

### Just a kid named TJ

**By Austin Killin**

I know a kid named TJ. He is an average kid. He likes sports and is just like any other regular high school guy. TJ made a choice at the bright, young age of 18 that would change his life forever. It was a choice that set him apart from most of the 18-year-olds in America.

TJ knew his choice could easily lead to a very tragic end, but he held his head high and marched straight into boot camp. My cousin

TJ is enlisted in the U.S. Army. He is now stationed in Kuwait, serving his first tour of active duty on foreign soil. Is TJ a hero?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a hero as one that shows great courage. Many people today, though, claim that a hero is an individual that has done a bold, brave or otherwise heroic action.

Paul Revere is remembered as a hero. Paul's claim to fame is a single ride. No one can deny or refute that his warning ride was a very heroic act. Yes, my cousin can drive a tank. Yes, he can shoot a gun. He possesses all the skills necessary to make a heroic act of war that people will look back on, like Paul Revere's midnight ride, and remember him as a hero. But are single acts really what make a hero?

This question leads me to yet another thought provoking question. How many names of legendary generals or soldiers have become famous? Washington, Lafayette, Grant, Lee, MacArthur and Patton, the list goes on and on. Why are these men famous?

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An old saying says, to answer a question in the present, we must learn the past. Many will say that it is because of the heart, the drive, the passion that they had for victory. But does a firefighter rushing through a burning, collapsing, smoke filled apartment building, on the 11th floor with a six-year-old on his back not have that same level of heart, drive, courage and passion that George Washington had?

Yet, how many names of famous firefighters or policemen, or even teachers does the general public know? I'm guessing not many. Why is this? These people have the same type of heart and courage that famous generals and soldiers did. It's because, while it is possible, people do not look back to see statistics like how many people fireman Jones saved or how many criminals Police Chief Williams apprehended. One cannot really be sure why this is. Maybe because war is more exciting. Who knows?

But I truly believe that firefighters, policemen, parents, teachers, soldiers and many other people who show their outstanding courage on a daily basis are heroes, no matter what type of extraordinary courage it is. This proves that single acts do not necessarily make a hero, but the fear, courage and passion that is deep down inside the bellies of great people.

So, is TJ a hero? Is the 18-year-old with a bright future, who sucked up his fears to go to a foreign land and risk death for sake of protecting his country a hero? He hasn't done anything heroic yet, or has he?

TJ became a hero to me when his pen hit the paper, signing his name to enlist in the army. It took a huge amount of courage to apply for the ultimate job, and I'm sure that no one would ever guess that the reason behind his heroics is another hero.

TJ's father was shaped by the military. He was in the Guards, and was called to duty at the beginning of the war in the Middle East. He instituted his morals from the military onto his children. I believe even this, let alone his true heroics serving in Iraq, instituted the heroics displayed by his son. And for his courage to bring up his children right and not back down.

TJ's father is a hero. His heroics in Iraq inspired TJ to join the army and do what he can to serve. This proves that heroism is, for lack of a better word, contagious.

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I'm quite positive that plenty of people would argue with that statement, asking, "Then why aren't there more heroes in America?" That question can be answered with plenty of reasons.

First off, the overtly negative portrayal of the war has brought considerable sense of negativity to the general public about the soldiers. There is no doubt in my mind that nearly every single one of those soldiers is a hero. Also, people fail to look at policemen who risk their lives facing down hostile and armed criminals. People fail to look at firemen who risk their lives to save others from a fiery death. They fail to look at the veterans of America, who risked their lives at one point so their country could be free and have liberty.

They fail to look at doctors, teachers and parents who are all heroes. There are many heroes out there who get overlooked, doing thankless jobs because of the fear, passion, courage and compassion that color their character. These heroes are selfless, unpretentious people. Many of them would never call themselves a hero, for their unmistakable humility is too great. These people are true American heroes.

So, are there still heroes in America? I strongly suggest the answer is yes. Heroes can be just a brave kid named TJ from McCook, Neb. to a senator sticking to his morals on capitol hill and fighting ferociously for his beliefs. They can be the soldier, scared of what is to come out of the dark building, or the firefighter trying to get out of a burning one.

