself in the midst of chaos that makes her shine.

At the age of 5, she was abandoned and abruptly became a foster child in an overburdened system, where she remained for the next six years. More than half of her life was spent as a ward of the state as she shuffled from home to home with nothing more than a few belongings in paper sacks traveling with her.

She came to me when she was 11. She had a spirit that convinced me she was smart, willing to fight to survive, and never afraid to speak her mind. While I admired these traits, our two temperaments clashed in a battle of wills in those teenage years as she sorted out who she was and where she belonged. Self-identity, and even more so, self-worth, are huge issues for all teenagers, and they were even greater for my girl.

Those years required intervention and therapy because the abuse of the past had inflicted its damage on the core of her soul. It was not an easy journey to heal the wounds and unravel the protective layers to discover who she really was inside, at her essence, and to choose how she wanted to respond and live. Yet she was willing to do the hard work, to take it on, and to choose Life.

I am so proud to have a daughter who holds high values: a woman of integrity, a woman who has found the path to forgiveness for her past, as well as trust and faith in the future. I am proud to have a daughter who is now a mother, and such a good one. My grandson thrives under the love and care and nurturing of his mama.

She is my hero. She is a beautiful, worthy, passionate, vulnerable woman of God.

Kathy Preston is better known simply as “HiKath.” She can be reached at HiKath.preston@gmail.com.

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My Hero, My Husband

Barb Girson

While heroes show up in many shapes and sizes, professional and personal, near and far, I get to be around my personal hero often, for he is frequently only a room away. My personal hero is my husband, Howard (Howie).

My husband is my hero because he has great courage. As a young boy, he grew up in a troubled home with just the bare minimum, and from this he found the courage to improve his quality of life. He has become a lifelong reader and learner and has remained genuine and true to himself. He is the most amazing dad to our two beautiful daughters and continues to inspire and entertain them through adulthood. His authenticity throughout the years has helped to keep me real.

He is my hero because he makes a difference in all the lives he touches. He is an intervention teacher in the inner city. He teaches at an alternative charter high school with students who are pursuing their diploma. I hear stories daily of the ways in which he acknowledges his students, inspires them, and connects with them. He has a hard job, and I am so inspired by his tenacity and dedication.

He is also my hero because he saves me from myself. He stays a rock for me regardless of the circumstances. My husband reminds me of my strengths when I need to be reminded, and he reminds me to be humble when I am flying too high. If I find myself down, he puts everything into perspective. For the past 32 years, my husband has always believed in me.

Of all the qualities that make my husband a hero, I value most his ability to regularly make me laugh. He brings me joy.

I am full of gratitude for our short 32 years together and pray for another 50. When I tell him that I hope for another 50 years, he gets a little mad and (teasingly) says, “Only more 50 years? What do you mean? Do you have plans to dump me in old age? You have someone else in mind, DON’T YOU?”

During times that we mark and remember those we have lost—our national heroes—and our personal loved ones; I want to remember those who are right next to me and express my gratitude.

Barb Girson, direct-selling expert, sales coach, speaker, and trainer, helps companies, teams, and entrepreneurs gain confidence, get into action, and grow sales by designing and delivering custom sales training/coaching programs at Leader Retreats, Conventions, Teleclasses, and 1:1. Reach Barb at www.MySalesTactics.com. Join her complimentary ezine list to get her award-winning Strategies that STICK™.
9/11: Last Big Job

Laurie Tossy

9/11 did not make my mother a hero. It is because she was already a hero that she responded as she did. Gretchen Pfab Tossy demonstrated throughout her life what it means to be a hero, through actions that affected her own family as well as thousands of other families.

Following the devastating earthquake the California Bay Area experienced in 1989, my mother joined the American Red Cross. She became a Disaster Relief Coordinator in the Family Services Division. Her first job was Hurricane Andrew in Florida. This was followed by more hurricanes, floods, fires, and earthquakes: natural disasters that took her around the country for weeks and months at a time.

In addition to responding to disasters across the US, Mom trained new volunteers, taught classes, held community preparedness training events, and worked numerous local jobs—the kind that rarely get any national exposure, but still affect dozens or hundreds of people who have lost their homes and possessions, the only thing that is “theirs” being the clothes they were wearing when they had to flee.

Ten years ago she was ready to “retire” from big jobs with the American Red Cross. She decided she didn’t want to be that far from my father for the length of time national disasters typically required. Then came 9/11, and my 72-year-old mother packed her bag and went to New York City. As part of the second wave of responders, she worked within blocks of where the Twin Towers had stood, helping both first responders and residents for the better part of two months.

Helping others was not new to her; my mother first volunteered with the Red Cross when I was a child and we were living in Japan. At that time she helped servicemen wounded in the Vietnam War. During that same period she was living as a hero unbeknownst to me. She was facing her own mortality. We kids didn’t know it, but she had cancer. She never told us; she didn’t want us to be afraid. She did what she had to do to protect her family and to beat this disease, not just once, but twice.

This led to many years volunteering for the American Cancer Society. There, she was a beacon for other patients, giving hope to so many by living—proving that breast cancer was not always a death sentence—and giving comfort as she accompanied frightened women to medical appointments.

If you asked her, my mother would never describe herself as a hero. She would say she helped others because she had the time and the ability, as if the opportunity to act was all it took. She seemed oblivious to the fact that most people did not act. To me, that’s what makes a hero: acting when others do not.

Laurie Tossy moved her heroic mother just this year to live nearby in Loveland, Colo., where she runs her marketing company, Internet Advertising that Works. Laurie is also the author of Refuse to Diet and a stone sculptor. Contact Laurie via www.InternetAdvertisingThatWorks.com or www.RefuseToDiet.com or find her on Facebook or Twitter.
I Catch Her Smiling at Me and Know It Will Be All Right

Milana Vinokur

It’s impossible to choose just one person who I may call my hero. Many have touched my life, each one unique and special in his or her own way. I wish I could write a story on each and every one, but that would take a book of its own. Although I know I won’t be able to mention them all, I will try to write something about as many as I can.

First and foremost there are true heroes, the men and women who put their lives on the line each and every day to protect our freedom and our way of life. They are firefighters, police officers, paramedics, soldiers...they are our children, parents, family, neighbors, and friends. To them we owe our eternal gratitude.

Then there are everyday heroes, the men and women who go through their daily lives carrying on their responsibilities, not realizing that each and every act, no matter how small, is an act of heroism on its own. They are the single mothers, the volunteers, the immigrants seeking a new life, the parents who work more than one job. They are my family. They are people who often sacrifice their own needs, wants, and comforts to help others and who, in the face of a crisis, bond together to help strangers. They are people who refuse to leave their pets behind after a natural disaster. They are people like Heather, Kari, Cari, Lisa, Megan, Amy, and so many more who work full-time jobs and then go out to search for animals who have been lost in the Jop-

lin Tornado, so that they may reunite them with the owners who miss them dearly.

Then, of course, there are animals, who teach us so much, if only we are willing to learn. They teach us love, patience, and the value of living in the moment and enjoying life to the fullest. They teach us compassion and how precious life truly is. And most of all, they teach us forgiveness.

I guess my biggest hero would have to be my son. For he is my pillar of strength, and in him I see a reflection of all the good that I was able to accomplish in this lifetime. I watch him grow into a loving, caring man and I know that no matter what, in my life I have done at least one thing right.

And then, finally, there is that one elusive hero: the one that often is forgotten, and who always gets noticed last, if at all. I see that hero each and every morning when I look in the mirror. I am particularly glad to see her on the mornings when the previous night’s events may have almost convinced me that there may be no point or strength to go any further. When I survive the night and see her smiling face once more, I know that all will be well, for I am strong. I am my hero!

Milana Vinokur is a highly intuitive and creative woman, artist, photographer, writer, animal empath, spiritual coach, and uniquely fun individual. Contact her at www.Milana.me.
My hero served as a medic in the army during WWII where his sense of caring, compassion, and awareness were heightened. He encountered many injustices that he never got over, yet he remained very patriotic throughout his life. He was devoted, industrious, kind, fair, loving, lots of fun, and selfless. He worked endless hours for his patients and his family. He loved people: any age, any color, any background, any situation. My hero served thousands of patients over four generations in his pediatric practice (and yes, he made house calls). He was the last surviving charter member of the SERTOMA club where he served his community through philanthropic causes. He read to children on a weekly basis and served as a high school football physician every Friday evening for 20 years, all the while demonstrating a quiet yet powerful presence and a palpable sense of humility. He made time for family dinners, vacations, discussions, and projects. He was an avid gardener who loved art, music, animals, baseball, nature, and children. He never met a child, dog, horse, or stray cat who wasn’t drawn to him and always knew just the right question to ask anyone regardless of their age. My hero was a great friend to all. He was positive and always had a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face (yes, even during tough times). My hero chose his battles carefully. He cried often during the real-life tragedy of 9/11 and also while watching touching movies like Heidi or A River Runs Through It. My hero treated the environment with care before it was a popular pursuit.

So you say, just who is this Renaissance man? This man is an angel; the angel of compassion and caring. He is my dad, Charles Howard Kelsall better known to all as “Howie,” and he was loved by many. Over 700 people attended his retirement party held amongst flowers complete with a one-man band, homemade ice cream for the kids, and a spontaneous and well-deserved standing ovation.

Howie, the last surviving Charter member of the Sertoma club, passed away on July 7, 2011 surrounded by friends and family. He is missed by thousands every day.

In closing, I would like to share 15 of the many unique life lessons according to Howie. He and I would be honored for you to use any that apply; that way Howie will never really die.

1. Whistle to yourself while you drive.
2. Have a chair of your own.
3. Smell ALL of the flowers.
4. A swift pat on the back or shoulder means “I Love You.”
5. Ice Cream and Napoleons are very grand inventions.
6. Talk to animals as people; they get it.
7. Hold hands when you go to sleep at night.
8. Quietly notice that raindrops speak loudly.
9. Arguing only goes in a circle.
10. Chuckle to yourself.
11. Wear clothes that make you feel good.
12. Deserve a standing ovation.
13. Love simple gifts.
14. Have your own group of friends.
15. Get complete in your own way with those you love.

Dr. Amy E. Kelsall is a lover of animals, photography, golf, travelling, and coaching/inspiring others. She is the President of PeopleWerks and also directs Master’s programs in Organizational and Professional Communication and Human Resources at University College at the University of Denver. Amy can be reached at 303-475-6723.
Everyday Heroes

Doreen Susan McGrath-Smith

As a child, I looked to people from history whom I admired for creativity, courage, and strength as my heroes. People such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Nathan Hale, Patrick Henry, Lewis and Clark, Abraham Lincoln, and John F. Kennedy remain high on my list of personal heroes. As I grew, I found that heroes are everyday people who face extraordinary challenges and live up to them.

Look in the mirror...each one of us has hero DNA! We are basically DNA repositories of every ancestor before us, from the beginning of time. Many of these ancestors have been afraid, yet bravely fought grisly wars, survived overwhelming disasters, wild animal attacks, soul-sapping starvation, brutal winter storms, diseases that wiped out many of their family members, and more. These people were brave enough to open their hearts and love and protect their families and friends.

Ben Franklin and my other heroes were far from perfect people. They had special moments in which they excelled, and this is how they are remembered. The same can be said for our ancestors, and even for us. I share this not to minimize any heroic act, but to celebrate the heroic potential in all of us, and the knowledge that we often can reach far past where fear may wall us in, to accomplish the extraordinary.

I am proud to know many valiant people with high aspirations: people who sparkle with everyday heroism, people who may struggle and fall, only to rise again and again. I could easily list names: Ken, Greg, Melissa, Ian, Patsy M., Tina, Barb L., but this list is endless, reflecting different aspects of a hero, like a multifaceted, brilliant diamond.

With deepest gratitude for heroic examples both past and present, may we remember and integrate their sacrifices into our lives, and prepare to excel when our moment arrives.

Doreen Susan McGrath-Smith lives in Albany, N.Y.
Those Who Came Before

Donna Kozik

I’m grateful for family members I’ve never met…the ones who came before.

One of the Polish translations of “Kozik” is “goat herder.” I can see in my mind’s eye my ancestors tending the farm animals in Poland and dreaming of something more for themselves and their families.

I honor my great-grandparents from both sides, who made the decision to strive for a better life in America. Not knowing what they would face, they showed great courage in taking a chance to go forward and pursue their dream. Arriving in New York City and not speaking English, they most likely found themselves full of apprehension and exhilaration in this new land of opportunity.

Not afraid of hard labor, these personal heroes of mine—men and women alike—did what it took to make a life here, from working in coal mine country to taking dangerous jobs on the railroad and rising before the sun to farm rocky land. And I believe they did it while keeping a sense of humor along the way—a sense of humor being one of the most precious gifts they passed down to me.

Because of their perseverance and stick-to-it-ness, I’m now privileged to live free in this great country and “work” in front of a computer all day, composing pieces like this. I’m thankful for my ancestors—those with the last name Kozik, Oldenski, Kuss, and Pituch—who I now represent.

Donna Kozik leads “Write a Book in a Weekend®” virtual events, where she shepherds people in completing their books in two days. Find out more at www.WriteWithDonna.com.
Renew Our Soul

Cheryl Hall

Seared into America’s memory is the pain of the families whose loved ones lost their lives in New York that September day. It was a day America dug deep within, finding her courage, comfort, unity, bravery, and new beginnings.

Beyond the immediate chaos arose the sacred virtue of our military men and women eager to defend our country and defend our freedom. The integrity and honor of each individual whose life was sacrificed will never be forgotten or taken for granted.

To the families touched by this tremendous loss both then and still today, I offer you this prayer:

Lord, I thank You for the promise in Your Word to deliver us when we cry out to You. I come to You on behalf of Our Nation’s loss that you will deliver each individual from whatever binds them. I know that although “we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). I pray that you will give the gift of wisdom, discernment, and revelation to those seeking your understanding and your comfort. Lord, I pray your blessing upon those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6). Lord, please show each of us how to use the trials of our lives to counsel and comfort others and Lord, heal our troubled spirits and renew our souls once again. Amen.


“Gratitude—keep it in motion!”
How Rosa Parks Tore Down the Berlin Wall

Trish Ostroski

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the result of sacrifices, dedication, integrity—and heroism.

The historic fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 served as an impetus for many things to collapse and crash as well. The crumbled wall, which had long divided West Germany and West Berlin from East Berlin and East Germany, with vast contrasts between the sides, also served as a metaphor for other shifts and divisions in society. Heroism played a role in the demolition of that divisive structure. There have been many heroes at the core of other longstanding societal structures that needed to fall as well.

Did anyone think the Berlin Wall would ever come down? Did anyone ever think that other societal divides would ever change? Crumble and change they did, due to the heroic efforts of many individuals. These moments of triumph were the result of heroes who bore a legacy that inspired another hero, and a “change reaction” was born.

Boris Yeltsin, Russia’s first popularly elected president, was in power at the time when the Berlin Wall fell and was a key player in that event. Where did he find the courage and integrity to stand firm for a freer society? From a Polish electrician! That electrician was Lech Walesa, who became president of Poland during that period. In turn, Lech Walesa credited his courage and determination to Martin Luther King Jr., a minister whose stand for American Civil Rights was inspirational.

Martin Luther King Jr. noted that it was Rosa Parks who served as his inspirational influence.

One of the difficulties in our world is the sense that justice and fairness may be concepts that are too complex. It is easy for us to think that as individuals we simply don’t count, and we may believe that our efforts are useless. We may tend to feel that nothing we do can change anything of great importance.

Mrs. Parks was a black woman—tired from a day’s work, she was seated in the black section of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She refused to obey a bus driver’s order to relinquish her seat to a white man. For her actions, Rosa Parks was arrested. To protest her arrest, black commuters organized a bus boycott that lasted 381 days. The buses that sat idle for more than a year severely impacted the transit company’s finances. As a result, the law requiring segregation on public buses was overturned.

Rosa Parks and her supporters could never have envisioned that a simple bus strike would serve as a catalyst for many changes for years to come, inspiring a “change reaction” that ultimately transformed the whole world.

Once one wall falls, the influence from that event can have a domino effect for other change as well. Once one believes that walls can truly fall, the course of history can be changed.

As long as there are heroes, the walls keep tumbling down.

Trish Ostroski lives in Toluca Lake, Calif. She is a hypnotherapist, writer, memory trainer, speaker, author, and playwright. Trish serves her community in a wide range of pursuits. She has received more than twenty awards for writing, production, speaking, and community service. Find her at Trish@rainbowhypno.com, www.RainbowHypno.com, and www.Hypnosis.edu/hypnotherapists/trish-ostroski/.

Gratitude for My Hero

Anne McLeod Ryan

It may sound trite, but my dad, Robert Walter Scott McLeod (Scotty to his friends), is my hero. He spent his life giving to others and to his country, the USA.

His final posting was as the US Ambassador to Ireland. In that capacity he used his creativity to connect the USA and Ireland in ways that had not been attempted before. For example, my father was the catalyst to renovating Bunratty Castle near Shannon, Ireland. The castle was close to ruins when the idea for it came to him. Bunratty is close to one of the major airports in Ireland. He figured that the castle could give visitors an introductory or parting taste of the Ireland of yore.

What developed from his idea, and it took about seven years to fully develop, was the restoration of Bunratty Castle and the hosting of a medieval evening feast with all of the singing, dancing, and storytelling for which the Irish are famous. He envisioned Bunratty Castle surrounded by an authentic village that visitors could explore before they go in for the feast, with real Irish people doing the work they would have done during medieval times featured in the village.

This is but one example of many, many that my dad was involved in creating as he worked to help tourism in Ireland. I like to think of my dad as not just my hero, but the hero of a nation. Dad died shortly after returning to the USA, which, in my way of thinking, is a way to say that his greatest work, his purpose, was complete.

