

Raise the Sparks Newsletter #22-Heroes

Ask the average person who they admire, look up to, or most want to be like. They will probably tell you the name of an actor or actress, sports figure, rock entertainer or television star. These are their heroes. Even in ancient times, members of the theatre and sports figures were revered.

When we look at these figures more closely, are they worthy of our adulation and hero status? Often, these people have little more to offer than beauty, or a particular talent or skill. Have they made a significant or long lasting contribution to society? Ask the average person who A Rod is (Alex Rodriguez from the NY Yankees for the few of you on the planet earth who haven't heard of him) and they will tell you lots of details about his career and his personal life. Many would say they greatly admire him and would place him in hero status. Yet beyond hitting and catching a ball, and dating movie actresses, what exactly has he done to change our lives for the better.

True heroes fall into two categories. The first are people who have made a significant contribution(s) which has affected a large number of people.

An example of this type of hero is Allen Breed. I'm sure his name is not as familiar to us as some of the more famous people who make daily news headlines. Yet Mr. Breed is responsible for saving thousands of lives every year. In 1968, he received patent number U.S. #5,071,161 for a sensor and safety system for car airbags. Countless people have escaped serious injury and death as a result of his work.

Some heroes invent an item which makes life just a little bit safer or easier for us. If you have ever scraped your knee or cut yourself by accident, you probably benefited from the invention of Earl Dickson who invented the band-aid in 1921. Earl saw that his wife Josephine often cut herself while preparing food. She would use gauze and adhesive tape which would often fall off. Earl decided to invent something that would stay in place and protect small wounds better.

He took a piece of gauze and attached it to the center of a piece of tape. To keep it sterile he covered the "band-aid" with crinoline to keep it sterile. His boss James Johnson saw Earle's invention and knew that it was far superior to anything on the market. By the way, James Johnson was one of the owners of Johnson and Johnson, which today is one of the largest manufacturers of band-aids and health supplies in the world. His company introduced band-aids to the general public and millions of scrapes and cuts later, the rest is history. Happily for Earl, as a result of his invention, he was made vice-president of Johnson & Johnson.

There are countless other examples of obscure people who made major contributions to the health and well being of society. Beyond that, there is a second category of hero. Like the first group they are often not known to the general public. However, their contribution, though great is often on a much smaller scale.

I came upon some members of this group in an unexpected manner. I was on an elliptical exercise machine in a health club in Liberty NY.. To pass the time I was watching an over head television monitor that had a feature on CNN called CNN Heroes; Everyday People Changing the World. Each of these average people profiled on the show had profoundly impacted the lives of others on a small scale. There is Richard St Denis who with his World Access Project has provided hundreds of wheelchairs to people in rural Mexico. Until Richard, (who himself is wheelchair bound) saw their need, scores of handicapped people were literally prisoners in their own homes. Now they can get out and go to work, shop and visit friends and relatives.

At the age of 21, Taryn Davis became a widow when her husband, an army corporeal, was killed in Iraq. The loss of her husband was of course devastating. In 2007, she created the American Widow Project. Her organization has established a support network for over 900 military widows. She recently said “More widows will know they are not alone. The work we do recognizes their sacrifice, survival and perseverance and allows them to find healing”.

The author Bernard Malamud once said, “Without heroes, we are all plain people and don’t know how far we can go.” People like Richard St Denis and Taryn Davis help us realize how far we can go and how much each of us can do. They are true powers of example. They exemplify the concept of the power of one. When a person has a vision and actualizes it, great things can happen. When that vision involves service, it is all the more powerful.

Within our own lives, we can also find heroes. Each of knows someone who has done something which can inspire us individually. For example, one of my heroes is my mother in-law. At the age of 92 she published her first book. Now at 96, she is working on her second novel. As a writer, I find her discipline and commitment to writing extraordinary. Everyone has a book within them. Now I know, that based on my mother in law; it is never too late to start that book I always wanted to write.

Find people in your life that can help, guide and inspire. Tap their knowledge and be open to learning from them. Most of them will be more than happy to give of their time and energy in helping you transform your life and in the process help others.

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Yours in peace,
Moshe Kessler

Certified Life Coach