As long as there is someone around with the courage, the passion, the heart and the drive to protect people, fight for others, raise a child the way they should be raised or even be a good Samaritan, there will always be heroes in my eyes.

And if my cousin's story has said anything, it is that heroics span generations. We can be confident that as long as there are heroes around today, there will be heroes around tomorrow. As long as we know this, we should never need to ask the question, "Are there still heroes in America?"

### By Elise Nelson

Think back to when you were younger. Who was your hero? Was it the local basketball star? The President of the United States? Your parents? Or was it your favorite actor or singer?

Think about your life now. Do you have the same heroes? What are the qualities and qualifications to be your hero?

As described in a Merriam-Webster dictionary, a hero is an illustrious warrior or one that shows great courage. He is admired for his achievements and noble qualities. So, "Does America still have heroes?" For me, America is the home of the hero.

As I look into my past, I remember those that played a large role in my life and those I claimed to be my heroes. When I began pondering my current idols, I thought, "Surely they can't be the same." As it turns out, many are the same, but for very different reasons.

The football star—as a young girl, the quarterback of the football team was always courageous in my eyes. He controlled the entire game in his hands and he faced his opponents fiercely. Today, it is not the quarterback that is the hero, but someone else that stands on that same field. That is the singers who carry themselves proudly to belt out our country's National Anthem every game. America still has heroes.

My best friend—I will never forget that long row of monkey bars. They intimidated my friend and me and looked so terrifying. We didn't know that we'd ever make it across. One day, she boldly reached for a bar and went all the way to the other side. I knew then that her bravery meant a lot. Today, she can still make it across the monkey bars, but she stands for something greater. She is someone that does what is right, even if she has to do it alone. America still has heroes.

Police officers and firefighters—They always kept the bad guys off of the streets and rescued us from fires. While they continue to fight crime and keep us safe, I now understand that they do

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much more. They risk their own lives to keep those around them protected. America still has heroes.

My grandparents—I knew when I was in my adolescence that they had to be tough. After all, they put up with my parents. As I have grown to know them, though, more and more of their fortitude shines through. They endured hardships and struggles I could never imagine. They even put themselves on the front lines to keep America free.

Last but not least are those that serve our country in the armed forces. I cannot say that as a child I would have listed them as part of my heroes...but I should have.

Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our years telling our children and our children’s children what it was once like in the United States where we were free.”

These men and women devote their lives to the freedom of the people of the United States. Without those who serve now and those who served before them, I may not have been able to speak here today. They are willing to lay down their lives so that the people for this county can live theirs to the fullest. America still has heroes.

Though the people I looked up to as a child have grown older, their values are still the same. As I have grown, I have changed and have been able to see those values from a different perspective. My heroes did admirable things when I was younger and have continued to do them to this day. They face their fears and each of them sacrifices himself for the people around him. When you ask me if America still has heroes, I say, “You bet! They’ve been here all along.”

## Heroes

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**By Brittany Durbin**

Next time you go out into the world, ask yourself this question: "What is a hero?"

To me a hero is someone who cares, protects or is looked up to as a role model for others.

America does still have heroes and always will. A hero can be anyone around you.

Ronald Reagan once said: "We have every right to dream heroic dreams. Those who say we are in a time when there are no heroes, they just don't know where to look."

Recognizing and being a hero are two of the hardest jobs in life. The many ways to recognize a hero make heroes hard to spot.

My uncle Rob and uncle Scott both fought in a war called Desert Storm. Although this war was an estimated two days, those soldiers were there for approximately six months. During this time my uncle Rob lost 13 of his friends. While talking with him he told me even though this war had light casualties, when one soldier died it was like a million had died.

Even in the smallest wars or the smallest problems heroes may be found. Being a hero is a very rewarding title that people can have in life.

Heroes surround us in our everyday lives. A hero can be found in your school. Your teacher can be your hero. They teach us what we need to know and put in the extra time to allow us to enjoy extra-curricular activities. Each teacher has a different activity that they lead or contribute to. Most people do not realize that each teacher works harder than he or she is credited for.

My teachers have taught me that even though things may be hard, to always try my best. They

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have said that trying is better than not trying at all. This simple lesson has taken me a long way.