Dad’s death is also another reason for him being my hero—he died of a heart attack. He had a couple of small heart attacks before the fatal one, and he kept on going and giving so much of himself to so many. He kept his pain to himself and didn’t complain about it. It was quite by accident that I found out he was in pain. One quiet afternoon in Ireland, he had a bout of pain. I happened to be alone with him, and he began to cry quietly. My dad NEVER cried (at least not that I knew of). He confessed that he was in pain, and he commissioned me to “take care of Mom” if something ever happened to him.

He carried on with his work in Ireland, creating great relationships and businesses for Irish people, and doing all of his diplomatic duties. The pain was never spoken of again.

I have always wondered if he lived in pain every day or if he just had it that one time. Perhaps it was his pain that gave him such a high level of compassion for others and an understanding that he was creating a legacy both in Ireland and in the Irish connection to the USA.

Anne McLeod Ryan helps small business people grow their businesses by working with them on the phone. Find her at AnneMcLeod43@gmail.com, Anne@surfacingyou.com, or Facebook.com/pages/Anne-Ryan-Coach/167185003300898.
Real Heroes

Cecelia Heckman Inwentarz

They say there are no mistakes in life, only lessons to be learned, sometimes learned the hard way, because that same old thinking that can bring us our worst nightmare cannot bring us our solution too!

On September 11, 2001, the world shared an unforgettable tragedy that touched our hearts and changed our lives forever. Simply stated, that tragedy showed that there is no safety from hurtful people hurting other people.

We live in a sea of hurt. We bear this pain throughout our lives. And then we leave others hurt in our wake. The huge, explosive experience of 9/11 showed us what we have long ignored: our collective hurt, bottled-up and pressurized from being held deep within us all for far, far too long. We felt it at once and as one. It took away our collective breath and knocked us to our collective knees.

Healing our world is our highest calling. The real heroes of 9/11 are those who have the courage to look deep within to heal their own hurt, to change the very patterns of their fears, to say: “No more will I be a part of the pain that can produce our worst nightmare.” Learn the lesson that you alone are responsible for healing your own hurt and pain.

Paul McCartney sang of an answer coming when the broken-hearted people agree. Healing our world is the only worthy price, the highest honor we can give back in gratitude to assure each life lost that they did not die in vain for us. Let the real heroes mark 9/11 as their moment of awakening to find their own courage within, as exemplified by the acts of heroism we praise and we remember on this tenth anniversary.


My Two Biggest Heroes

Kim Nishida Bidwell

My two biggest heroes have always been my mom and dad. (Although I probably didn’t always appreciate them as much as they deserved, especially during my teenage years.)

My dad is my role model and hero for personal determination. He grew up on a watercress farm in Hawaii and was the only kid in his family to transplant himself to the mainland, where he worked and raised his family in Southern California.

The most recent example of his determination is that at the age of 75, he decided that he wanted to hike to the top of Half Dome in Yosemite. This is a grueling 16-mile round trip hike with an elevation gain of nearly 5,000 feet. In short, it’s not for the faint of heart. He trained for weeks in advance, and although it might have been more challenging than he bargained for, he never gave up, finishing off the hike in the dark even though we started before 6 a.m. I would love to be just as gutsy when I’m his age, determined to take on new challenges and live an exhilarating life.

My mom is my hero because of her unwavering self-confidence and her ability to completely own who she is without apology. I have often struggled with staying true to myself, feeling that I had to go out of my way to please others. (Where this lack of self-esteem came from is a mystery to me. It certainly did not come from my parents!)

As I get older, I appreciate how important it is to take a stand for yourself, and this is one of the things I help others do through fitness and business. But it all started with my mom being her own person and being my biggest cheerleader.


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In Pursuit and Support of the American Dream

Sandra Martini

When it comes to honoring the heroes in my life, both personally known and admired from afar, there are far too many to list. So I choose to honor two men who embodied every aspect of America, although in very different ways: my father, Franco Martini, and my father-in-law, Arthur Gamache.

My dad grew up in rural Italy and, at the tender age of 16, came to America to create a new life for himself like so many before him. Working in a button factory for 3 cents an hour, he taught himself English. A friend later helped him get a job operating heavy equipment, something it turned out he had a natural talent for. Sixteen years after arriving in New York, he moved his wife and two young daughters to rural Massachusetts where the housing was affordable and the schools were good.

And there begins my memory...

Dad commuting to New York until he found a job in Massachusetts.

His support and encouragement for us, now three daughters, to be the best we could, in every way.

His determination to live life on his terms, even when cancer took over his body.

And on that horrible day, September 11, 2001, my Dad, in a show of patriotism and support for all that was lost, purchased the biggest flag he could find and put it across their roof as his eyes filled with tears of anger and grief.

At the age of 19, Arthur fought on Normandy Beach in WWII, and, never fully recovering from the horrors he saw there, returned home to spend the next 68 years as an entrepreneur and father of five who believed in doing business with a handshake, generously donating his time and talents, and being fair to everyone.

Two stories in a country made up of heroes.

Sandra Martini is a self-employed marketing strategist and client retention expert. She has learned from both her father and father-in-law, in addition to years of Federal Government and corporate experience, what it takes to design, create, and enjoy a long-term successful business. Learn more about Sandra at www.SandraMartini.com.
What Matters Most

Teresa C. Lea

Throughout my life, many people have been heroes or champions in their own way to me. Some call it going above and beyond the call of duty. I call it having such a deep conviction that there is no other option or choice, only a drive to satisfy the hope, vision, and ambition that give way to meaning.

Many have been great examples for me to hold true to my vision of what I believe:

My parents, who were so passionate about their faith that they left families and home country to share it and live it to the end.

My friend from high school, Kah Walla, who is so determined and committed to increasing the rights of individuals in Africa that she has built her life around and even risked her life for the cause of equal rights and democracy for the Cameroonian.

Others have made sacrifices to show the extent and depth of love they had for me and my continued well-being into adulthood, such as my elementary school teacher, Miss Sather, who has flown all over the world reconnecting with her former students to see how they’ve evolved and grown.

I’ve had many teachers and mentors who have called out the best parts of me through their examples of walking their talk. It’s impossible for me to pinpoint just one. I am eternally grateful for the role they each played in their own way; how they inspire me to not only be the best I can be but to not compromise myself and instead be true to myself and that which matters to me.

There is one individual in particular, however, who stands out and for whom I am particularly grateful. This individual is not an average person. In fact, she is not a person at all. Mari was my dog, my companion, my friend. It was she who:

Showed me life was worth living and gave me a reason to live.

Reconnected me to the little girl inside of me.

Let me see I was worthy of love outside of my work.

Gave me permission to both play and be still.

Taught me I had worth merely by my existence.

Showed me what courage was and the value of pushing through pain to get to what really matters on the other side.

Embodied the example of continuing to ask for what I need in different ways until I am understood.

Taught me the importance of close observation and full participation in life.

Showed me that life was about more than creating safety, that it was also about taking risks and living each moment to the fullest.

And it was Mari who gave me permission and voice to own and share my gifts with the world, showing others how to go from pain to powerful, to transform trauma to triumph, and to live fully In Touch and In Life.

Teresa C. Lea shows people how to heal, reclaim their lives, and step into authenticity and personal power. To go from Pain to Powerful, Transforming Trauma to Triumph, to Living Well Fully In Touch and In Life. You can reach her at www.InTouchInLife.com and get your life back now!
A Day to Remember

Jennie Yates

September 11, 2001, is truly a day to remember for me; a day when many heroes stepped up to the plate. Strangers put their lives on the line to save others. Unselfish acts of kindness and raw faith that the human spirit will prove triumphant. This day holds meaning in so many ways to all human beings. For me, this is my story:

I was ready for work, just walking out the door, when the phone rang. I looked at the caller ID. It was my father. I hesitated. Just before the answering machine kicked on, I picked up. My father said “turn on the TV,” so I did. He and I watched together, connected by the power of the telephone, as the Twin Towers fell to the ground. I cried, not only for the tragedy of the situation in New York, but for the tragedy of my own situation. My father and I did not have a healthy relationship, and I was sad because I hadn’t wanted to talk to him—and yet, I had picked up the phone. We were connected in silence and emotion through technology and the minutes seemed like hours. I’ll never forget the overwhelming sense of how fragile life can be. Hundreds of people were losing their lives that day, and my main concern was avoiding a phone call from my own father.

I was 40 years old that year, and two months prior to 9/11, I had called my dad and we had made peace. I asked him to apologize for the hurt and pain I endured as his daughter. We made peace, and I thought that maybe we’d enjoy time together in the future. Instead, we shared a phone call during one the most pivotal moments in history. My father died a few weeks after that monumental day that held the last conversation we ever had. I applaud the courage and tenacity of every one of the 9/11 heroes who did not hesitate, not even a second, to run and rescue, save, fight, shed blood, and watch in horror as many lives were lost. All of you are true heroes to me, and I am grateful for having made peace with my dad and having that day as our last day together. Human spirit does triumph, and we all live on.

My Father, My Hero, The Firefighter

Laynita Cichy

I want to thank my father and the many men and women who have served their country and communities so faithfully and generously as firefighters, rescuers, and first responders. My father served as a firefighter in the US Air Force and later became a full-time professional firefighter in Richmond, Indiana.

I remember visiting him at the firehouse as if it were yesterday. Many times the bell would go off, and we would head home, calling dad later to ensure he was okay and safe. But there were times when we would follow behind those fire trucks and their wailing sirens to the fire site. These times were always exciting but so scary! I knew my father would have to go inside that burning building. I also knew that one mistake could take not only his life, but the lives of so many others.

Firefighters are trained to combat hazardous fires, rescue individuals from burning and collapsing buildings, car incidents, and hazardous environments. They save lives, provide personal safety, and protect our property and our environment.

My father was a role model to many people. He instilled in my siblings and me the honor of serving others. He empowered us to be of service to others. My sister is a hero, as she serves in a role that improves the lives of children all over the world. My brother and I are heroes, as we each served our country as members of the armed forces, ensuring our country was safe at all times.

Dad, you are my hero and a hero to so many others. Thank you for your self-sacrifice, your untiring efforts, and your invaluable service ensuring our safety and the safety of so many friends and strangers.

Laynita Cichy is a business and lifestyle empowerment strategist who assists women in designing profound transformations in wellness, life, career, and business. You can find her at www.LaynitaCichy.com.

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From Darkness to Light

Diana Garber

I watched in horror as he was beaten with a green garden hose until his legs bled. I was four and he was eight. We both sobbed, wondering what just happened, and why. In those days they didn’t know what dyslexia was, so he was placed in special education. He was certainly the brunt of misunderstandings, misdiagnosis, tough times, and short tempers. On many an occasion, even the schoolteacher’s hand marks were on his face when he came home.

Not surprisingly, he developed a temper of his own. It got to a point that if someone looked sideways at him, he’d sooner fight them than ask questions. But I knew the softer side of him. He became my protector, and knew when to get me out of the house or run interference. He was my champion, and neither of us realized at the time he was honing his leadership and negotiation skills.

He also had a kind spot in his heart for those who really were in need of special education, and others like us who wore homemade or hand-me-down clothes. One dare not make fun of any of us when he was around.

I watched as he became a man, got married, and had children of his own. When you hear a child try to take the upper hand by saying, “I’ll be a better parent than you ever were to me!” feel free to reply, “Great, you figured it out, so I guess I did something right!” If they only knew how easy they have it.

He had a choice…to play the hand he was given, or rise above it, and that he did with strength and wisdom thus the title of this piece, “From Darkness to Light.” If you ever needed anything, he was there for you even though others weren’t always there for him.

With a strong work ethic, he worked full-time and coached. When he retired, he pursued coaching full-time and became a very respected and loved coach who won state championships. You may know him, Coach Keney of Jackson Milton, Ohio. He taught boys’ and girls’ basketball and volleyball.

On one of my visits, he showed me a book the girls’ volleyball team put together for him. I could only tear up with pride seeing the lives he has touched, and I’d bet not many (if any) know from whence he came.

So this dedication is to my personal hero, my brother Pat. If I am half as good a person as you are, you raised me well. I adore you, brother. You are truly an inspiration and a hero.

Sis

Diana Garber strives to find balance in a seemingly chaotic world. Her clients experience improved well-being, relationships, financial freedom, and business success. Diana’s diverse backgrounds include disaster recovery, information technology, healthcare, corporate finance, and 30 years of Feng Shui. Visit her website at www.IntuitiveConcepts.com to see her awards and accomplishments.
Ageless Inspiration

Jackie Trottmann

In a youth-obsessed culture, aging is treated as a liability, not an asset. The focus is on the outward appearance and not the beauty of the soul. And let’s face it, how many older people do you know who have let themselves go and whose lives revolve around complaining about their physical maladies. Don’t get me wrong: aging is definitely not for wimps. The older one gets, the more life is filled with loss—loss of friends, loved ones, pets, mobility, and health. That’s why Opal Otis is my hero.

Opie, as she prefers to be called, is a youthful 99 years old. She’s a feisty redhead who has kept her signature locks. My husband and I are taking dance lessons from her, and she wears us out! Any time we see her, she is dressed in the latest style with all of the jewelry and accessories to match. People tell her that if they could bottle her energy, they would be rich. Opie is rich in pure joy. Her passion is teaching others how to dance. She’s been doing that since high school. That translates to over 80 years! When her husband proposed to her at the age of 26, she wouldn’t marry him unless he knew how to dance. He didn’t. So she taught him how.

In 1957 she organized a going away program for the local pastor. He was moving to Oklahoma. Opie put on a production with the churches’ youth, performing numbers from the Broadway musical Oklahoma. The kids had such a good time that they begged Opie to continue performing. There wasn’t room in the church to practice every week, so she sought permission from the YMCA. They agreed. For 18 years her students performed throughout the St. Louis area at hospitals, retirement homes, and even prisons. They were the opening entertainment for major events like the International Girl Scout Convention and the Missouri State Fair. In the evenings, Opie and her husband Warren taught dance lessons and competed around the country. They took large groups of dancers on 35 cruises all over the world and entertained aboard the ships. Before there was Dancing with the Stars, there was Opie and Warren.

I’ve never heard her complain about anything. She always has a twinkle in her eye and a smile on her face. In 2003, Opie was featured in the first edition of the book series Ageless, Remarkable St. Louisans. I’m looking at a signed copy of the book. In her handwriting are the words: “My secret??? Forget not to show love. Exercise and keep those endorphins workin’ that make you smile. Put on a happy face and keep movin’. That old adage, ‘you can’t hit a moving target…’ works for me.” Opie is my hero for what it means to live life with passion. I want to be just like her if I get to make it to 99. And I plan to keep my red hair too.

Jackie Trottmann lives in St. Louis, Mo. and is an aspiring author presently offering encouragement to others through her blog and writings at www.GuidedChristianMeditation.com.

“Express your gratitude out loud and often.”
Dad, My Guiding Star

Gillian Holland

My dad’s always been my guiding star, even though he’s no longer with us. In fact, he died when I was just 4½ years old. He’s still my hero, because I’ve learned so much about life through him. I believe he encouraged me to become a medium, so I could help other people come to terms with their own losses.

One of the most beautiful things he’s taught me is that life is for living, but you can’t really live life in the moment unless you are willing to let go. Letting go is part of the process of life. Sometimes I think the word death gives the wrong impression. It isn’t a full stop at the end of this lifetime; it’s a pause as we get into gear for the new step forward. Life’s a continuation. Our life takes us through several seasons as we move from childhood to adulthood and beyond. Each step takes us up a notch, but we have to be willing to let go so that we can move forward embracing life fully. As we move through the cycles of our own life, each harvested bloom becomes a seed for next season’s growth.

It’s not always that easy, because most of us want to hold on to the familiar rather than face the unknown. But change is inevitable, and although I wanted to cling to Dad, he taught me to pour love rather than fear into the gaping hole caused by his loss. Love is the doorway to the heart where we learn that we are all one, and can never be separate, even though we may still yearn for a departed one’s physical presence. In accepting his loss rather than trying to hang on for dear life, I would finally be able to move forward.

As my skills as a medium grew and developed, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that life went on in a slightly different form beyond the door we’ve labeled “death!” This is so reassuring when you are bereft. There is a moment in the pause when we are ready to begin living again; we are ready to trust the process of life and start to come to terms with the loss. This does not mean that our loved ones will ever be forgotten, however. I also knew that Dad could offer me his support from the other side of life, but he couldn’t live my life for me. Our lives are our own, but the knowledge and wisdom I gained from this experience becomes my inspiration to help others.

Gillian Holland is a medium, writer, and workshop facilitator living in Hertfordshire, in the UK. You can find her at her website: www.GillianHolland.co.uk.
Everyday Heroes

Joyce Layman Blackburn

A hero is someone who’s known for courage and daring action. You’re probably familiar with Neil Armstrong, but have you heard of Ben Saks? He was a junior at Carnegie Mellon University who was shot in the hand while assisting a police officer struggling to subdue a suspected drug dealer. The suspect grabbed the officer’s gun during the struggle and shot Ben, who received 20 stitches and personal thanks from both Pittsburgh Police Chief Dominic J. Costa and Mayor Bob O’Connor.

Courageous and daring, yes, but how long do we remember their stories? It doesn’t take landing on the moon or putting yourself in harm’s way to be the hero someone needs. Consider the everyday heroes who make a difference in our lives:

The friends who have helped us through a difficult time.

The teacher or coach who inspired us to be a better person.

The stranger whose kind gesture made us smile when we are having “one of those days.”

The mentor who recognized the potential in us before we saw it in ourselves.

The family member who made us feel special and appreciated.

Who are the everyday heroes in your life?

Betty Reese said, “If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito.” Weighing about two milligrams, a mosquito’s impact is felt, and no matter how small, ours can too. We view others as everyday heroes when we should consider ourselves for that role. We can provide the inspiration someone needs, and we are always there for the people we care about. Don’t be surprised if someone remembers what you’ve done for them and thanks you.

To all of my everyday heroes, know I am grateful for you!

