BECOMING A HERO IN AMERICA

The *American College Dictionary* defines a hero as a person of distinguished valor…………..admired for his [or her] noble qualities.” Although the term *hero* has often been used as a synonym for great leader, those who are neither prominent nor important may well become heroes. Heroes are trailblazers, according to Mythology Teacher. com. Heroes overcome many great challenges. Heroes have all the weaknesses the rest of us have - greed, fear, hate - but they have mastered and defeated them. Heroes make their heroic deeds look easy, even though they are not, concludes the website.

Historian Dixon Wecter has identified eleven major factors that work together to determine whether an individual rises to the level of hero.

1. **In a democracy, heroes must be chosen by the people.**
   A genuine hero is chosen by the people on the basis of what they understand to be the ideals the hero symbolized. The making and unmaking of heroes goes on during death as well as during life.

2. **People of good will become heroes.**
   The self-serving autocrat or arrogant dictator will not make it to the American hall of heroes.

3. **American heroes must be perceived as giving unselfish service to the people and the nation.**
   No one will be thought an American hero if the people feel that the pursuit of self-interest and personal glory, rather than national interest, was the ultimate goal.

4. **Living American heroes are rarely taken very seriously by the people.**
   Many of our greatest heroes have been the subject to abuse and criticism.

5. **American heroes are, often as not, as well known for their failures as for their successes.**
   Remember President George Washington as a hero during the harsh winter at Valley Forge; President Abraham Lincoln with his appearance of a drawn face, stooped shoulders with the nation’s burdens on his shoulders.
6. **American heroes overcome personal handicaps.**
   President Franklin Delano Roosevelt having to overcome his childhood paralysis (polio); Lincoln growing up in poverty in a log cabin.

7. **American heroes symbolize values and attitudes that are distinctively American.**
   Americans prefer heroes who are humble in origin, kind, honest and free from vanity or arrogance.

8. **People of good character become American heroes.**
   Americans do not require heroes to be saintly.

9. **Americans must see something of themselves in their heroes.**
   Americans like their heroes to love sports, play an instrument or engage in some other popular activity.

10. **Americans want their heroes to do for them what they cannot do for themselves.**
    An American hero must sense what changes the American people want and then help them make them.

11. **Accident and circumstance help make American heroes.**
    For example, Washington was a hero due to colonies ready to declare their independence; Lincoln was a hero as the time was right to end slavery and the Union was threatened.

    *from Heroism in America by Gerald Leinwand*

Our culture talks about heroes so much, it is almost cliché. When you’re asked to write about heroes for the five-hundredth time, you might roll your eyes. But actually this topic is one that should be run into the ground. We should never forget the sacrifices made in the past and in the present to preserve their safety, freedom, and happiness. Heroes inspire more heroes. It’s a side effect of their actions. Seeing them do their best, inspires us to do our best. The heroic spirit is kept alive and reborn for a new generation.

*From Mythology Teacher.com*