



Who is Your Child's Hero?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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When I grew up it was easy. We knew that in the western movie the cowboy with the white hat was the "good guy" and the one with the black hat was "the bad guy". We looked up to figures like Ann Frank or Jack and Bobby Kennedy who died for their beliefs. We heard stories of valour from our parents and their friends who had sacrificed through the World War. We watched Terry Fox run rather than rest so that the next generation might not have to suffer as he did.

Yes, it was easy to identify the heroes in society.

Sometimes we were inspired by individuals who did what we could not or would not do - like the first visitors on the moon or the recipients of Nobel Peace Prizes or architects of the site of various Expo celebrations.

At other times, we were inspired by pioneers of the path which we chose for our own lives. Many students, for example, decided to become school teachers because they wanted to be just like someone who had taught them. David Suzuki encouraged us to respect and protect the environment. How many guitars were purchased by starry-eyed people who hoped to be "discovered" like the Beatles, Beach Boys or Elvis had been?

And people didn't have to be famous to be examples for us. There were the farmers who demonstrated faith by planting seed in the spring with the hope that it would produce a crop for the fall. There were the volunteer firefighters and police officers who risked their lives to protect our community. Doctors made house calls late at night when their own health was in jeopardy because of fatigue. There were people who left our little town and made it "big" in the city. And those who stayed who taught us about family, work and personal values.

Maybe part of the reason that we could honour heroes was that we didn't know everything about the individuals we respected. There was something to be said about simplicity. Today, it is only a matter of minutes until technology broadcasts the sins or failings of people on a world-wide basis.

Perhaps our attitudes towards authority have changed the possibilities for heroism. What used to be unquestionable respect towards teachers, police and community leaders, has, in many cases, been replaced with disgust and filing of complaints of unprofessional conduct. It is true that "one bad apple can spoil the bunch" and plant a seed of doubt about the others.

I find it extremely sad when I ask my clients who they have as heroes and am told "I don't have any". Often the ones who previously held those positions fall from grace due to personal or business failings. Those who admired them therefore become disappointed and disillusioned to the point that they give up trusting that others are genuine or will be able to maintain hero status over a lifetime.

Sometimes individuals are not classed as heroes until they die. I remember the polarization that the ideas and programs of Tommy Douglas created when he was alive. A few years ago, however, he was given the title "Greatest Canadian" for the very things that caused the controversy.

I have decided that I don't want to be exactly like anyone else. Instead, I would like to incorporate the traits of individuals into my own life. I wish that I had the voice of Barbara Streisand, the intelligence of Bill Gates and the wisdom of Jesus. Okay, that's not going to happen. But perhaps I could use examples such as the compassion of Mother Theresa, the long-suffering of Nelson Mandella, the peaceful methods of Gandhi, the oratorical skills Martin Luther King Junior and the laughter of my two-year-old granddaughter to shape my own life.

This week, I challenge you to list the people who have been heroes for you. Why and how did they inspire you? Better yet, think about the things that you might do which may result someday in someone saying to you "You are my hero".

Everyone needs a hero and it seems that there aren't as many around as their used to be. Why not be one?