Joyce Layman Blackburn is a keynote speaker, motivational teacher, and author who helps others connect the dots between their thoughts and results. Impacting lives in one profound way or another is Joyce’s mission in life. You can reach her at www.JoyceLayman.com.
A Pitcher of Heroes

Joe Noonan

This story is a tribute to a man who had a profound effect on my life, more than I ever dreamed. I never got to thank him, until now. Life invites us all to live our greatest dreams, and as an executive coach and leadership trainer, I help my clients bring their dreams to life through a very playful, intuitive process. I learned it from him.

I loved to play games as a kid but hated organized sports. Way too serious. Baseball was the worst. When it came to uniforms, adults, and all the rules, I’d choke, frequently striking out. The dream of “hitting the ball out of the park” died a painful, shameful death for me.

Then one summer I got invited to a pick-up game in the woods. I went reluctantly and saw this old guy forming teams. He asked me my name and said, “Welcome to our game, Joe.”

He called me Joe! Curious, I got in line. We were up to bat. As my turn got closer, my anxiety built.

I stepped up to the plate with my game face, fearing the inevitable public humiliation. He just smiled at me, a very disarming smile, and did something I’ll always remember...he gave me a pitch that came in so slow and beautiful, a dream I’d forgotten sprang to life within me. This dream grabbed that bat and swung hard, hitting the ball into the outfield.

Overnight, baseball became my favorite game, and by the end of summer I was hitting his fast ball. I learned a powerful philosophy from my new mentor that inspires me to this day. A masterful coach, he tailored his conversation and his pitch to each of us individually with innate faith in our ability to succeed, inviting us to realize our greatest ability.

Joe Noonan is an author, speaker, and guide who writes about his adventures with life. He’s been a guest on Oprah and National Geographic. One of his latest books, God is Delicious, is a celebration of our relationship with food. Download free stories from his books from www.JoeNoonan.com.
Learning to Live Gracefully

River Grace

I still remember my first impression of him: his neatly cropped white beard and hair framed an otherwise youthful face, which was dominated by eyes sparkling with curiosity and life. He was the creator of thought-provoking and critically acclaimed art installations, while I was a 19-year-old university student and trainee journalist.

Despite our age difference, we became close friends, and over the next few years he helped me rethink my core values. He was the first person who told me that there was more to life than top grades, career, and professional achievement. He was the one who encouraged me to meditate, spend time in nature, and listen to my intuition. He also challenged me to overcome my fears and see life as a joyful experience, rather than an exhausting battle.

What I liked the most about him was the graceful manner in which he walked his talk. He trusted that all his needs would be provided for. While other professional artists relied on teaching or administration jobs in order to support themselves, he lived as a freelance artist and interior designer, trusting that the next payment would come exactly when he needed it.

He started training me as an art critic for contemporary art but let go without holding any grudges when it became clear that I had other inclinations.

His presence was both gentle and powerful. We met relatively seldomly, but each encounter was empowering and eye-opening. And while he might be an unusual hero, he made a profound difference in some people’s lives—one of which happened to be mine.

River Grace is a gem angel jewelry designer and an aspiring author. She is gracefully flowing through life, and you can reach her at www.Gem-Angels.com.

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An Everyday Hero

Nancy Emmert

My husband, John Emmert, is an everyday hero.

Sometimes being a hero is a matter of opportunity—being at the right place at the right time. John rescued our granddaughter when she went unconscious and almost drowned at the bottom of the deep end of the pool.

Sometimes being a hero calls for rescuing someone even if it puts you in danger. John helped a friend kick his drug addiction. When the friend had a relapse, John risked his life by going into a crack house and pulling him out.

Sometimes being a hero is responding to a disaster. John made several trips to Mississippi to help rebuild homes for Katrina victims.

Sometimes being a hero is a matter of bravely developing skills to protect and rescue others. In his training as an infantry platoon leader, John took many risks, including jumping out of airplanes.

Sometimes being a hero is using your skills and talents to give others a new start. John helped build Habitat for Humanity homes in Detroit, New Zealand, and Romania.

Sometimes being a hero is assisting people when you have skills they don’t. John has done any number of household repairs for men and women alike. And he’s rescued many a person from computer and software catastrophes.

Sometimes being a hero is seeing what needs to be done and doing it. John serves in a local soup kitchen, collects food for the hungry, and distributes food baskets at Thanksgiving and presents for needy families at Christmas.

Sometimes being a hero is noticing when people are down and cheering them up. John has a wonderful sense of humor and has made it his personal mission to never miss an opportunity to make someone laugh.

I love being married to an everyday hero.

Nancy Emmert from Northville, Mich., coaches people on how to manifest rapid changes and new directions in their personal or work life. She believes that everyone has some unique contribution to make to the world, some special way they can be a hero to others. Visit www.HumanDesignPlus.com.
Courage, Strength, & Truth

Holly Tompkins

For me, a hero is someone you aspire to emulate, greatly esteem and respect, and look to for guidance and leadership. And while I’ve always loved my mom, until recent years, I never would have believed she would turn out to be my greatest hero.

My hero has not lived an orthodox or flawless life, but a full and colorful one. Mom was very young when she had my half brother and was subsequently kicked out of her home. She then met my father and spent the next 20 years building a successful business, having two more children, and moving to New Zealand.

Eventually, my parents separated, Mom moved back to America, and she perfected the role of wife and caretaker when she married my stepfather.

She has never been afraid to take on new challenges and is very smart, capable, and incredibly hard-working. She’s been the co-owner of a multinational company, a teacher, a sheep farmer, a travel business operator, a mortgage broker, a wife, and a mother.

Having been born into a large family with an abusive, alcoholic father and an ambivalent mother, my Mom had to develop certain coping behaviors to meet the challenges in her life. She became the ultimate people pleaser and perfectionist and has always made herself invaluable to anyone that came into her life. She would make it all about the other person and, in the past, could never express her needs or desires in a direct and honest way. She was a great manipulator, in the nicest possible way, and therefore incapable of being truly genuine.

So why is my mom my hero? Because at the age of 59, she had the courage to be honest with herself for the first time and to ask for help to change her life. She stopped being afraid to see things she didn’t want to and opted to take total responsibility for her life and happiness. She had the courage to face her truth, change her behaviors, and become an authentic person.

She left her financially secure but unloving marriage to my stepfather, looked for what she is truly passionate about, decided to take a yoga teacher training course, and then moved herself to the mountains and started her yoga business. She is living a very conscious and healthy life, is truly happy for the first time, and her inner light and beauty has never shone so brightly.

My mom has transformed herself and her life in order to live her truth. Her bravery and example regularly remind me that it’s never too late to change and that ultimately, you are the only one who is responsible for your own happiness in life. Her journey has been absolutely instrumental in helping me to live my own truth and to learn life’s lessons with grace and acceptance. She has guided me and given me courage, direction, and an unaltering and inexhaustible amount of support and love. My mother is my hero.

Holly Tompkins is American-born but has lived in New Zealand for most of her life, where she moonlights as a part-time photographer, small business consultant, and writer.
Touched by Heroes

Cherry Hsu

There are many heroes who have touched my heart in various ways.

I am extremely grateful to:

Those who express selflessness, dedication, and love towards humanity.

Those who bring forth their courage, voice their opinions, and follow dreams to benefit society and even the world.

Those who overcome personal challenges and inspire others to do the same.

Those who save others from danger and help them survive.

Those who share their talents, passion, and joy with others.

Those who educate others and encourage them to apply their knowledge.

Those who simply listen to and comfort their loved ones and friends in need.

Whenever I find myself experiencing the wonder of nature, I am humbly thankful that I am in the presence of an invisible hero who created the universe and everything in it, so that we can feel the warmth of golden sunshine, smell the aroma of colorful flowers, hear the sea breeze, gaze into the starry night sky, share planet Earth with interesting creatures big and small, and see the sweet smiles of babies who might one day become heroes in their own right.

Cherry Hsu helps people and animals feel healthier and happier easily. She also provides intuitive guidance to clarify direction in life. Reach her at www.EmbraceLite.com.

When Least Expected

Joyce Ozier

Heroes come in all sizes, shapes, and colors. They also sometimes appear when least expected.

Mine came in the form of a 28-year-old artist with long, blonde braids. Her name was Olivia. We were colleagues, both part of the window-dressing team of a national retail chain. We worked together but knew very little about each other’s private lives.

Then lightning suddenly struck. That was the day I called home to have the telephone answered by a strange policeman, telling me that my 13-year-old daughter had been seriously assaulted by a home invader and left to die. He said she had just been taken to the emergency room.

I don’t know how I drove across town in the snow to get to the hospital. Clearly, I was in a state of shock.

That’s when Olivia’s heroism appeared. Olivia, virtually a stranger, took it upon herself to call me every morning for months before I left for the hospital to keep me from becoming despondent and give me the strength to go on. We talked about the assault. We talked about my feelings. We talked about nothing in particular...she just kept me talking. None of my “real” friends seemed to know how to respond to such a terrible and shocking experience, and most of them simply left me alone.

It was a very bleak period.

As I think back on those terrible days, I wonder how I would have made it without her. Sometimes heroes come from the most unexpected places.

This story, fortunately, has a happy ending. Elizabeth, my daughter, eventually survived, but only after months in the hospital and a long recuperation period, which involved superhuman determination and hard work. She is now a beautiful adult and wonderful mother of two very special boys.

You never know when a hero will appear.

Joyce Ozier lives in Vancouver, Canada, and is Vice President of Retail Display Secrets Ltd., a retail display/sales training company. She can be contacted through www.RetailDisplaySecrets.com or JoyceOzier@gmail.com.
The CNA: Certified Nursing Angel

Susan Brownell

You don’t have to wear a superhero costume to be a hero. You can be a hero by following your life’s calling, whatever that may be. Heroes aren’t in it for the glory. Heroes care. They follow their hearts. And so it is with Karen Brownell, a CNA. My definition for CNA is Certified Nursing Angel. Karen loved her job and it showed—she was named Employee of the Year in 1991 and also won the top CNA award from the state that year.

Karen was on the job at the Morrow Memorial Nursing Home in November, 1997. She told a co-worker that she felt like she was going to faint. Karen immediately collapsed in a full cardiac arrest. She died while caring for others. Fortunately, the ambulance arrived quickly and they saved her life. That was just the beginning.

The ambulance took her to the local hospital. She died again there, and once again was revived. She was transferred to the regional hospital with the best heart care. She lost her life and was revived five more times there. She was in a coma for two weeks. Karen’s heart was not able to function on its own. She had to get a pacemaker/defibrillator. Although they are supposed to last about seven years, she is already on her sixth pacemaker/defibrillator in 14 years. She is on a heart transplant waiting list.

It has been a long road to recovery. She continued to work her way back to health, and eventually she returned to her job as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at the same nursing home, even though it was quite strenuous for her. I always loved to hear her stories of the latest ventures of some of her patients. She used humor and compassion to get her through the challenging parts of being a CNA.

She was tired all the time and had little time and energy for other things, but she still managed to work. She babysat her grandchildren regularly while her daughter-in-law attended nursing school. The doctors pleaded with her to give up this kind of work, as it took such a toll on her. The wires attaching her pacemaker/defibrillator to her heart sometimes came loose from all the heavy lifting she did on the job. Just the same, she could not be dissuaded from her work. She cringed at the thought of an office job, which would have put less stress on her heart. She reached the point where the doctors told her she was 100% dependent on the pacemaker/defibrillator. All this while, Karen continued to spread love and cheer to the aging residents on her wing of the nursing home. She gave, and continues to give, material things to them, as well as her time and attention. Most of all, she gives them her heart—the well-worn heart of an angel—with no strings attached, just a few wires and a small box with a battery.

Susan Brownell founded and writes for the award-winning website www.SanctuaryForCancerCaregivers.com. She lives her passion of teaching and providing online support to cancer caregivers when they need help most. As a coauthor of several books in the Gratitude Book Project® series, she’s also learned to practice the fine art of gratitude.
Everyone has at least one hero. I did not know that one day my hero would be one of my sisters. Her name is Linda, and she is one of my younger sisters. While growing up we argued often, mainly because we were both so hardheaded! We were four years apart in age but had quite a few qualities that were similar.

When we were teenagers, we had different viewpoints. I liked for things to be orderly, and she did not mind if our room was a mess or if she had to get up earlier to press her clothes before school. She enjoyed life, laughed a lot, and had many friends. Linda was the type that put others’ needs first.

Linda was like a second mom to my children. She loved spending time with them and especially spoiling them. Even though I had two other sisters, she always told them to call her their “favorite” aunt. Her signature on her birthday cards to them said: “From your favorite aunt”! I think they thought “favorite” was her first name!

She went on vacations with us and spent just as much time with my other nieces and nephews. She was like a second mom to all of the children in the family. She never had any children of her own. The older she and I became, the closer we became. Holidays were so much fun when we all got together. We would laugh about how we use to aggravate each other as we were growing up.

The true hero part came when Linda turned 38. She found out she had breast cancer and it had progressed to stage four by the time she was diagnosed. My sons were in high school, and the oldest had graduated and was engaged to be married. She fought the cancer like a trouper. She did the chemo and radiation mainly for all of us. She seemed to be the one encouraging us more than we encouraged her.

Linda did not like to be the center of attention. She never discussed her health issues with her friends. It didn’t matter how bad she felt, she would not complain or seek pity from anyone. I remember one time when she had had a test done at the hospital and we were leaving, she ran into one of her friends and the friend asked her how she was doing (the friend did not know about her cancer). Her answer was “fine.” She asked the friend how she was and she talked for quite a while about her issues as Linda listened to her and never mentioned her cancer.

Linda, through her last months and her death, taught all of us what true humility and love is. I have precious memories of her because of the way she lived her life. She will forever live in my heart and in my life. Part of her spirit is in my spirit and my children’s spirits. She will live on as our hero.

Debbie Miles, RN, LCSW, is a registered nurse and a licensed clinical social worker in private practice in Pensacola, Fla. She is also a wellness/personal development life coach who integrates the mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects in her coaching. Find her website at www.TheSkyIsTheLimitCoaching.com.
My Pint-Sized Hero

Marty Carey Segelke

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes; mine is a 4-foot-tall, 60-pound spirited redhead with sea green eyes. Her name is Gretchen, and she is our 8-year-old granddaughter.

Two years ago, Gretchen started swimming in a summer league. Her first race was the 25-meter freestyle, but she refused to step to the starting line. The starter called again and finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Gretchen got into position. The gun sounded, she jumped in, and she dog-paddled across the pool. Upon exiting, the timers handed her a purple “participation” ribbon, which she accepted with great excitement.

This summer she continued her swimming, but to her consternation, the coaches entered her in the 100-meter individual medley. A test of both skill and endurance, it required her to swim four lengths of the pool, performing four different strokes. “What are the coaches thinking?” she exclaimed as fear built prior to the race. Tears flowed and she expressed extreme doubt. Even moments before the beginning the race, it was touch and go. Would she back out or swim?

The first leg of the IM competition was the grueling butterfly stroke. Gretchen dove in and did surprisingly well, ending that segment in the lead. Next was backstroke—a stroke she had not raced that year. After the second leg, she was still leading. The breaststroke was third, with freestyle the fourth and last segment. Watching this entire event take place, we wondered if she would last. As she turned for the final lap, it was obvious that she was spent. At one point, Gretchen almost stopped, and another swimmer was closing in, but she touched first. She won the race.

Exiting the pool, Gretchen was exhausted. Her eyes welled up with tears, and she could hardly breathe. A half hour later, she recovered miraculously and realized that not only had she completed the race, but she had done it well. The whole experience was most significant not only for her, but for the coaches who believed in her and those of us who watched.

A week later, I had planned a round of golf. Heavy rains prevented us from using carts, and the only way to play was to walk the four miles—bad hip and all. First, I hesitated, and then I remembered Gretchen. Eighteen holes later, I limped in with two mammoth blisters on my feet, a hip that screamed for pain relief, and sweat that rolled down my face and other places. Like Gretchen, I had finished.

These stories seem small in the bigger scheme of life. But seeing a doubtful young lady complete her race, knowing of our brave men and women serving in our military, learning of the firemen who entered the Twin Towers so courageously, and hearing of others who act unselfishly in time of need—all these accomplishments, great and small, give us hope. Heroes are around us everywhere, in all places—even sitting on the couch beside you.

Marty Carey Segelke lives in Denver, Colo., and is a former social worker and owner/manager of a medical personnel business. For ten years, she has been a life/career coach and has taught family story writing. Her website is www.KaleidoscopeUnlimited.com and she can be reached at mjcseg@aol.com.
Courage to Age Gracefully

Elizabeth H. Cottrell

My mother and father, ages 87 and 93, are my personal heroes for so many reasons, but I admire them especially at this time in their lives for choosing to embrace the challenges of aging with extraordinary courage, grace, and humor.

“I want to live until I die,” has been my father’s mantra, and they have both lived fully and joyfully in spite of health challenges and the psychological pressures of age that seem to defeat those who are less robust in their outlook on life. Whoever said “growing old is not for sissies” certainly had it right.

The cynic would say they have no choice... age is staring them right in the face and will happen whether they want it to or not. That’s true, but what makes them remarkable is they have chosen to:

- Keep moving and stay physically active.
- Take control of the things in their lives they can control and accept the things they can’t.
- Keep thinking and reading and conversing.
- Cultivate friendships and be good friends to others.
- Stay involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren.
- Accept invitations and have fun.
- Practice generosity.
- Dwell on the positive.

They are fun to be around, and they are beloved by their family and friends.

Mom and Dad are my personal heroes only partly because their choices have made my life easier and minimized my need to make decisions for them. The real reason is they have given me—and everyone who knows them—a precious gift of hope... hope that as WE get to the years when Mother Nature seems to take away so much, we, too, can reach down into those deep reserves of courage, faith, and love for the strength to face whatever lies ahead.

Elizabeth H. Cottrell (@RiverwoodWriter) helps committed life-embracers learn to make four essential connections: with Self, with Others, with God, and with Nature. She blogs at www.Heartspoken.com and is on a mission to revive the art of personal note writing! At www.RiverwoodWriter.com, Elizabeth offers writing, editing, self-publishing, and online visibility services.


