

Hero. A word that speaks of valor and courage and selflessness. A word that in American society is far too overused. It is not a word that began as an adjective for common men, but a word that was used to describe the champions of ancient times. Heroes were mythological or legendary men that possessed inhuman strength, bravery, or skill. This was not the best swordsman in the village, nor was the king given the title because of his position. These heroes were rare individuals that were often worshipped by the normal folk, so great was their reputation.

I do not subscribe to the belief that a hero deserves the title for an ordinary act or deed. 'Heroic' is not intended to describe anything that is commonplace. Heroism is not that easy. Unlike the version we view from comfortable theater seats, it is not an easy thing, being a hero. Being heroic is not glamorous; it is gritty, it is lonely, it is self-sacrifice. Heroes are not people who make effortless decisions. Bravery is not that easy. The media has distorted our perception. We see the word "hero" in print every day. The movies make it seem such an attainable thing, when in truth, heroes are rare.

While everyone has personal role models, they are seldom heroes. Admirable. But not heroic. Many people suffer greatly in life and must endure hardships. We are amazing creations with the ability to rise above our circumstances. This does not make one a hero. To overcome is human. To make sacrifices is human. But a hero is more.

A hero places a higher value on the lives of others than his own. He deliberately puts himself in a situation that endangers his own well-being. He goes above and beyond. A hero is no common citizen. I don't see heroism as merely choosing a dangerous profession. Careers are chosen to fulfill a life, to give it a purpose. For some, the most rewarding professions are those that carry a high risk. But any job can be hazardous.

A hero is not every policeman, fireman, and service member. Sure, they *can* be heroic. But so can your next-door neighbor. A hero is someone that falls into a life-or-death situation and makes a conscious decision to jeopardize his own life for someone else.

A hero *is*: the mother who pushes someone else's child out of the path of a bus, risking her own safety, every fireman in the second twin tower that chose to stay even after the first had fallen, the soldier that throws himself on a grenade to save his comrades, each family that took part in the Underground Railroad, knowing that their service might end at the gallows, the teacher who stands between his students and the gunman.

My number one American hero is not a single man or woman, but every man and woman that opted to dangle their life from a thread to keep the life of another human being from ending.