

Most people think heroes are individuals who are brave or are greatly admired. This definition is about as accurate as a grenade blast in that it hits everyone. Heroes are more than people who have obtained fame and fortune. They are not the flavor of the week or the person who eats the most bugs. They are not the athlete who scores the most points or the celebrity with the shiniest hair. To me, heroes are people who give of themselves to the less fortunate, who sacrifice their own safety to save others, and who stand up for the right moral decision regardless of the consequences.

Heroes help others no matter the consequences to themselves. They take risks not for the thrill, but in order to help people who are stuck in their own personal Hades. Mother Theresa exemplified this to the extreme. She lived among the poor lepers without thought to the fact that she might contract this disease. Coughing, sickly people with stubs for fingers crowded around her and all she did was care a little bit more. Dripping and oozing sores only served to spur her on to greater heights of love and service. Her life is my definition of hero.

Service comes in many forms, and sometimes the form it takes is tragedy. I watched as a nation wept on the eleventh of September. People were stunned. They could not figure out how to express their grief, but on that tragic day when two planes hit the twin towers, a number of firefighters knew in their very being what needed to be done. These

firefighters found the courage in the now cold creeping spots that were formerly their hearts to do what others could not do. They went into the very grasp of death in order to save people from that twisted, burning mess referred to as a building. Later, after mourning their dead, the remaining firefighters grasped that courage once more, and shouting to the night, "We will not be conquered," they proceeded to dig in rubble that burned the very flesh from the bone. They did not stop for rest or food, and, in the end, though a tragedy had occurred, those great heroes lit our darkest hour.

In another time, a great man showed America what it meant to be a hero. Abraham Lincoln knew the nation might never be reunited if he freed the slaves, but he also knew that it was the only moral action to be taken. He looked at the multitude hungering for the right to live free, and he knew that America would be shaped by his actions. He did not know if the nation would survive, but he knew he would not live in an America without freedom. He died for his beliefs, but before that great tragedy, he reforged a nation with his convictions.

Thus, giving and sacrifice are the very foundation of hero to me. True heroes show not what great strength is in the arm, but what great strength there is in the minds, the hearts, and the very spirit of mankind. There is a hero in all of us, but unfortunately, it usually takes more effort than a person is willing to give in order to find that hero. To me a hero is someone who cares to the point of pain, and then cares just a tiny bit more.