“Live in gratitude today and every day.”
In one word, I am most grateful for MUSIC! Nothing can lift my spirits, calm my nerves, pick me up, or encourage me like music and musicians can.

Music is a wonderful way to escape, express, or connect with someone or something in a special way—even if only for a little while. I am so appreciative of all the beautiful music in the world. How fortunate we are! And our part is so simple, we just have to listen.

I think music actually has secret and heroic superpowers. It seems it can communicate, give comfort, spread love, make you happy, inspire, relax, bring peace, be a friend, create a party, make you cry, uplift you, give you energy, awaken feelings, soothe, educate, and even entertain. I daresay music is magical!

I can’t even begin to express the amazing breadth and depth of the body of music in the world on 1 page, or even on 1,000 pages. Music has the power to touch us on so many levels—some we may never understand. I wish I had more eloquent words to convey the incredible gifts music has to offer. But fortunately I don’t have to. Instead, I will share the thoughts of the masters themselves.

Here are words of some of my favorite mentors, friends, and heroes sharing their thoughts on music:

“If you’re not having fun, it’s not worth doing.” —Tommy Bolin

“Music really becomes the soundtrack to the major events to your life.” —Sheryl Crow

“After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.” —Aldous Huxley

“It is an honor to play music and share its beautiful effects with others; it makes me feel immortal.” —Phil Brown

“Music doesn’t lie. If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music.” —Jimi Hendrix

“Music is the shorthand of emotion.” —Leo Tolstoy

“Music happens to be an art form that transcends language.” —Herbie Hancock

“Music in the soul can be heard by the universe.” —Lao Tzu

“If music be the food of love, play on.” —William Shakespeare

“Music is forever; music should grow and mature with you, following you right on up until you die.” —Paul Simon

“Music is love in search of a word.” —Sidney Lanier

The only thing that could say it better is the music itself. So sing a song, turn up the radio, feel the power of the music, and make today just a little better.

Darlene Janke Horwath, “The Party Lady,” is the premier “Sex EduTainer.” When she works, it is always a party! Find this retired RN, author, speaker, trainer, and passion consultant at her website, www.ThePartyLady.com or on Facebook at www.ThePartyLady.net. Hear her podcast at www.PartyGirlPartyGirl.com or call her at 888-5-TOYLADY.
A Heroic Cat

Joyce Kenyon

There are so many heroes from ancient to modern times, but one courageous little being stands tall among them. I only met her through a story in the newspaper, yet she found a special place in my heart—and likely in the hearts of others.

One night an abandoned building caught fire, and soon the entire structure was in flames. Then out of the smoke a small, badly burned tabby appeared, carrying her kitten out to safety. She safely deposited the kitten across the street and returned to the burning building.

No one could stop her. Five times she went inside the burning building and fetched another kitten. She ignored the third-degree burns that covered her body. She had gone blind. She could barely breathe. But she would not rest until her whole family had been saved. Then she collapsed.

This little cat was such an inspiration to me—and an example to all of us of the incredible power of love and courage.

Joyce Kenyon is an Authorized Instructor and Seventh Degree Initiate of The Radiance Technique®, an ancient cosmic science for stress relief, healing, love, prosperity, and enlightenment. For nearly 30 years she has taught health care professionals, sports and entertainment figures, entrepreneurs, and people on a spiritual path. Contact her at RadiantJK@radiant-healinghands.com or visit www.Radiant-HealingHands.com.
Heroes in the Park

Louise-Annette Burgess

Today I took my 10-month-old daughter on her first visit to the carousel in the park. It was operated by two young people who looked to me as if it couldn’t have been that many years since they themselves first felt the joy and wonder of riding it. The taller of the two was sizing up the three children in the front of the line to see if they were tall enough to play the reach-for-the-brass-ring game. They each stood up as straight as possible with wide, hopeful eyes and paused in their breathing as the operator held the height stick next to each of them in turn. Elder brother, no problem; sister in the middle, narrowly made the cut; however, the younger brother...he was not even close. “Sorry – you can’t play,” said the worker, walking away.

Heart-stricken, he bowed his little sandy blond head, and his eyes slowly filled with tears. So did mine. His dad walked over from the side and asked, “What’s wrong, buddy?” The little boy couldn’t speak; he just shook his head and turned away as the older brother explained. His sister tried to comfort him, “That’s okay, if I get a gold one you can have it,” she said as she hugged him. He wiped the flow of silent tears away with his hands, quickly shoving them in the front pockets of his jeans.

The other employee, who was running the carousel, opened the entrance gate and collected the tokens. As the lights flashed and the horses started their wondrous chase, the workers had a quick exchange. The carousel operator opened a locked cabinet and handed something to the taller one as they shared a knowing smile. When the boy came round mounted on his magic steed, the operator adjusted his handful—it was a stack of rings! He pulled one out and held it for the boy at a lower height than the ring machine. The boy’s jaw dropped in awe, and he smiled a perfect 7-year-old grin, complete with a missing tooth.

Throughout the remainder of the ride, each time the boy came around, the operator presented him with a ring to catch. I didn’t see them all, but at least one was one of the prized brass rings! A simple, compassionate offer on the spur of the moment, meant to delight a child, and those two carousel workers became heroes not only to the little boy but also to me.

The three siblings won three additional rides with their impressive collection of brass rings. My daughter and I shared an amazing time on our joy-filled adventure to the carousel.

We humans share precious few voyages around the sun together. If we are very fortunate to have the brass ring of excellent health, we get a few more trips. I hope that I will always remember to act in the moment to bring joy; to do the little thing—perfectly timed to make someone else’s ride all the better.

Louise-Annette Burgess helps others put their best face forward working as an image coach and beauty consultant. She is a mom and wife, playwright, author, actor, director, and fan of all things dramatic—especially historic theatres. She is an active community volunteer and founding member of The Whiteside Theatre Foundation.
A Dream Fulfilled

Millie Sunday Jett

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is my personal hero because he inspired me to fulfill my dream. Six months before Dr. King spoke at my high school, my life had been turned upside down. My father was having serious health challenges and was on permanent disability. In addition, we had to move to a different and more affordable part of the city, and that meant I had to change high schools in the 11th grade and would not be able to graduate with my friends, classmates I’d known since elementary school. The most devastating news for me was finding out my father would not be able to financially support my college education; I had dreams of going to nursing school and being the first in my family to attend and graduate from college.

The day that Dr. King spoke at my high school, I was filled with anger, bitterness, and an unrelenting sense of despair. My only thoughts were about myself: life was unfair; I wouldn’t be able to go to college, my personal sacrifices (such as asking my parents to save money instead of buying me gifts) were in vain, and why can’t I have my old lifestyle back? That morning while wandering in the halls (something completely out of character for me), a teacher questioned me and instructed me to go to the auditorium, at once, to hear Dr. King. At that moment, hearing Dr. King meant nothing to me. My own pain was too intense, and I felt his presentation would not be relevant to my circumstances. By the time I reached the auditorium, his speech had started, and the room was almost filled to capacity. I reluctantly took the only vacant seat, front and center in the first row.

Gradually I noticed my mood shifting, and I experienced a profound connection to what Dr. King was saying. In substance, he spoke about how the mishaps and disappointments in life can be healed and that God can fix all unfulfilled dreams. He said we needed to change the way we think about ourselves and start loving and accepting ourselves. We were informed of our rich and proud heritage and that it mattered not if we were exploited or however painful our history may have been, we mattered. He emphasized asking for God’s help in accepting ourselves and our tools. And to use our tools to serve and strive to be the best at what we do.

I left that auditorium with a newfound sense of purpose, pride, and conviction. It was empowering to sense the possibility of fulfilling my dream through proper vision and use of my own resources. Dr. King’s speech gave me the motivation for pursuing and obtaining my undergraduate degree (graduated magna cum laude) in nursing and completing graduate school.

I am grateful that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is my personal hero, because he inspired and encouraged me to dig deeper and reach higher.

Millie Sunday Jett is a coauthor, trainer, speaker, registered nurse, human resources manager, lieutenant colonel (retired), and an emotional freedom and healing facilitator based in Detroit, Mich. Find her at Facebook.com/millie.jett or on LinkedIn.com/in/milliesundayjett2CU.
Hildie Who?

Helen M. Thamm

Yes, Hildegard Peplau had a rather unique name. She may only be well-known to people in my profession, but to us she was really a hero. “Hildie,” as she was sometimes fondly called, was considered to be the grandmother of psychiatric nursing. Before she came along, caretakers in mental institutions or “asylums” were often either nuns in Catholic countries or unsavory sorts in others. People with serious mental illnesses were not well-understood, and since many acted somewhat differently from average people, they were often shunned and even ridiculed.

Hildie developed her interpersonal nursing theory in the 1950s, and soon began teaching nurses her compassionate and professional model, which helped transform the treatment of all mental health patients, or clients. Her basic premise I still live by today is: it is the therapeutic nurse-patient relationship that helps a person heal. Many modern psychiatric nurses still follow Hildie’s example and have continued our education to attain higher degrees (Hildie achieved her doctorate), to get even better at helping people.

Today, due in large part to the work of this pioneer, many psychiatric nurses without Master’s degrees are becoming better clinicians by being certified in our field, and we psychiatric nurses with Master’s degrees (or above), attained before 2000, often became independent therapists helping people in outpatient settings. In the year 2000 we reached another milestone and became licensed as advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). Some who had additional training even began prescribing psychiatric medications. Unfortunately, our hero did not live to rejoice in our accomplishment, as she died in 1999. I imagine, though, that Hildie was smiling down from some beautiful place at her nurse “grandchildren” when we achieved those expanded roles!

If it weren’t for Hildie’s belief that people whose wounds don’t always show deserved specially educated and also deeply caring professionals to help them heal, I believe my profession would never have come into being. I, and others like me, would not be there to help “my folks” as I call my clients, overcome serious challenges, such as mood disorders, through therapy and, if needed, medication, in order to live full and satisfying lives complete with being able to enjoy more supportive relationships.

My hero understood all people are precious and worthy of being treated with respect and deep caring. Registered nurses who follow on the path she forged don’t make dramatic rescues like firefighters who may save people from burning buildings. However, most of us have quietly and gently helped save people many times who felt desperate and may even have thought about ending their lives, through the therapeutic relationship, which is based on trust, respect, and deep caring. We don’t consider ourselves to be heroes. We are just professionals dedicated to helping other people overcome emotional challenges and losses, find and use their strengths, raise their self-esteem, build nurturing relationships, and create more satisfying lives. Hildie, we hope we make you proud!

Helen M. Thamm, APRN, CPC, is a stress reduction expert, life/career coach, creator of www.NurseCareerSuccess.com, and author of How to Manage with a Magic Wand (No, don’t hit your ‘problem employees’ over the head with it!).
Heroes in My Life

Leslie Hagerich

On the anniversary of 9/11, as we stop to remember and honor heroes of that day who risked their lives in the service of helping others, I want to also express gratitude for anonymous heroes in my life. These special heroes are my parents, Don and Nancy Hagerich.

While my heroes never rescued me from a burning building or gave their lives on a battlefield for my freedom, they have gone above and beyond the call of duty, always there in times of need. Whether celebrating my accomplishments, comforting me when I was down, or helping me learn from my mistakes, my parents always provided unconditional love, encouragement, and support.

When I experienced heartbreak, it was my parents who reminded me that we often learn our greatest lessons through painful experiences. They stood by me through life’s trials and tribulations, and they continued to love without condition.

When I was worried about the loss of my job and how I would manage in a down economy, my parents encouraged me to pursue my dreams despite the many obstacles I faced. They remained optimistic when I was unable to see clearly the possibilities that existed in the moment. Their belief in my ability to pull through yet another time gave me confidence to move forward in pursuit of a better future.

Perhaps there are those who will not see my parents as heroes the way I do. From my perspective, however, it takes great courage and commitment to love so unconditionally, as they have. I will be eternally grateful for the sacrifices they have made for me.

My parents have provided a living example that will help me always remember what matters most in life: people, relationships, and living from the heart. Thanks, mom and dad! I hope you know how much I love and appreciate you.

Leslie Hagerich is a Certified Professional Coach and Licensed HeartMath® Provider. She is the founder and CEO of Leader’s Edge Coaching, a personal and professional development company helping people de-stress, rejuvenate, maximize performance, and build resilience through an innovative, scientifically validated approach to wellness and heart-based living. Contact her at Leslie@LeadersEdgeCoaching.com.
I’m Okay. You’re Okay.

Peg Roach Loyd

My personal hero is George. He would not consider himself a hero. Most days he quietly goes about his business, getting up early, going to work, coming home, and fixing dinner. When the day’s work is done, he sits back in his recliner and watches sports on TV. His favorite team is the St. Louis Cardinals, and he watches their baseball games as religiously as my dad used to listen to them on the radio when I was a kid.

George cares about me, despite my failings. He acts silly with me, and I act silly back.

He has shown me what it is to be a hero.

On the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, George had back surgery to repair a ruptured disc. I didn’t know it beforehand, but he was deeply afraid to have the surgery. He feared he would never walk again.

Fortunately, the surgery was successful and he was walking the hospital corridor that same night. “I’m okay,” he said, fighting back tears. “I can still walk.”

As we watched the events of 9/11 unfold on the hospital room TV, we witnessed amazing courage. Policemen and firefighters walked into the burning Twin Towers as the people inside scrambled to escape. People inside the buildings helped others get out safely. Ordinary people who were going about their day were struck by extraordinary circumstances. They realized the risk and helped each other.

What defines a hero is courage. I believe the highest form of courage is when a person does something they are afraid to do, but they go ahead and do it because they know it will help someone else. They know the risks. They do it anyway.

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer and was in the process of being treated for it, when George was diagnosed with cancer, too. We were both feeling overwhelmed by what we were experiencing.

George was presented with several options, including “watchful waiting,” where his doctor would monitor a blood marker every three months and track any sudden or significant changes that would indicate the cancer was growing. There were risks associated with all the treatment options, and there were risks to watching and waiting as well.

It was only after I had several checkups with my doctor and felt well again that George decided to proceed with treating his cancer. He had waited over a year. “Now you’re okay,” he said. Only then did I fully realize what he had done and why. He had postponed his own treatment until I was healed from mine.

My husband, George, is my hero, and I am grateful to be his wife.

**My Husband, My Hero**

**Marcia Francois**

I met my husband when I was just 18 years old. We were both at university, and we started seeing each other a mere six weeks before final exams. Really bad timing, but within weeks we knew that this was the real deal. We’d found our soul mate. We waited a few years to marry, and we’ve now been married for 16 years. It’s one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.

Dion is my hero because:

He has always allowed me to be my true, independent self. Many others in the past have felt threatened by my strong personality, but not him. He has always recognized and even encouraged my need for freedom, and for that I will always be very grateful.

He supported me through a cross-country move to a big city where I knew no one but him.

He accepts me unconditionally, warts and all, and loves me anyway.

He always encourages me to succeed and be the best person I can be.

He calms me down and is my solid rock.

After trying to become pregnant and being diagnosed with infertility, he let me cry countless tears and kept me strong, even though he was hurting as much as I was. We eventually got pregnant through IVF, and he is the most wonderful father to our twins, Connor and Kendra. I know I could not parent these children as effectively without him.

Yes, we have our share of troubles but there is no one I’d rather be with in this life than him.

He is strong where I am weak, and we are a great team together.

Above all else, he is my very best friend, and I love him dearly.

**Marcia Francois** is a wife, mother of twins, time management speaker, and coach who inspires overwhelmed women to passionately succeed in life and business at [www.PurposefulTimeManagement.com](http://www.PurposefulTimeManagement.com).
Evelyn Pindura

She may not have been a 9/11 heroine, but she has definitely made a difference to the lives of many. What caught my attention was her massive involvement in missions reaching out to thousands of people worldwide.

Joyce Meyer’s outreach ministries provide assistance to those who have given up hope—feeding the hungry, helping treat and prevent illnesses, and rescuing children from the streets.

There are so many things that we take for granted, but when someone decides to answer that call of duty, how can we let this go unnoticed?

Joyce Meyer is the founder of the popular television program *Enjoying Everyday Life*, and she’s my hero.

*Evelyn Pindura* is a passionate writer and encourages people to strive for the best through difficult times. She is known as “The People’s Advocate.” Her desire is to inspire people to achieve their God-given destiny for their lives. You can reach at Evelyn@evelynpindura.com or www.EvelynPindura.com.
Dog Heroes

Lynne M. McCarthy

Often, the word hero conjures up visual images of service people who have fought for their country, firefighters, police officers, or even the common people who do a good deed. Heroes are often people who risk their lives for a particular cause, or make a major contribution to society or humanity. In short, heroes are people who go above the call of duty, but what about our uncelebrated canine heroes?

The history and evolution of domesticated dogs exceeds a time span of 15,000 years. Some experts believe that ancestors of domesticated dogs may have lived on Earth more than 100,000 years ago. According to historical records from across the world, dogs have been by ancient people’s side not only as their companion, but also as their hero.

Historically, canines were used for hunting, herding, tracking, retrieving, fighting, and even guarding human dwellings. These dog heroes are depicted in various forms of art from the ancient world. Notable dog heroes appear in tomb paintings, cave art, stone reliefs, pottery, sculptures, tapestries, and various artifacts. Clearly, our ancient ancestors were graphically depicting gratitude to their dog heroes through their individual art forms.

The Egyptians believed that if they were buried with their dogs, the dogs would be available to them in their next life. Their dog heroes were mummified in the same way that their masters were.

The Greek society also had love and appreciation for the dog. Canines were considered spiritual guides and protectors of the souls of the dead. They were viewed as healers with metaphysical powers for the wounded and sick. These dog heroes were also used in Greek hospitals to give comfort to the dying.

As canines continued to guard temples, fields, farms, and towns, the Roman society developed characteristics of their dogs for warfare. Their gratitude for dog heroes was often depicted in the art form of statues.

