

Defining A Hero Brenda Calderón, Age 13, Carrigan Middle School

“It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” OneWorld’s Motto describes one characteristic of a hero. Heroes are the light in the midst of the darkness. They are those who wait and hope a little longer. There’s no doubt that they make this world-- that is filled with malevolence-- better. This is why we should give them our respect, and yet we allow them to go unknown and the term hero to be tossed around. You see, the term hero to most people is simply a four letter word used to describe Superman or Spiderman. To be able to comprehend the complexity of such a simple word as hero, we must understand what our own definition of a hero is. How are heroes made? Where do they come from? Are there differences between a celebrity and a hero? Can a hero be a celebrity? Can a celebrity be a hero? Do we really need heroes and if so, why?

All of my life I have searched for a hero I could call my own. As a child, I saw my father wake up every morning to go to work at a factory full time, just so that he could provide me with all the luxuries this world has to offer. I also remember seeing my mother wake up each and every day just to make sure that I was taken care of. It wasn’t until I became a teen that I began to comprehend that my parents were my very own heroes. Their goal and mission in life is not to save themselves but to save me and that is what makes a hero.

Heroes are people who dedicate their life, hopes, dreams, and spare time for others and for the good of mankind. **In their self-sacrifice is our victory.** A hero doesn’t need to be a single person; it can be an entire group of people. For example, OneWorld Progressive Institute is a hero in my eyes, because their mission is to educate, inform and engage viewers on a range of issues critical to their lives as individuals and members of communities. Heroes are brave and courageous, they stand tall and speak loud even when everyone turns the other way and pretends to be deaf. A hero to me is also someone who devotes his or her entire life and dreams to finding a cure for cancer. A hero is the soldier audacious enough to throw himself in front of a bullet for another soldier just so that the other soldier can go home and see his wife and child. A hero is the teacher who remains steadfast in the belief that her life was meant for molding the minds of her young students. A hero is someone who doesn’t think about themselves but about those around them, even if they are mere strangers.

Christopher Reeve once said, “A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.” To me a hero is someone who, like the English proverb says, is afraid to run away. A hero is someone who is willing to hold on just a bit longer. It’s also someone who has the power to do something and does just that. On the other hand, a coward just sits back and watches injustices happen before his or her eyes.

Art Green once wrote, “Heroes aren’t born heroes.” Heroes develop over time; they aren’t created in laboratories. I believe heroes are made when the need arises and someone is willing to answer the call. They’re ordinary citizens who face problems and adversities as we do.

Plato once said “A hero is born among a hundred, a wise man is found among a thousand, but an accomplished one might not be found even among a hundred thousand men.” Heroes, to

me, come from the same place that presidents, singers, doctors, politicians, and construction workers come from; they come from the crowds, from the people.

Webster's Dictionary defines a hero as "a man who is admired for his achievements and qualities". In my opinion, this definition better suits a celebrity, because most heroes aren't acknowledged. Most heroes will never receive a reward for their acts. Most heroes go unnoticed and are considered to be just another ordinary person in the crowd, and most don't achieve celebrity status or prestige. But, you see, a star is noticed and acknowledged for their doings. They receive awards and are chased by the press. Sometimes stars even take credit for something a hero did for example, when they play the role of a real life hero. People tend to ignore the hero themselves, and focus on the actor playing them. This society has somehow wrapped their minds around the concept that a hero is the basketball player who shoots the winning basket, or the baseball player who hits a home run. Jason Westlake once expressed in a poem, that when you ask a person who they would consider a hero between Lance Armstrong and Mike Tyson, most would choose Lance Armstrong, because even though Tyson has money, fame, position, and talent he doesn't have the characteristics of a hero. Celebrities consider themselves heroes and bask in the glory of their actions, when in reality heroes do not see themselves as heroes; they don't do it for glory; they do it because it's the right thing.

Have you ever seen the kid who steps in to help his friend who's being bullied? He's a hero, but through that heroism he becomes the subject of ridicule. The same thing happens to stars; they become the subject of ridicule in the tabloids. There is a difference between heroes and celebrities, but when they do reach fame, they are found amusing for a while, but the one thing people love more than a hero or star is watching them fall. Heroes can be celebrities, because they can achieve fame through their acts, like Martin Luther King. Some celebrities, like Roberto Clemente, have used their fame and fortune to help those in need, therefore becoming heroes.

Why do we need heroes? Well, 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." Without heroes we'd just have bad guys, and live in a hopeless world. No more Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, Pedro Albizu Campos, Martin Luther King Jr., etc. We wouldn't be audacious enough to try and have our voices heard and stand tall. "Without heroes," Bernard Malamud once said, "we're all plain people and don't know how far we can go."

"A true hero is really never a hero at all; at least not in their own mind." (Art Green) We must learn how to recognize heroes and let them know their efforts are welcome. In order to recognize who a hero is we must know our own definition of a hero. And you must always remember heroes are just like you.