A principal or counselor can also be a hero for leading you in the right direction and helping you become successful adults. Going into my senior year, I have felt confident in the decisions that I am making for the future. Finding scholarships and understanding the process of applying to college becomes easier with the help of your principal or counselor. Many people would not be who they are today without this direction.

You may also find heroes out in the world around you. James T. Walsh once said: "For as long as this nation has known war we have embraced the heroes it has produced. Americans have rightfully noted the honor and nobility of courage under hostile fire and thanked them who perished in their defense."

Veterans and soldiers sacrifice not only their own lives, but everything they have to fight for our country's safety and freedom. They go to war knowing that they may never return home. They leave behind their families, and they often times miss the birth of their own children as well as many family members.

The soldiers that never return home will always be in our hearts, and will never be forgotten. Because of these heroic individuals, we are able to live in the land of the free.

The most common place to find a hero is in your own family. My grandpa Strawn's uncle was a World War II veteran. He was a head tank mechanic for General Patton. Even though he is not alive today he will always be a hero in our family.

Many believe that their parents are heroes for everything that they give and do for them. They look up to them as role models. Your grandparents can also be your heroes.

My personal hero is my grandpa Charlie. He has helped me through so much and has been my best buddy from when I was sick, to my recovery and even now. When I was 3 1/2 years old, I was diagnosed with Leukemia. Over the next two and a half years, I went through extensive treatments of chemotherapy.

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During this time I lost my hair. To make me feel better my grandpa shaved his head. When I was at my lowest point in treatment, my grandpa was there. He was always there, along with my family, and for this he is my hero. The world is made up of even more heroes than I named, but we all have our own heroes.

I hope today you have a clearer image of the different types of heroes, and how to recognize them. Take some time to think about who your hero is and why. I leave you with this quote by Bob Riley, "Hard times don't create heroes. It's the hard times when the 'hero' within us is revealed."

**By Sarah Heermann**

Bam! Pow! Wham! These are the sounds we read in comic books as kids. At an early age we all looked up to these fictional characters as heroes. They would beat up bad guys, right some wrongs and get the girl. Now that we are older, what is a hero? Who do we look up to now? Who is protecting America from the bad guys?

The bold characters that are formed from paper and ink are still influential in the minds of children today. At Halloween we see kids dressed up as Batman, Spiderman and the Hulk. With bulging muscles, cool costumes and super natural powers that they can choose to use for good, these characters are easy to fall in love with. It also helps to have the bad guys constantly losing and an attractive woman waiting for the return of our hero.

When we were little this was about as complex as I thought the world was. There was an obvious split between good and bad, with the good always winning, and little sacrifice for their success.

As I grew older, I am sad to say I learned that the superhero world was not reality. Heroes do



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not always win when they should, they do not always have the perfect physic, teeth or hair, and they do not come in colorful spandex costumes.

Heroes often sacrifice a great deal in order to save others, and this is what earns them the fame. Though some do not even get fame; they sacrifice without the expectation of anything in return. This is what defines a true hero. These men and women you may see everyday. They are the ones that helped when the Twin Towers went down, the ones that helped when Katrina struck, the neighbors that help you every day and the soldiers that fought for your freedoms.

The greatest sacrifice to give is your life. What more is there to give?

There is no larger group of people that risk and lose it than our own soldiers. They shed blood daily protecting what America stands for and the freedoms and rights no other country has the chance to enjoy.

These heroes do not have super powers; they become super with the sweat and blood they give. They do not have colorful spandex costumes, they wear camo and boots whose soles they wear down by marching miles at a time. And they sacrifice their lives everyday to preserve the America we all know.

I am proud to say that we have many in our own communities that have fought in wars. They ran across battlefields, with bombs and bullets piercing through the air, alongside the friends they had made, not sure if they will ever see them again or if they themselves would make it out alive, but they charged on toward the enemy. We must never forget them or the sacrifices they made.

Without these men and women, who will protect America? As we have grown, we have had to reinvent our definition of a "true" hero. We trade capes and muscles and superpowers for courage, valor and honor. These are the American heroes, the people that defend our country, our liberties and our freedoms.