Today, our culture and society acknowledges the gratitude for military dogs that courageously performed countless deeds and made sacrifices for our country with their lives. Canine heroes have acted as military and working dogs in World War I and II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and other military conflicts. They perform duties and provide assistance in all branches of the Armed Forces.

Search and rescue missions use canine heroes to locate missing persons in the wilderness, disasters such as the Oklahoma City bombing, 9/11, and, most recently, nature’s fury in Joplin, Mississippi. Our presidents have had dog heroes by their side as they led our nation. We continue to train service dogs, therapy dogs, and dogs that can detect seizures and even various forms of cancer. We even allow dogs in the workplace.

From ancient times to our society today, we have lived with our canine heroes as our shelter evolved from caves to condos. It is true that throughout the world dogs are still used as rescuers, guards, hunters, herders, haulers, helpers, and spiritual protectors. They will always remain our best friends, loving companions, and, especially, our heroes.

Lynne M. McCarthy, ASID is an NCIDQ Certified professional interior designer who practices commercial and residential design. She is coauthor of other publications. Look for her upcoming book The Miracle of Harley (ISBN-13 978-0-61551-980-7). See www.TheMiracleOfHarley.com, or e-mail her at zDogzzDogz@gmail.com.
A Hero on TV

John Rasiej

I don't usually look to TV stars or Hollywood celebrities when I think of heroes. Simply being famous or having celebrity doesn’t connote heroic behavior. Yet there’s one exception for me, someone whose work inspires me and has helped me appreciate the human spirit of helping others.

That man is Ty Pennington.

For years I had avoided watching Extreme Makeover: Home Edition because of a preconceived notion that it was a sappy, melodramatic show that played to people’s emotions. I’m not proud to admit it, but part of me felt a certain sense of “What did these people do to deserve a new home?”

One day last year, a rerun of an episode happened to be on when I turned on my television. Maybe it was just the right moment, but I found myself drawn in to watch, and what I saw moved me deeply. Here was a man who, with some colleagues, was helping change people’s lives in a massive way. Of course this was a commercial endeavor and people were getting paid to create it, but underneath it all was a palpable concern to lift up someone in need.

It wasn’t just building a new house, but as I came to see in watching more episodes, there would be special attention paid to children with special needs, to support people doing important volunteer work in their own communities while neglecting their own personal comfort and sometimes well-being, to disabled veterans, to victims of weather disasters, and to so many more.

Nothing was cookie-cutter. Time was spent to find the special interests of the children in families so they had a place that really reflected them. Special spaces were built for a man who ran a car repair shop for those who couldn’t afford to pay a regular repair shop, or a hair salon for a woman who loved doing that for her community and hadn’t been able to in her old home. Special wheelchairs were brought in for people, one of which would allow a father to dance with his daughter at her wedding, years after not being able to stand.

And I saw it didn’t stop there. When they worked on homes that held people doing fund-raising or other charitable work, they created ad hoc fund-raising drives, bringing in stars for concerts, organizing food drives for neighborhood pantries, and more. Sometimes they would get colleges to provide scholarships for children in some of these families to help ensure a brighter future.

It was like nothing I had ever seen on television. The first time I watched, I wept cathartically as my cynicism was overcome by inspiration. I saw the spirit of giving and gratitude so powerfully expressed. I still watch episodes frequently to feel that uplifting spirit.

In the middle of this commercial medium, which often provides entertainment simply to get the viewers to watch some advertising, this program and this man stand apart. Thanks, Ty Pennington (and your team), for bringing hope and inspiration to so many.

John Rasiej is a public speaking mentor and communication coach as well as an author. He created Speak Louder Than Words to support business leaders and entrepreneurs to get their messages out with better connection so they can impact the world more. His website is www.SpeakLouderThanWords.com, and his book is at www.SpeakLouderThanWordsBook.com.
The Rainbow Spectrum

Joy Leccese

When I was in high school, it was easy to find heroes. As a freshman, I viewed upperclasswomen as somehow magical: I wondered how they got to be who they were. They stood on invisible pedestals, and I admired them from afar. Quite simply, they were just other high school students, but they emitted an aura of grace and poise that seemed foreign to me, and I wanted to know how they got to be that way.

The student body president, class president, and the president of the Mission Board (our social justice activities group) all seemed to me to wear halos. Halos were not part of my wardrobe in those days, so I had no idea how to relate to those girls other than to view them in awe.

Upperclasses’ student government representatives wore shiny sashes of royal blue grosgrain ribbon draped diagonally across their torsos over their uniforms; freshmen and sophomores wore green ones. In the middle and lower schools, ribbons were green and pink. All of them held meaning, whether for a 16- or 6-year-old, as every elected student had to be approved by the nuns—a significant sign of stature.

Fast forward to my junior year, and a life-altering moment of no small proportion. Toward the end of the school year, elections were held for student government positions for the following academic year. One afternoon, while I waited for my ride home, one of the senior class students emerged from the headmistress’ office, where they were discussing nominations for the upcoming year. Priscilla—a beautiful, tall, stately young woman, sat me down on the stairway with a serious countenance, and said, “We want to nominate you for president of the Mission Board for next year, but your grades might interfere. You need to promise that you will do well in your finals, or we can’t elect you!”

Good thing I was sitting down already—a faint breeze would have otherwise toppled me! I was stunned. “Yes! Yes! I promise to study and do well!” ‘Nuff said. Off she went back to the headmistress’ office, and the rest is history. I was nominated, elected, approved, and...I passed my finals with flying colors. Talk about motivation!

Why were these young women my heroes? Why was I so in awe of them? In hindsight, I think it was because they embodied one of the principles that was instilled in us by the nuns. “Have the courage of your convictions. Stand up for what you believe in.” Regardless of whether your beliefs change with passing years, if your values are in place, and you live by your convictions, you are a Woman of Character. And heroes are made up of character.

It’s doubtful those girls considered themselves heroes. But they set an example for me when I was young and needed role models, and for that reason, they were my heroes, and for that I will always be grateful.

They look so young. Their hair is so short. They are so fit. They are alive and vibrant and hopeful. Some have young wives, and some have infant children. These are the young men of the United States Marine Corps. And they are heroes.

They became Marines by choice, and they did it after 9/11, knowing the challenges ahead of them and the risks that they may face. I live near Oceanside, Calif., and see many of these young men who are stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

When I talk with them, I have yet to find one who is not respectful. They speak of their time in the Corps with acknowledgment of the risks, but they are also very confident of their training. They are dedicated to their mission of protecting the American way of life. And we are all in their debt for the commitment and sacrifice that they are willing to make.

I have met many of these young men on the base at Camp Pendleton, at golf courses, and in restaurants. As often as I can, I take a moment to thank them for their service, and they are humble in their replies. At times my wife and I will buy a round of drinks for them, or pay for their meal.

I met Mark, Ben, and Charlie on the golf course, and we played a round of golf together. They all worked in the motor pool, and each had been deployed several times to Iraq and Afghanistan. I asked them about the risk that IEDs (Improvised Explosive De-

vice) posed. They were matter-of-fact in their responses. They felt that their vehicles were armored to a sufficient degree and that they had confidence in the resources that were available to sweep the road before they traveled it.

Even though we have seen enough pictures of our heroes coming home with prosthetic arms and legs, Mark, Ben and Charlie did not reveal any fear that they could lose limbs, or their lives.

That willingness to put themselves in harm’s way to serve others is heroic. They risk sacrificing life and limb, and creating a void in their wives’ and children’s lives, so that we may continue to enjoy the freedoms that we have and keep our enemies far away from our homes.

My interactions have been with men in the Marine Corps, but there are many fine women as well who have made the same choice, the same commitment, and who are willing to make the same sacrifices. My respect extends to all of our men and women in the armed services. When you see our men and women in uniform, take a moment to acknowledge their service and see them as the fine individuals that they are.

They are heroes, and they deserve our highest regard.

Doug Brennecke is a San Diego mortgage originator who listens to his clients, educates them, and tells them the truth. Reach him at www.DougBrennecke.com.
Salute to Courage

Armaity Hathidaru

I have often wondered...what could be the compelling force behind a heroic act involving courage? What propels someone to throw himself so passionately into the jaws of death? Is it a death wish, a temporary loss of rational reasoning, or an inexplicable concern for the well-being of another human?

It was late afternoon one bright summer day in August of 1969, when a disturbing phone call rushed me to my uncle’s bedside at the hospital. He had had an accident. What I saw shocked and confused me. How could this happen to a well-built, healthy, fit person?. A God-loving soul, respected and loved by many, and leading his life with vigor and gusto?

Uncle Nozer was a Chief Marine Engineer of a tugboat. On this fateful day, after attending to his duties, he came to the dining room on the upper deck. Just as he was getting ready for his lunch, a loud blast from the engine room shattered the peace of Bombay Harbor. The boiler on his tugboat had exploded, filling the engine room with scorching steam. In an instant, he sprang into action and descended into the engine room. He knew his three workers were trapped inside. Single-handedly, he managed to save two men. One at a time, he carried them over his shoulders. By this time he was completely scalded, his skin peeling off his flesh. He swiped his hands over his arms to strip off the loose skin. In a desperate attempt to save the third man, he tried to jump in again, but the crew prevented him from doing so. They heard him say, “Oh! But my man is inside, I have to save him!” These were his last words before he collapsed at their feet.

It was painful for me to see his pink body with a dark ashen face from severe steam burns. In spite of his own agony, he was concerned about his men and was saddened to hear that two of them did not survive. He whispered to his wife, “Don’t cry for me, I am still alive. Think of the wives whose husbands are no more. Pray for them.” He showed strength and grace in the face of adversity, silently bearing his pain through the night, but the burns were too deep for him to survive. He passed away peacefully in the early hours of the morning. It was a sad day for the family. Shock and grief knew no bounds.

He was a hero. He was honored with a posthumous award of bravery. However, awards and accolades could hardly console the young family who just lost a loved one. Pride and honor followed once the painful episode sunk in.

It was a short life, well-lived and ended in the selfless service of humanity. Sometimes the urge of self-preservation takes precedence over doing the right thing. He made his choice. He showed unbelievable compassion and extraordinary courage.

Armaity Hathidaru has a degree in occupational therapy with years of experience in holistic coaching. She empowers and guides you through the journey of pain and stress and into the life of joyful living. She can be reached at Armaity101@gmail.com.
My Wonderful Aunt Bernice

Avery Thurman

My hero is my Aunt Bernice, who was first of all my favorite aunt, and secondly a famous Canadian author. She was always a very caring and loving person and was close with my mom. My mom became ill and passed away when I was 19. During that emotional time, my Aunt Bernice was a source of comfort, support, and strength for my dad, sister, brother, and me.

When I visited my aunt overnight we used go shopping in downtown Toronto and have great times together. She used to tell me stories about how she became an author. When she was a child she grew up in the Depression era and used to love writing stories. When she was a teenager, she met the famous author, Lucy Maud Montgomery, who had written the “Anne of Green Gables” books. She had the opportunity to show her some of her stories and Ms. Montgomery told her that she thought her writing was good but that she had to obtain a higher education in order to be become an author.

My aunt’s family was poor, and she could not afford to attend college. She gave up her dream of being a writer, because she believed what she was told by Ms. Montgomery.

She married and was a wonderful mother to her two girls. When they were grown up she renewed her interest in writing. She had letters published in newspapers and short stories published in schoolbooks.

She was 59 when her first book was published in 1981, titled That Scatterbrain Booky (pronounced boo-key – a nickname her mother had given her). The book was about the struggles of growing up in the Depression years. It was wonderful seeing the name “Bernice Thurman Hunter” on a published book, and I was so proud of my aunt, especially when I received my autographed copy. It was successful, and she wrote two other “Booky” books. Her books were geared towards pre-teens, and she was asked to speak in schools all over Canada.

The Scatterbrain Booky book was made into a theatre production, and my family was proud to attend it. I was amazed to see my aunt’s book transformed into a play. She wrote many other books and was still writing the year she passed away in 2002. She had won a number of awards, including the Order of Canada.

In 2006, a made-for-TV movie came out called Booky Makes her Mark based on the Booky books. Two other made-for-TV movies have been made more recently based on her “Booky” books. Had she still been alive, she would have been thrilled.

I am grateful for my hero, Aunt Bernice, because first of all she was a loving and supportive aunt. Secondly, in spite of being told she would never become an author without higher education, she overcame that false belief and became a famous author. She has been and continues to be an inspiration to me in my endeavors as a budding author.

Avery Thurman is a nurse in Canada and a budding author who has had letters published in local newspapers and is a contributing author to other books in the The Gratitude Book Project® series. One of her goals is to write and publish her own book. Find her at Facebook.com/averythurman.
Gesture from the Heart

Allegra S. Harrington

According to Arianna Huffington’s recent commencement speech at my oldest daughter’s college graduation ceremony, the world ahead is a split screen. One side is darkness and irrationality, typified by the financial and environmental irresponsibility that we face today. The other side is creativity, innovation, and empathy as the keys to thriving in this world. Huffington called this generation of graduates the most compassionate, connected, and engaged of all time.

This is the moment and time where my younger daughter, Siena appears as the hero in my life. Heroes are people of distinguished courage and ability who are admired for their brave deeds and noble qualities. Below is a blessing which describes vertically with each letter what makes her who she is becoming.

S: is for the soul sister she is to Nellen. Together they balance each other like a fulcrum with humor and might.

I: is for her infinite humanitarian intuition that engages her path for truth.

E: is for her elevating gifts as a writer and teacher she brings to the cause of social justice as a feminist.

N: is for the nimbus that appears in her aura every day after the severe abdominal illness she suffered in middle school. Luckily, this experience shaped part of her into the dynamic singer, actor, poet, and peacemaker she is today.

A: is for the activist she is on and off campus at college as she clarifies her vision. Currently she is drawn to gender studies.

The question is: How does this commemorate our heroes for the 9/11 anniversary?

During the attacks to the World Trade Center, my husband at the time and I had to shield our two girls from the atrocities on television. Siena would hide in my arms and belly as we processed the cruel invasion. A few months later was her eighth birthday in November. She had made a list of her friends, cousins, classmates, food, and activities. After designating her dad as the musical entertainment, she thought quietly.

“Mom, on the invitation, please say no gifts. I want a donation to the firefighters and their families instead. OK?”

This gesture from Siena at such a young age has been a fore-shadowing of the fine woman she is at 19 today. She will always be a steward for positive change destined to help others thrive in this world.

Allegra S. Harrington creates Sculpture To Wear and photography in Norwalk, Conn. She is working on her first book, on fairies and healing. Contact her at www.AllegraSHarrington.com. She is here to help women thrive and elevate the Earth’s vibration as a writer and artist.
Woodsie, My She-ro

Avenelle Warde

"Don’t forget that I used to eat your cereal when you were a baby and mommy asked me to prepare your food,” is often what my oldest sibling says when she wants to annoy me. I sometimes wonder how I looked so chubby in my baby pictures, when she has admitted to frequently eating my porridge. I guess over the years her love, advice, and care have more than compensated for those childish misdeeds. Everyday heroes do many different kinds of deeds and come in different sizes, ages, and flavors, and for that I am grateful.

I have always had a deep respect, admiration, and love for my mother’s oldest child, as she has often been like a mother to me. I can recall that she used to discipline us with a coconut broom when we were little children, because we had forgotten to clean the yard. Countless times, we were able to escape the beatings since she could not run as quickly as we could. Nevertheless, she always encouraged us to be tidy, courteous, honest, and the best at what we did while growing up. One of her favorite sayings was: “What are people going to say and think about you when you behave in such and such a way?” More than once, I would rudely reply, “I don’t care, let them say and think what they want!” In response she would sometimes answer: “Your mouth is too hot; you need a good smack!” As I matured, I have seen the wisdom of her words and have learned to curb my tongue...well, sometimes.

Creating first and lasting impressions were always big on her list. During my adolescence, she opened her home to me and taught me many invaluable lessons on entertaining both friends and foes. Saving and investing wisely, taking care of her family, and dressing well, especially when appearing in public, were very important to her. Her positive influence has contributed to my success in my job, as she always encouraged me to pursue higher education and to maintain a good work ethic. Colleagues who have worked with her and also worked with me, have unknowingly paid me a great compliment. They said that I reminded them of her, because we were both hardworking and honest.

My “big sister” as she sometimes calls herself, is one of the wittiest, most candid, hardworking, and compassionate people that I know. Throughout the years, she has been an advisor, arbitrator, financier, and cheerleader for her siblings and various in-laws. Though she did not attend university, she was the first to congratulate us on our achievements. She also takes the time to attend our graduation ceremonies, often at great cost to herself and her family. Woodsie, I know that you always have our best interests at heart, even though your plans and ours may not always be aligned. You are my sister, in the flesh and in the spirit, and you are my “she-ro.” I am thankful for the lessons that you are still imparting today.

Avenelle Warde, founder of ClubE3, where members are enthused by our entertaining and evolutionary approach to education, has a passion for helping children succeed academically. She lives in St. Kitts, West Indies, and has worked in the telecom industry for over 20 years. Tweet her at Twitter.com/aveywar_skn.
Love Never Stops Giving

Sylvia Myers

I had the privilege of meeting my own personal hero once. I wanted to tell her how much I appreciated her, but I thought I had time and that there would be another opportunity. I was wrong. So this is my way of paying tribute to her.

I had enjoyed stories about her life before that hot day in Ohio when, with a bit of nervousness, I waited for her to answer the door. She welcomed me warmly. I loved her and wanted desperately for her to at least approve of me. I hope she did.

This is a little story about a woman who lived her life with courage. Who gave her children the greatest gifts a mother can give her children and the world. They had love, security, and happiness. Even though she raised them for a number of years alone, she always provided for her family. Between her taking in ironing and her parents’ gardens and hog farm, they never went hungry. No, they didn’t eat at restaurants or have fast food or always have the “in” things to wear, but they had her and their grandparents, who loved them unconditionally and taught them values. She walked miles each way every day to the local factory (they didn’t have a car) until she was finally hired. She taught them love and perseverance by example.

She raised a son who proudly served his country as a United States Marine but yet can still cry unashamedly over an injustice. She taught him how to be a loving and respectful son to a father who had a difficult time expressing those feelings. She raised a son who became a responsible and loving husband and who is an incredible stepfather. He pays everything she taught him forward on a daily basis.

Yes, she and her children lived a hard life at times, and she shed more than a few tears of fear and frustration, but she courageously moved forward and today, her son is still paying it forward in my life. And for that, I honor my mother-in-love.

We all have heroes, but what we may not realize is that we are all heroes for someone at some time in our lives. We may be aware of our acts of heroism when they happen, but most often we are not.

Heroic moments can appear silently in something as common as a shared smile or a hug, which can be as huge as changing someone’s decision on suicide to as small as giving them the strength to continue to grow into their own greatness. I hope that everyone, especially me, takes the time to be aware and share a smile every chance they get. Such a small thing to you may be the most heroic thing you could do for someone else.

Sylvia Myers loves smiles, people, pets, and life. She is a VA specializing in Infusionsoft. She and her husband and BFF, Sam, share a home in Tampa, Fla., with four cats and one dog. Sylvia’s passion is helping animals who cannot help themselves. To learn more about her, please visit www.SylviaMyers.com.
Snapshots of a Young Hero

Nicole Bissett

Heroes come in many different packages: soldiers, doctors, cops, firefighters, or just people you look up to. Others come in 7 pound, 12 ounce little packages. In my case, that little hero is my son, Eddie.

When I learned of my pregnancy, I feared having a baby who would keep me awake 24/7 (in other words, a baby like I was to my mother), or not being a good enough mom. It never occurred to me to fear big mistakes I would make that would affect him. I never thought I'd be taking him out to San Diego during my first divorce, or marrying a stepfather who was an angry alcoholic. It never occurred to me to fear how I would support him as a single parent when, at the age of 38, I had only worked one job in my life. Nevertheless, I made it through all of that, because he was my inspiration.

Eddie was the baby who rarely cried. I was able to tell when he was hungry or wet. Otherwise, he was happy and sweet. When his father and I divorced when he was 3½, Eddie was able to talk and comprehend things as though he were already a young man.

Eddie was the reason parents who were strangers to me would approach at school or on the McDonald’s playground to tell me what a sweet son I had, and ask if he could play with their son. The boy that every teacher in elementary school loved and adored. I would go to his parent-teacher conferences and come out crying tears of pride. Each one would tell me they wished every student was more like Eddie.

Eddie was the kid who kept his head when his crazy mother lost hers over some computer glitch. He was often able to fix those issues, even as early as age 12.

Eddie was the teenager who stuck it out with me in a studio apartment when I had to leave his alcoholic stepfather. He had his end of the room; I had mine. Yet he took it like a trooper.

Eddie is the reason I chose to live, instead of throwing in the towel and giving up my life, on more than one occasion. Eddie is the kid who, despite the things that were thrown his way at such a young age, kept his head, and, more importantly, kept his heart.

He is 16 years old today, and he still inspires me. Strangers still say how polite and sweet he is.

There are many ways a hero can save a life. My hero saved mine just by existing, and being who he has steadily been for the past 16 years. Maybe when I grow up, I’ll become just like him. I sure hope so.

Nicole Bissett resides with her husband, Harry, and her son, Eddie, in La Mesa, Calif. Her fiction, essays, and poems have appeared in Behind Our Eyes, an anthology on disabilities. Her articles are regularly published in Today’s Vintage Magazine, Dialogue Magazine, and the Insurance Journal. Nicole can be reached at NicoleBissett1969@gmail.com.
Leila Glenn

Lloyd and Leila were married next to the sea in California on July 25, 1981. Six weeks later, Leila’s mother died, sending them to Detroit. The moment Lloyd’s feet touched the ground, he exclaimed, “I LOVE THIS CITY...THE BUILDINGS...AND THE PEOPLE!” He gave himself this assignment: break up the fallow ground of the earth and open the minds of the people. He said, “It’s a job nobody wants, but I’m willing to do it.” Lloyd began restoring the community—in spite of the main artery to his heart being blocked. “I’m to get it started; but others will come to finish it!”

His mantra became TAKE THE CITY. No task was too daunting for him—not even 28 vacant city lots—overgrown with 7-foot weeds, littered with debris, rodents, and a dead body.

He worked tirelessly as a director on the board of the Core-City neighborhood organization, and he encouraged participation. That caldron was turned into an oasis likened to the Garden of Eden using elbow grease and a few good men, specifically, Charles Johnson and Vaughn Brooks.

People came from everywhere to see the transformation.

Only Lloyd’s concern for the elderly and the youth exceeded his love for the city. He challenged the school system, churches, neighborhoods, and City Hall. He preached and lived the gospel. He clothed and fed the needy.

Recently, a man in his early 40s recognized me after 24 years. “I’ve been thinking about your husband, Mrs. Glenn, because he’s the only man who poured himself into me when I was 17. He taught me how to carry myself. He told me there was a time to wear a t-shirt and a time not to wear one and that I didn’t need a scholarship or money to get a college education. That I could go to the public library and get information on any subject I wanted.” Then Eric said, “For three years I applied myself, Mrs. Glenn, and today I live in one of the most prestigious suburbs in Michigan. I make a hefty five-figure salary on my job, thanks to Lloyd Glenn. He made me who I am today.” I cried. That day—May 24—was my husband’s birthday.

Today, July 25, 2011, would have been our 30th wedding anniversary.

Priceless, as is the following note Lloyd wrote to himself:

“WHAT IS IT I HAVE TO DO?
“I have to catch everyone if they start to go over the cliff.
“What I mean is this...if they’re running, and they don’t look where they’re going, I have to come out from somewhere and catch them.
“THAT’S ALL I DO.
“I’m not a preacher or an evangelist. I’m not a teacher or a healer. I just catch people before they go over the cliff. THAT’S ALL. I know it may seem crazy to some. But that’s the only thing I’ve ever really wanted to do.”

“I JUST WANT TO HELP PEOPLE!”

It was an honor to be a hero’s wife, and it was worth the sacrifice.

Leila Glenn, coauthor of Amazon best-selling Celebrating 365 Days of Gratitude and coauthor of Celebrating Moms & Motherhood, has the flame of hope still burning in her heart for the resurgence of the city of Detroit. She can be reached at LeilaTheAuthor@gmail.com.
My personal hero is my great-aunt Helen, my maternal grandmother’s sister.

As a young woman, she lost her beloved father prematurely, and was left in the care of a mother who was ill-equipped for dealing with life or children. Helen married a businessman and farmer somewhat older than herself, and after more than 10 years of contentment and happily working on the farm, she lost him too soon as well. She then discovered that when he was on his deathbed, his adult children had tricked him into signing a codicil to his will mixed in with “business papers” from his car dealership. The codicil left her nothing—the entire estate, farm, business, and other assets, went to her stepchildren. Unable to have children of her own, she was alone, with no means of support.

Now in her mid-40s, Helen had only worked briefly in childcare before marriage. In a working world where women were not particularly welcome, she took such low-paying jobs as “dorm mother” at a women’s college, and retail jobs that kept her on her feet for long hours. Having never worked under the “new” Social Security system, she knew she would have to work for many years to create a retirement income for her later years.

Her mother became ill, and because Helen had no “responsibilities” (husband or children), her siblings left it to her to care for the overbearing, demanding woman. Helen shouldered that burden with grace, and cared for her mother for many years, in and out of nursing facilities, until her mother passed away at the age of 96. Her older sister (my grandmother) developed cancer, and Helen took on some care giving responsibilities for her as well, until she passed away. During this period, Helen was diagnosed with fibromyalgia, a chronic pain condition. Still, she persevered.

In her mid-70s, Helen finally retired. She spent her last 20 years battling osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, macular degeneration, and, finally, blindness. She watched her brother, two sisters, and friends die before her. She was in constant pain, she was alone, except for nieces and nephews hundreds of miles away, and her meager fixed income was barely enough for rent, food, and healthcare needs.

Still, each time we spoke, she told me she woke up every morning grateful to be alive—to have the precious gift of one more day on Earth! She has been, and always will be, my shining example of Abraham Lincoln’s belief that “Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” For her lifelong example of grace, dignity, courage, and perseverance, and her conscious choice to be happy throughout a life of unfair treatment, economic struggles, and personal tragedy, she is my hero.

Helen Sue Walker is a wife, mother, grandmother, HR professional, nonprofit founder, support group leader, and advocate for people with fibromyalgia. She is the author of Taming the Fibromyalgia Dragon: Thoughts on Life With Fibromyalgia, and a contributor to The Gratitude Book Project®. She lives in Richmond, Va., with her husband Jon and two beloved rescued dogs.
Beautiful Heroes

Melanie Kissell

Ashley has that “stop and stare” kind of beauty—the kind we all envy. Her features are remarkably stunning. But the most beautiful part of her can’t be seen outwardly. She’s the first to step in when problems arise, offer up suggestions, lend a helping hand, organize activities, volunteer her time, research resources, and map out a strategy to get issues resolved. From Ashley’s perspective, no matter what, the show must go on!

Ashley is my “Get it done” hero.

Morgan is also exceptionally beautiful—you’d feel compelled to take a second look if you passed her on the walkway. But her beauty goes far beyond skin deep. She’s relentless in her convictions to follow her passions, straight as an arrow in aiming for her goals, as intellectual as the day is long, laser-focused, and her life is soul-driven to the max!

Morgan is my “Don’t ever give up” hero.

Jamie doesn’t think she’s beautiful but she’s dead wrong. I’ve seen the way people look at her. She’s simply gorgeous. But her inner beauty is unsurpassed. She has abilities and capabilities that run the entire length of the spectrum. I’ve never known another human being who aces the highest math courses imaginable and is also a natural-born artist and musician. She’s amazing!

Jamie is my “Celebrate your talents” hero.

Briana is Jamie’s twin. Need I say more about her beauty? From head to toe, she’s got it. And her smile can light up a room! But Briana’s greatest beauty comes from within. She’s the most meticulously organized gal on the planet—the whiteboard, bookmark, file-it-away, Post-it-note queen. She consistently keeps her nose to the grindstone, and she always makes the grade!

Briana is my “Get your act together” hero.

In case you haven’t figured it out by now...

Ashley, Morgan, Jamie, and Briana are my four daughters—my beautiful heroes.

Melanie Kissell has a longstanding love affair with words that began in the first grade. Communications is her thing, so she is totally infatuated with blogging, social networking, and social media marketing. Come by anytime and knock on the door of Solo Mompreneur at www.MelanieKissell.com/about/.
How does one begin to choose a hero when one meets and interacts with so many people during one’s lifetime? Most are not heroes, but they have probably left some mark on you.

My dad was someone I not only loved unconditionally, but I always valued his opinions. I looked up to him, which wasn’t difficult because I was short. All joking aside, I truly did look up to him for many reasons.

When I cried, he comforted me and told me life wasn’t always exactly what one wanted it to be. When I laughed, he would laugh with me because he said it was more fun to laugh together. He showed me the way to enjoy the little things in life. He wanted me to follow my heart not just my head. He told me to have big dreams, and even if I didn’t achieve them all, I should never forget them. I continually asked him to promise to never leave me. He said he would always be there for me.

When I graduated and decided not to pursue higher education, he said it was all right. He wanted me to find my own way through life. I started working shortly thereafter, and he told me that he was proud of me for finding such a good company to work for.

On my wedding day, he knew I was hesitant, so he told me on the church steps that we could turn around and drive away. He would back me up no matter my decision. God, I loved him for that, but I got married anyway.

My dad was everything to me. He supported me in all my decisions. And he never said, “I told you so” when I divorced my husband.

My dad will always be my hero because I feel his presence even now although he’s not here on Earth. I know he’ll always be with me. My dad, my hero.

Sharon G. Teed is a retired engineer living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She is writing her own book on her life to be dedicated to her granddaughters and is a coauthor of various Gratitude Book Projects®. Sharon can be reached through e-mail at Sharon.Teed@sympatico.ca.
Heroes of My Life

Peggy Lee Hanson

I dedicate this writing to United Airlines Flight number 93 and all the souls it carried on that fateful day of September 11, 2001. The brave and courageous actions demonstrated by the crew and passengers, men and women alike, will forever stand out against the eerily quiet sky for those next five days afterward.

To be alive during world- and life-changing events, such as the first landing on the moon, the first moon walk, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the tragic and untimely death of Princess Diana, the horrific events of 9/11, and natural disasters thus far in the 21st century, to name a few, is nothing short of awe-inspiring; all these opportunities for heroism allow us to witness to the ordinary becoming extraordinary.

When thinking of my heroes, they all share some common denominators—women: strong, driven, smart, daring, courageous, and brave. They stand alone, but are not alone in their hopes and dreams. And for their fellow sisters and brothers they avenge those who came before them or work to secure a future for those yet to come.

The first name that comes to mind, and the first woman I remember learning about in history (other than Betsy Ross) is Harriet Tubman, the abolitionist and humanitarian who helped slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad.

The second name that I recall belongs to Katharine Hepburn, actress extraordinaire. Her witty nature and strong stature both on and off the big screen showed “true grit” (pun intended). Because of her strength and resolve, I named my daughter, who is also one of my heroes, Kate.

Additional women heroes come from movies and/or books where friendship is core, love abundant, and steadfastness rampant. These include The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood, Steel Magnolias, and The Sound of Music. The main female characters of Titanic and An Affair to Remember offer the more romantic side of heroism, overcoming life’s odds by prevailing over the direst circumstances.

Let me not be remiss in forgetting anyone by mentioning my current-day heroines, those women with whom I forged deep, close, and personal friendships: my clients, mentors, teachers, aunts, sisters, cousins, and especially my mother, who married my dad on September 11, 1945; his soul was already at rest for 19 years when Al Qaeda descended that fateful day in 2001.

I had been working at Northwest Airlines that morning, listening to the radio when the news reported the first plane hitting the first Tower. Some thought it a joke; then the second plane hit the second Tower and the TVs were at once turned on. Not much work got done that day, the day after, or the day after that.

Ah, yes. To be alive witnessing world- and life-changing events is awe-inspiring, while watching the ordinary become the extraordinary.

Peggy Lee Hanson mentors those in life-changing situations, guiding them through their journey with proven strategies, compassion, and support. She is a speaker, best-selling author on Amazon.com, and Certified Dream Coach®. Find her at www.Inspiration4Encouragement2SupportU.com. You may reach her at PeggyLee@MyDreamArchitect.com.


“Live in gratitude today and every day.”
Parents: The 24/7 Heroes

Margaret Hicke

There are heroes in life’s critical moments. They rise to the occasion and show us that we can reach deep inside and find courage and strength we did not know we possessed. Then there are the “everyday heroes” who step up to the plate, day after day; who reach deep inside, day after day: parents.

Two people step forward and accept a child into their life. At that moment, in a hospital room or a courtroom, parents are born. Even though they may have attended parenting classes, there is no class designed specifically for the child they are welcoming into their world. Parents move forward, not knowing what the future may hold. There is no specific roadmap; there are no guarantees, warranties, or return policies! That child may face many challenges in life. Parents do not ask. They accept; they trust. They get up in the middle of the night; they provide; they care for their child and are on call 24/7.

Parents educate and instill values, day after day.

Parents experience great joy and deep sorrow. They provide meaning. They laugh and they cry. And heroically, they send the child out into the world. The parents worked with the clay they were given. Many feel they didn’t do a worthwhile job. They don’t ask to be honored and, if they are, they frequently respond, “If only I had known, I would have done things so differently.” Nevertheless, honored they should be.

Parents mirror to us the values that make this country great, both in times of joy and times of sorrow. Values like self-reliance, responsibility, compassion, empathy, generosity. Then they pass the torch to new parents. The world is taken care of. New heroes are born.

I know you. I have met you, and I have been a parent myself. You inspire me. I am grateful.

Margaret Hicke, aka Marge, Mom, and Grandma, is a licensed marriage and family therapist, supporting children, adults, individuals, couples, and families on their journeys. She is coauthor of 365 Days of Gratitude, #1 bestseller on Amazon.com and author of the webinar Recipes for Parenting. Find her at www.MargeHicke.com/parenting, Marge@margehicke.com, or 858-566-4651.
The eldest of five children in a working-class family, I was a very curious youngster who dreamed of exploring the world, but believed quests and adventures were the stuff of fairy tales. Then, at age nine, a pivotal and glorious experience occurred: I read the biography of Amelia Earhart.

Oh, how I identified with her! She came from humble family beginnings with love but not much worldly exposure. Yet, like me, she had a yearning to see and do everything. So, courageous to even consider it—she did! I was fascinated by her daring and confidence and was struck with the conviction that if she could do it, I could too.

In a flash of realization, I saw oodles of possibilities! Somehow, her life story and successful example gave me “permission” to explore the world. Suddenly and inexplicably, I wasn’t shackled by circumstances or perceived obstacles any more—the world was mine to discover, and I set out to do it.

The desire to, as Socrates said, “know thyself” has never subsided. Both as child and adult, I have been diligent in determining what I want to do and then doing it!

Amelia defied convention and assigned gender roles long before I was born, yet her example, and therefore her spirit, lives on in me as I joyously revel in the many adventures life has to offer. Amelia Earhart has been my inspiration and is my heroine.

Phyllis Campagna, ChBC™ is a business coach living in the Chicago metro area. When not pursuing her passion for business, she loves to spend time with family and friends, travel with her husband, and indulge in her hobbies of genealogy, dancing, and collecting holiday movies. Contact her at www.Excelsis-PS.com.

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Remembrance of Heroes

Louise Rouse

We will never forget 9/11. Heroes were born in the midst of a few short hours. Over three thousand of them. They were rescue workers, police officers, ordinary people, and extraordinary people, until that day. Then they became heroes. Anyone who has ever experienced the loss of a loved one knows departure shines the light of a hero on his or her remembrance. We never know the depth of their souls until we are left to stop and reflect. Little did we recognize that the heroes, whom we long for, stood right by our side.

Nonetheless, there is one hero who is stands above the rest for me. My favorite hero is the best of the best. Many artists have tried their hand to master such perfection. To capture the wondrous beauty my hero has created. My master hero graces us with eternal life, thus ensuring nothing ever really dies. Death transcends, rebirth again. An act that is hard to follow.

The pain of loss runs deep in our emotional being. We can yell, scream, cuss, and my compassionate hero understands without judgment, only compassion in return. A master teacher, hero to us all, who loves us unconditionally.

Humbled in awe, I ponder how anyone could ever master my hero’s art. In the quiet places in my mind rose an answer. Like a whisper in the wind, I heard: “Look in the mirror. I am in you and you are in me. Say I AM that I AM.”

Is the master inside what the master created? Can we create beauty as magnificent as all that we see? Can we be as compassionate and all-loving as a master can be? As apprentices to a highly skilled craft, may we honor all heroes from the past. May we be grateful there is a hero in us in the present.

Louise Rouse is a Transformational Coach who turns lemons into lemonade. If you are ready to become a hero by turning your loss into helping others, go to www.PlanetaryCoach.org, www.Thoughtbuster.com, or www.AmericasGriefCoach.com. You can also reach her at Facebook.com/invisiblerelationships or Facebook.com/pages/Planetary-Coach/243610602323377.

My Personal Hero: A Selfless Friend

Debra Dupree

In this world of quid pro quo, it is refreshing to get to know and be friends with someone who is good to the core. You know who I’m talking about. The non-judgmental friend who will listen to your troubles and then help you put things in perspective, the friend who will give you a ride when your car quits without asking for gas money, the friend who will call to see how you are doing when you haven’t been in touch for a while, the friend who will watch your kids for a couple of hours so you can just get away to regain sanity, or the friend who does a good deed for you just because. This friend will do all these good things and then some, yet expect or want nothing in return. Friends like this are as good as gold.

I don’t know why these friends choose to be selfless. Indeed, they have lives of their own with plenty of other obligations. Yet they find the time to help others without giving a thought to how the favor could be returned. Perhaps it is an innate quality that was continually nurtured over time, and the reward for these golden wonders is in being helpful. Whatever the reason, we all benefit as a society.

So, to all of you selfless people out there—whether public servant, privately employed, entrepreneur, mogul, retired, unemployed or self-employed—you are my hero. You each make the world a better place, one generous act at a time. When I finally grow up, I want to be just like you.

Debra Dupree is a writer from Memphis, Tennessee. She enjoys writing about her life experiences and providing useful information to her readers. Visit her website at www.BluffCityWriter.com or get in touch with her at BluffCityWriter@att.net.
The Hero Next Door

Stephanie Rainbow Bell

The media presents many stories about heroes, and rightfully so—the firefighter who saved a small child, the off-duty policeman who stepped in to protect a citizen, the pilot who steered his disabled aircraft and passengers to safety. But there are hundreds of thousands of heroes that never get any media attention...that we never hear about.

They simply go through their days, doing what they do. Perhaps they get a thank-you or an acknowledgement, but for the most part, day in and day out, their accomplishments are seldom known to more than themselves or perhaps one other person.

Who are these people?

They are...quite simply...you and me. And our neighbors across the street. And our friends and relatives.

They are every person who ever helps a senior cross the street.

They are every person who chooses to pray for their fellow drivers while stuck in a traffic jam.

They are every person who takes a moment to listen to the store clerk who is having a bad day.

Or who tells a friend to hang in there.

Or who brings chicken soup over when a friend is ill.

Some would say that’s being kind—it’s just the “right” thing to do.

But I say it is heroic, because you have gone out of your way to look after someone else. You have put your own needs aside, even for a minute or two, to care about another person’s feelings, safety, or welfare. That’s what heroes do, right?

I hope when you read this, you will smile, and your heart will smile too.

Because I SEE you. And I acknowledge the hero in you.

Namaste. (I bow to the divine in you!)

Stephanie Rainbow Bell, an inspirational speaker, intuitive coach, and author, uses her unique gift of compassion and her low-key, fun style to teach you how to powerfully manifest the results you’ve always dreamed of, including loving relationships, bigger bank accounts, and radiant health. Receive your downloadable gift and info at www.InfiniteInnerPower.com.
Delta Rescue—Saving Lives

R. J. Peters

When invited to write about a special hero for this book, I had to give it a lot of thought. It’s not that I couldn’t think of one...it’s that I had to choose just one. There are many people in our lives who give us hope, inspiration, and a feeling of gratitude. But it finally came into focus as I was cuddling one of my rescued cats and remembering how I got started.

Inspired by the work of one man who didn’t look the other way and didn’t give in when there was only opposition and lack of interest, I started my own small-scale rescue shelter almost 10 years ago under somewhat similar conditions.

One of the organizations I’ve tried to help support since the 1980s is DELTA Rescue, located near Glendale, Calif. Founded by Hollywood actor, film writer, and producer Leo Grillo, the compound now houses about 1,500 rescued dogs and cats, abandoned in the forests and wild areas of California. Most were on the brink of death, or soon would have been if ignored.

Grillo began his rescue work more than 30 years ago after he dreamed of a sad, lost dog in the forest. When he actually saw such a dog plodding along a road, he knew he had to save him. The dog was a very thin and very tired Doberman. Grillo named him Delta—Greek for “change.”

Not only did Delta’s life change, but so did Grillo’s. While hiking one day with his now-recovered dog in a wilderness area, he found 35 more dogs trying to survive together. When no one would help (including local and national humane groups), he spent the next year visiting the dogs every day to feed and care for them with whatever supplies, knowledge, and skills he could acquire.

In time, with little help but with a growing dedication to saving the animals he knew were still out there, his rescue compound became a reality and was named after his first rescued dog, Delta. “Dedication and Everlasting Love To Animals” thus became www.DELTARescue.org.

Taking no salary from his 150-acre no-kill facility, now employing 70 workers and veterinary staff, he also founded Horse Rescue of America, and works tirelessly through his Animals on the Edge project to help animals in other countries.

While some heroes shine once, others become lifetime beacons of hope for many. Leo Grillo is such a man.

Dr. R. J. Peters has rescued over 1,000 cats and dogs since 2002. Her book on cat behavior appears at www.HiPaws.com. She has always been dedicated to helping others, first as a doctor, now in retirement as an animal rescuer.
A Pope, a Bishop, and a Father

Roslyn Rajasingam

In my life journey, I have met some outstanding human beings. They inspire me and encourage me to become a better human being. Even though some of them have already gone on to the other life, they are still very much alive in my memory and my daily life. They lived purposeful and fruitful lives, were true to their vocations, and developed their God-given talents.

Blessed Pope John Paul II worked tirelessly and was very influential in bringing back democracy in his country. He wrote many church teachings for the Catholic faithful. He forgave the person who tried to kill him and is a true inspiration of reconciliation. He believed in young people and initiated World Youth Day. It was a blessing to meet him in person where we gave each other a hug as a sign of peace during one of these celebrations in Spain.

Bishop Broderick Pabillo was a brilliant student and seminary professor, but left his religious congregation to serve the poorest of the poor in a tiny fishing village in the southern Philippines. He trained the local priests. He works with and loves the poor, is excellent in Scripture, and lives as a true disciple of Jesus. He advocates for the urban poor and for farmers to own the land they cultivate.

Prospero Montesclaros was the editor of his college newspaper, and dabbled in drawing; worked as a mining engineer, an assistant city engineer, and a construction manager; was a college lecturer for calculus and algebra; and was a faithful church lay leader. He entertained his family and friends with his amazing singing voice, exceptional guitar playing, and sense of humor. He worked overseas for several years and performed on a national television program.

I am grateful for my heroes because their values and faith guide my life.

Roslyn Rajasingam from Sydney, Australia, is a published article writer, best-selling author, blogger, and online business consultant. She also manages a school and is a co-leader of a couples ministry. Find her at www.RoslynRajasingam.com, where you can also download an e-Book called Blogging Basics: The Alpha of Online Business.
My Son, My Hero

Sandi Cornez

My hero is my older son, Jason.

For so many years now, he’s been a towering pillar of strength for me. He’s always there in times of need, with unwavering love and encouragement. He helps me remember my strengths and admires my willingness to keep going in life.

Many years ago when Bette Midler recorded “The Wind Beneath My Wings,” I remember singing it to myself and knowing it was about Jason.

And even though he now has his own family and a little son, he will always be my hero.

Sandi Cornez has helped hundreds of people with her skill set in networking and building relationships. You can find her website at www.TheProfitGarden.com.

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**Consummate Caregivers—Modern Heroes**

**Eric Pfeiffer**

Dolly, Ed, Helen, John, Pat B., Pat G., and Shirley sit in the living room with me on a Sunday afternoon, talking about their caregiving experiences. They don’t look like heroes. But they are. They are modern heroes, hardened through years of providing care for a loved one with Alzheimer’s disease. All but John have finished their caregiving; John’s wife is in the final stages of Alzheimer’s disease. They are here to share with others facing the same challenges what worked and what didn’t work in their caregiving experience. They are bound together through a common enemy: Alzheimer’s disease, a monster disease if there ever was one.

They emphasize one thing: caregiving is giving, first and foremost. Giving makes people feel good; it makes them feel strong. Caregiving in Alzheimer’s disease requires creativity, ingenuity, endurance, and strengths they didn’t know they had. But they have done it. They didn’t know they could do it. They didn’t ask to become caregivers. Someone they loved needed care, and they were there to provide it, from beginning to end. Now they are looking at life after Alzheimer’s disease. Some have moved beyond dealing with the disease; they don’t want to dwell on what they have been through. Others among them are giving back to others just starting caregiving by sharing what they have learned, what they wished someone had told them about what was needed. They all are here to contribute their wisdom and their experience to a book called *The Art of Caregiving in Alzheimer’s Disease*.

I am including what they have to say as a postscript in my book, which was written for other caregivers, those just beginning to realize what they are in for, and those virtually drowning in the caregiver experience. They are throwing other caregivers a life-line, something they wish they had had when they were going through the caregiving experience. They have come to know one another, and they have come to love one another, the way heroes do for others who have been through the same challenges with them.

They are not alone. There are 15 million people in the United States providing care for someone with Alzheimer’s disease. These seven people and I want to make life a little easier for them. These seven are heroes in my book. I salute them. I am grateful that I am privileged to know them.


Nurses as Heroes

Joy Porter

Nurses are heroes by their function and their dedication, but there are a select few who have especially stood out in my mind. I coach nurses and pre-nurses on how to get into online nursing schools and the fastest strategies for obtaining nursing licenses. A few years ago I noticed something that really touched my heart.

I always ask people why they want to go into nursing. Most people say that they have always wanted to be a nurse. Many explain that people in their family are nurses and it’s their destiny. However, some nursing students mention the attack of 9/11 spurring them into action. Some would say that it woke them up out of their daily routine to go after their life dream. Others say that 9/11 made them think about their contribution to the world. They couldn’t help those who were hurt, but they wanted to be of service. They made an agreement with themselves that they would learn how to help. For many people, that led to a career in nursing.

It takes a special person to step up during the middle of a crisis and save the day. It takes an extra-special person to step up because of that event to become the vision they saw for themselves...to go on to save lives and help people day after day.

I know that many people enlisted in the military because of the attack, and I was amazed at their bravery. After I went into nursing education coaching, I felt the same admiration for those who entered the health profession because of it. That event encouraged them to give more, to be more, and to serve more people. All of these heroes have my immense gratitude and love.

Joy Porter is the author of Get Your RN Faster (www.GetYourRNFaster.com). Joy coaches people on how to bypass nursing school waiting lists to achieve the nursing career of their dreams.
Everyday Heroes Inspire Me

Diane Halfman

I have been blessed with an abundance of amazing heroes in my life. They have all challenged me to want to live up to their qualities—qualities that appear effortless for them, because that is who they are.

Three specific heroes and one group of heroes have been particularly instrumental in shaping who I am.

My dad, Jerry Halfman, embodies his motto of “quest for the best.” He lives from the foundation of faith, family, and friends. He taught me faith is where everything starts and then to surround yourself with family and friends because they create love and happiness. At home, he set high standards for my grades and participation in sports. In his career, he led by example. My dad is my lifetime hero as he set the bar for me to live my life being my best.

Todd Durkin, owner of Fitness Quest 10, inspires people to “get better” every day. He has created an amazing environment in his gym of elevated attitude and energy. The simple joys of running, jumping, and laughing have slipped in the electronic age, and we see more obese kids than ever. But Todd has created an environment for all levels of athletes to embrace the thrill of play, of moving your body to improve your fitness by 1% each day. His passion, determination, and ability to live the example of his beliefs have surrounded him with a team of employees who reflect his heroic characteristics.

My personal trainer, Janet Bertrand, is also my hero as she lives her life being the best person she can be. Her attitude toward life is contagious, and I want to be like her. She has a husband and four children she loves dearly, and she makes family a priority while also keeping her nutrition and fitness at a high level. She is an icon at the gym because of her passion, energy, and drive to inspire people. Janet is proof that sweat is sexy and simple consistency shows.

Though there is not one person I choose to name, I witnessed many heroes in my career as a San Diego Police Officer. The sacrifices an officer makes daily in personal safety and unending service to people they don’t know is always a marvel. I learned a hero always has your back and seeks for a greater good. I am so grateful for the lessons I embraced from these selfless heroes. I celebrate all of their unsung deeds in tirelessly protecting and serving as many people as possible day after day—many times the only reward being the knowledge that they did their best.

All everyday heroes exude the wonderful qualities we all aspire to emulate and give us a treasure map to being our best. When there is love, happiness, health, abundance, connection, and laughter I guarantee there is a hero behind it leading the way.

Thank you to all of my heroes for showing me how it is done and being a model for a well-lived life!

My Dad Is My Hero

Tricia Ebert

It’s appropriate for a September 11th commemorative to celebrate and honor my father, Donald J. Ebert, Sr. My dad was drawn to police work when he was in high school. He joined the Junior Police and ultimately became a police officer in my hometown of Union, New Jersey.

My dad was the sort of person who was always learning, growing, and wanting to achieve more. He was a very smart man and took police exams every year to rise through the ranks. In a short time he rose to be a lieutenant in the detective department. My dad loved being a detective, but he knew that he could achieve more. When he was in his 40s, with a wife and three young children, he went to back to school. He worked days and attended Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey, at night (in his full police uniform, with a gun on his hip at all times!). After ten long, hard years of study, my dad graduated with honors in Police Science. I was so proud of him!

My dad continued rising through the ranks and after becoming captain in the Union PD, he achieved his ultimate goal—Chief of Police. The competition was stiff. There were many other capable, intelligent captains waiting in line for that position. And my dad got the job.

If there is one thing I learned from watching my dad, it is tenacity—to always persist and keep moving toward your goals. My dad was and is an inspiration to me, even though he passed on many years ago. His soul lives on in me, inspiring me to work toward what I want in my life, no matter how long it takes or how much work is involved.

Thank you, Dad, for instilling your tenacious spirit in me! I love you.

Tricia Ebert is a writer, teacher, speaker, and healer living in the Los Angeles area. One of her websites is www.TheDangerousTruth.com.
Who’s My Hero?

CS Shride

Each and every one of you, in some way, at some time, is my hero.

Anyone daring enough to live life fully, passionately, and enthusiastically—to go against the herd mentality and follow their own bliss.

Everyone who is actively searching for meaning; everyone who is constantly evolving.

All the people on the planet who take personal responsibility for their own life experiences, who choose not to be a victim anymore.

Every person who realizes they always have a choice in every situation.

Those who are striving to become the best they can be, in everything they do.

Anyone who puts in the time to achieve mastery in their field.

Every teacher who remembers why they are teaching and taps into that love and enthusiasm daily and then lights in their students a zest for learning and knowledge that can’t be quenched.

All the caring, overworked parents, who take the extra time to really connect with their children and let them know how special, important, and how very much loved they are.

Every farmer on the planet who embodies being a steward of the land, who tends the soil for the next generation as well as the current one.

Each businessperson who remembers why they are in commerce, putting the needs and concerns of their customers and our planet on the same level as the bottom line.

Anyone charged with providing protection who taps back into their humanity and lets go of their notions of us versus them, letting their compassion pour forth.

Everyone who is actively working to heal themselves as well as our planet.

Anyone who gives a damn.

All of you.

Each and every one of you is my hero. Thank you for who you are and what you do.

A Selfless Teen

Julia Simens

Anyone whose main goal is to help others instead of thinking of obstacles to put in their way is definitely a hero in my eyes. When this person happens to be your own daughter, words can’t convey how you feel. Jackie is my hero.

Being part of two worlds that do not easily overlap, I am often flapping around the world like a bird without wings. When my “sandwich generation” collides with my expat work world, it seems like a disaster in the making. Having a child head off to college in the USA when you live 8,500 miles away has been hard. The challenge of adding another geographic barrier into my life as my mother ages has been hard.

Jackie is not an adult. She is shoudering the normal burdens that are associated with attending college: maintaining her own apartment and helping out with an aging grandma. When her classes are over, you will find her on the way to Grandma’s apartment. She takes lunch to her, catches up on what Grandma might need, and makes sure that I am kept in the loop of what is going on in regard to everyday life with my mother.

Sometimes the things Jackie does are small—making sure her grandma can open the jars that are in her own refrigerator. Sometimes the things are huge—making a three-hour trip just to help Grandma get from the airport back safe into her own apartment late at night. Jackie does all of this willingly.

As I report on Jackie, a teen hero, it makes me confident that this current generation of teens has some heroic and selfless people to run the world in the near future.

Julia Simens is an author, educator, consultant, and presenter with a focus on family therapy and early childhood education. She has helped many children and families adjust to their global lifestyle. She is the author of Emotional Resilience and the Expat Child. Visit her website www.JSimens.com
My Inspirations

Melody Heath-Smith

I am writing about my heroes, and I am going to start it off by naming Donna Kozik. My husband says it is silly to name your editor as a hero, but she is my hero! She gave and keeps giving me the chance to show the world who I am through my writing. Her and her team are the reason I can tell people that I am a published writer.

Next on my list of heroes are my best friend’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bjarnason. They are a normal family that has survived more than their share of hard tests in their lifetime. In some of my own hard times, they were the ones who were there for me.

Jutta W. is my next hero. She has been a shining light for me over the past decade. I have tried to list all the things she and the Calgary Pregnancy Care Center have done for me, and I simply ran out of paper. I am the woman I am today because of her kindness, her guidance, her thoughtfulness, and her love.

I do not know anyone specific who fights for our freedoms, but I will say that they are all my heroes, including their families they left behind. They remind me every day that I am here and free, because of their sacrifices. It is sad to watch the news tell us one more passed away and that more family will not get to see their soldier again.

I have a famous hero too; her name was Beatrix Potter. She helped that “writer” part of me peek out and join this world.

Her life showed me that becoming a writer in your 30s is a possibility.

Thank you to all the heroes out there. Without you, how could we ever reach our dreams?

Melody Heath-Smith writes children’s fiction, fiction, and non-fiction. She is always writing and creating a phantasmagorical story. You can reach her at MelodyTheWriter@hotmail.com or visit her blog, www.MelodyTheWriter.blogspot.com.
Mary Warden was my Nana for 39 years of my life and on my birthday this year she died at age 93, my current age reversed. To say she is my She-ro who was idealized for her extraordinary qualities is an understatement. She was without a doubt the best role model I could have asked for. As far back as I can remember she was always there for me with genuine care and concern. Growing up surrounded by adversity, this one woman was my rock, loving and supporting me through it all. I felt a strong need to rise above my misfortunes, prove my abilities and perfect all that I did. In spite of this, she taught me that I’m perfect just as I am. She was constantly lifting me up when I felt my chips were down and encouraged me to confidently achieve my dreams and goals.

Thinking about her, I’m reminded of the Bette Midler Song, “Wind Beneath My Wings.” I wonder if my nana knew she was my hero, who I admired most and desired to be. I hope she knew the profound impact she had in shaping me into the woman I am today. I can reach a little farther and fly a little higher knowing she’s in my heart. Although I miss her dearly, it was a blessing having her in my life for as long as I did. I give thanks every day that she was the wind beneath my wings, pushing me to be my best. In silent moments, I continue to feel her amazing presence guiding me with her soft whispers of encouragement; still lifting my wings and giving me a gentle nudge to soar and continue on.


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It seems odd to call Paul McCartney my hero. He hasn’t saved lives or performed any major heroic acts. But there is no denying that he has been and continues to be a strong creative force of inspiration on the planet. On a personal level, he has been a melody whose notes have been woven intricately into the fabric of my life for over 40 years.

My initial exposure to the creative power of music came from my third-row seat at the Hollywood Bowl in 1964. In all my 13-year-old innocence, I was swiftly lifted up into the tide of Beatlemania, which seemed even then to carry a certain freedom and joy within its frenzy.

Twenty-five years later, I found myself again at a McCartney concert, this time eye-to-eye with a legend, singing together in harmony the history of our lives, and engaging fully with the timeless nature of the music and the experience. What I now know is that these moments in time of high inspiration, these peak transformational experiences, are gateways for each of us to open up to our own creative spirits—our own inspiration and passion for life! That is the gift Paul’s music brings to the world.

Wendy Mackowski, MA, CPCC, and coach is the author of the inspiring gift book, *Bluebirds Song; Answering Your Spirit’s Call*, dedicated to Sir Paul McCartney and Lady Linda, the original Bluebirds whose inspirational music and good works continue to transform the lives of many generations of Pigeons into beautiful Bluebirds! Find her at [www.BluebirdsSong.com](http://www.BluebirdsSong.com) or [Wendy@BluebirdsSong.com](mailto:Wendy@BluebirdsSong.com).
Grateful for Men

Monika Huppertz

My first hero was my dad. He killed the spiders, scared away the boogie man, and protected his daughter’s honor like no other. Television introduced me to superheroes: big bulging muscles, faster than a speeding bullet, perfect timing, and charming.

As I grew, I noticed different heroes. Some wore a uniform, protected and saved the people, and were very brave at heart. Others taught, inspired, championed a cause, or brought about peace and change for the betterment of all. I discovered some upon a stage, some on a track, some on a rink, and some on the other side of a camera.

As I looked around, I realized that if I opened my eyes, I could see heroes virtually everywhere! Boyfriends, boy friends, boys, tweens, teens, young adults, boyish men who thought they were adults, adults (for real this time), refined men, rugged men, smart men, aged men, and really aged men could all easily wear that badge of hero.

All of these heroes were so willing to provide for me in a variety of capacities. Some provided a smile, others humor. Some provided safety, while others held me accountable for my actions. These men of all ages supplied, presented, provided, or made available their time, their honor, and their resources. Kindness, a strong shoulder, advice, and service were mine for the taking.

I have come across many different heroes in my life time. And, with luck, I will continue to. Whether I’m stuck in a snowdrift, need my cat rescued, am lost, need some information, or need a strong pair of arms to hold me, my heroes will be there to guide, comfort, or provide what I need.

I’m truly grateful for the many heroes that I’ve had the privilege of experiencing and knowing; truly grateful, indeed.

Monika Huppertz, intuitive life coach asks: “Do you portray happy on the outside, yet inside are not? Are you ready to remove obstacles and leave your restrictive life behind? Step towards your success with purpose and passion!” For your free Personal Truth consultation call and free gift, e-mail Monika.huppertz@gmail.com. You can find her website at www.LivingYourTruth.me.
Maria

Mary Armstrong Hines

My hero may not wear a cape, leap over tall buildings, or have superpowers, but to me she embodies the true meaning of the word hero—strong, generous, kind, courageous, and able to overcome overwhelming odds. She is an everyday hero. I met Maria when I was working with low-income families, helping to educate, connect, and empower the residents. Maria rented a two-bedroom apartment in an affordable housing complex. Living with her there were her three children and two dogs, and on top of that, she rented out the other bedroom to another woman, to help supplement her monthly income.

Maria had a daughter in high school and both a daughter and a son in elementary school. I met Maria when I had the good fortune to have one of her daughters, Rosa, in my afterschool homework club. She was the sweetest, kindest girl in the center—and worked hard every day to be on her school honor roll. She would always offer to help me by cleaning, organizing, putting up posters or artwork, or helping to serve the daily snacks, and she even assisted the younger children with their homework after she was done with her own. It became crystal clear to me that she learned these mature and selfless traits only through her amazing role model and mother, Maria. Rosa always wore the same brown sweatshirt every day to school, even when it was hot outside. One time I had to drop something off at her apartment and that is when I saw how her family lived, each and every day. Two beds were in the living room and two in the bedroom and all four of them shared a bathroom, which was chaotic when they all had to get up and go to school and work. Maria found it hard to keep paying the rent for the apartment and talked about the cockroaches she battled daily.

Maria worked very hard at a nearby grocery store, so she wasn’t able to be home with her children very often. The children’s father was in name only, offering no parenting help or financial support, so she was it—the mom, the dad, the provider, the nurturer, the nurse, the role model, and the teacher. I looked beyond her sad, exhausted eyes and saw her true strength and shining light. She was perpetually tired and never stopped worrying about money. But she put one foot in front of the other and went to work every day, and still managed to raise three wonderful, bright, and kind children.

There are thousands of Marias out there, in small rural villages and sprawling urban cities throughout our country, and whenever I feel like I have problems or want to complain about something, I think about Maria…and I honor her for the mother and woman she is. I am grateful for all the single mothers like Maria who are working two and three jobs trying to make ends meet, and I stand in awe of their strength, tenacity, and courage. You are the real heroes, and your children will be your grateful legacies.

Mary Armstrong Hines lives in the San Francisco Bay area and works in teaching and social services. She loves spending time with her family, her friends, and her yellow lab, Maggie May. You can find her at the ocean, reading a great book, writing, traveling, or at Maryh11@att.net.
My Musical Hero

Susan Seale

My grandfather wasn’t a firefighter or policeman. He didn’t risk his life in that way to save someone else’s. He was a farmer and later a deliveryman for NuWay Dry Cleaners. His formal schooling ended with sixth grade. His legacy has been his love of music, and that has lived on through his children and grandchildren.

It was the joy he exuded during our family parties that had the most positive impact on me. His eyes would twinkle as he encouraged me to play piano, dance, and join in with the family. There was much laughter and excitement during those times! I loved to just be in the same room with him.

My Gido, as I called him, was a Ukrainian-Romanian farmer living in northern Alberta, who spoke English as a second language. Eloping with my grandmother during the Depression era, farming times were tough and money was scarce for most of his life. One day, when my mother was still a girl, my grandfather arrived home with an armload of instruments, announcing that they were going to make extra money for the family by having a band…and they did! They enjoyed many years playing weddings and parties, and they even played on the radio.

He passed on his belief that education was important, frequently telling me: “Go to school, because no one can take your education away from you!” I became a teacher, and I knew that gave him a sense of pride.

For years I have felt a daily a sense of gratitude to my grandfather for bringing the joy of making music into our lives so long ago. It has been the determining factor in my life’s work: sharing a heritage of music-making with children and families and sharing that joy from my heart.

My She-roes

Lorna Blake

“How important it is to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!” —Maya Angelou

I’m grateful to my grandma Matilda for the nurturing and love she offered me in my earliest years. She laid the foundation for the woman I am today. Over the years my mother reminded me that my grandma loved and supported me before I was born. My mother became pregnant as a teenager and was abandoned by my biological father, so she hid the pregnancy. Her mother, Matilda, found out about the pregnancy and assured my mother that everything would be okay and that I would be a blessing and a light in her life.

My earliest childhood memories are of being loved and appreciated by my beloved “Mammie.” I was born into my grandma’s arms, and for my first four to six years she was my caretaker and nurturer. I recall sitting beside her at night as she read the Bible by kerosene lamp. I also snuggled up close to her in bed at night. She comforted me when I got scared by the incredible ghost stories my grandpa loved to tell and I loved to listen to.

I remember going with Mammie to the river where she sometimes washed clothes. One day I fell in, and it was Mammie who saved me. As I traveled into town with my grandma she made me feel special as she told good stories about me to her neighbors and the community. She always told me: “Hold your head high.”

While my mother wasn’t as nurturing as my grandma in my earliest years, she made the tough decision as a teenager to have me, not knowing how she would support me. She carried me for nine months, enduring abandonment, heartache, and shame. That took a lot of courage.

She gave me the best of herself in every way and helped me recognize my worth as a woman. From my earliest years, I saw my mom as a strong and powerful woman. As the ninth of ten children, she commanded the respect of all her siblings. In my teen years she became an entrepreneur and gained the respect of her entire community.

She made my elementary through high school education her top priority and always told me that education would be the key to my success. She constantly told me I was smart and pumped me up. For my high school entrance exam she budgeted for a tutor even when she hardly had enough to pay for the bare necessities.

She was the most loyal and supportive person in my life. When I made the decision to go to university as a mature student and a single mother, my mother cared for my kids and did everything to champion my success. She was my best cheerleader and my biggest fan! My mom and grandma are now deceased, but their spirits live on through me.

Like Abraham Lincoln, I’m proud to say: “All that I am, I owe to my mother and grandmother.”

Lorna Blake specializes in empowering women to recognize their power and find their purpose in life. She has helped hundreds of clients from more than 20 countries. Her mission is to empower millions.
Lifting Up the Everyday Heroes in our Midst

Claire Knowles

It was Henry David Thoreau who wrote: “...so many men [and women] lead lives of quiet desperation.” I lift this up because therein lies the making of everyday heroes. Heroes who, perhaps because of personal health or economic situations, or because of a host of other reasons, are coping with what life has handed them—every day. The situation is not of their choosing; yet they cope with it, knowing that life isn’t fair. They know that the heavy burden continues. These are the unsung, uncomplaining, everyday heroes who show us they have the courage, endurance, persistence, and inner strength to face this day and then rise to the challenges of the next in their own quiet ways.

I think of the many people (family, friends, neighbors) who carry the weight of a cancer diagnosis with them, of children in hospitals across our land, of our aged who are alone and confined to wheelchairs, and of the many people exasperated by long-term unemployment. While desperate in their respective situations—they still manage a smile, and possess the fortitude to face and embrace each new day.

Heroism can be dramatic, as in the courage displayed on September 11th and that of our deeply-wounded soldiers returning home. Yet, heroism can be undramatic—just think of the many quiet, everyday heroes in our midst! Their courage is noteworthy too.

Claire Knowles is a retired human resources and labor relations manager, who is now an independent consultant, coach, and facilitator in business leadership.

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A Tribute to Adi

Kicki Pallin Serby

I have seen her in so many pictures, my great-grandmother Adi Pallin, always with a firm and intelligent gaze. She passed away when I was only 7 years old, but now, being in my mid-40s, I have fully realized the impact she has had on my life.

Adi was born in Finland and experienced the first World War in the village of Fiskars Ironworks, a society west of Helsinki. She was the oldest of five daughters and one of the first women in Finland to be granted an apprenticeship to become a pharmacist, after the Russian majesty had given her father permission in the year 1900, when Adi was 18 years old.

She married a man who was one year older than her father, my Swedish great-grandfather Rudolf, who had immigrated twice to America prior to meeting the love of his life in Finland. He was a mill engineer who had been to Pittsburgh for further education and work.

Just a year after Adi’s 40th birthday she became a widow and suddenly found herself alone with two teenagers. She immigrated to Sweden and started rebuilding her life by working as a translator, a landlady, and a cookie baker for a bakery.

In the 1930s an inheritance changed Adi’s financial situation dramatically, and she could then not only shower the people around her with concern but also, when needed, with financial aid. And she never forgot her background. After the Winter War of 1940 and World War II in 1946, she was awarded two medals from General, and later President, Mannerheim in Finland, for her humanitarian and noble work in the name of charity services.

Adi had three unmarried younger sisters whom she invited to Sweden or regularly sent food packages to. She also took care of several of her grandchildren during school semesters and became very involved in the female emancipation movement, serving as the chairman of the Fredrika Bremer foundation in Enköping, a small Swedish town.

I am so grateful for having Adi as an inspiration; my heroic great-grandmother has shown so many of us female relatives how important it is to contribute. As Sonia Johnson has said: “We must remember that one determined person can make a significant difference, and that a small group of determined people can change the course of history.” So why hesitate? In the name of gratitude, let’s start making change a daily topic as a tribute to all our heroes.

Kicki Pallin Serby lives in Stockholm. She’s studying at the university and is deeply involved in researching a more sustainable way of living. Visit her at Twitter.com/KickiPS.
His Spirit Lives On

Doreen Baran

My father, Bill Race, was a remarkable man. He was an entrepreneur. We worked together for many years, giving him time from when I was born in 1926, through my formative teens, and on into my career years to make me what I am today.

Perhaps it started when I fell off a pier into Lake Ontario at the age of four. Can you imagine the horror in my father’s heart when that happened? His curly-haired, blonde, green-eyed daughter was about to drown! Fortunately, he was able to dive in and save his firstborn daughter. His beautiful wee daughter dried out safely in his arms, and he continued to love, protect, and cherish me forever more.

Bill was a man who gathered many around him to listen to his vision of life, encouraging them when they were down, and inspiring each and every one at all times.

When I was in my teens, his ideas and beliefs were far further advanced than others at that time. He taught me that sex is a blessing and a normal part of life. Today I am grateful for this.

Working together, sharing an office with two desks facing each other, gave him a perfect opportunity to share his ideas, values, and his vision of life with me. I was a part of his business and given opportunities that other women were not afforded. I was taught to fill in the gaps of knowledge in which he had no interest. This part of his wisdom gave me the opportunity to progress in my chosen careers over many years.

Bill passed on long ago, but the effect he had on my life lasts until this day.

Bill Race made me a passionate, intelligent, and inspirational woman who carries on his way of life, sharing wisdom and knowledge with everyone who will listen. His spirit lives within me!

Wherever Bill is, I am sure he is proud of me today!

Doreen Baran, a full-time Toronto realtor and team leader, writes a dynamite newsletter for 1,000 readers, volunteers for three charities, and turned 85 last August! Find her at www.DoreenBaran.com.
In the terrifying aftermath of 9/11, while we were still reeling from the horror and tragedy, my friends Susan Hagen and Mary Carouba swooped in quietly behind the scenes to take the action that makes them heroes to me.

It started when they noticed the media describing the undeniable courage and sacrifice of the first-responders almost exclusively in masculine terms: firemen, policemen, “the brothers,” and “our brave guys.”

References to the equally courageous and sacrificing female first-responders were strangely absent. These women, who had rushed in to save lives—and even laid down their own—were invisible.

Susan and Mary wanted these heroic women recognized along with their male colleagues. And they wanted children everywhere to grow up with these strong and resourceful female role models.

So they set out to find these women and bring us their stories. Without knowing exactly who these women were or how to locate them, they flew from California to New York and started asking around.

As they began to find women to interview and earned their trust, other women stepped forward. Often the women presented a tough exterior, necessary in their lines of work, that gave way mid-interview to vulnerability and the need to have their stories heard.

The interviews were long, tiring, and emotional; and almost everyone cried, including Susan and Mary. For many of the women, it was the first time they had told their whole story, from beginning to end.

Susan and Mary then shared these interviews with the world in their book *Women at Ground Zero*.

To this day, every time I pick up the book, I tear up. I feel the strength, the power, and the vulnerability of the women in it. I feel gratitude for their sacrifice. And I feel proud of my gender.

That is why Susan and Mary are my heroes.

**Martia Nelson** is a life and business coach who gets business owners off their hamster wheels and into success that blends financial gain with ease, purpose, and joyful living. She is also a dynamic speaker and author of the book *Coming Home: The Return to True Self*. Receive her complimentary gift at [www.MartiaNelson.com](http://www.MartiaNelson.com).

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The impossible can always be broken down into possibilities.
—Author Unknown

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