

Who Is a Hero?

By Marty Kaminsky

Maybe
it's you.

The word *hero* means different things to different people. For some, it's the fire fighter who enters a burning building to save lives. For others, it's the baseball player who clears the bases with a game-winning home run.

Recently I spoke with some well-known people who have done heroic things or have witnessed heroic actions by others. I asked what the word *hero* means to them.

"Heroes conduct themselves with honor and make the right choices day after day."

*Peter C. Lemon,
Congressional Medal
of Honor recipient*

"One of my heroes was the man who owned the grocery store where I worked as a teenager," says Mr. Lemon, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in defending fellow soldiers during the Vietnam War. "He was honest, hard-working, and treated people with dignity. Another was my lieutenant at Army basic training, because he believed in me. These men didn't focus on themselves, but encouraged others to believe in themselves."

"Heroes are those who recognize their weaknesses and do something about them."

*Dr. Mae Jemison,
former astronaut*

"I don't like the term hero. It implies that some people are perfect and have no weaknesses, but we all have shortcomings," says Dr. Jemison, who was the first African American female astronaut. "Heroes are people who fail but stand back up again. We all have the material of heroes inside us. By using the example of others you look up to, you can fan the flames of inspiration and find the hero in yourself."

"Those who sacrifice, take risks, or do the extraordinary for the benefit of others can be heroes."

*Nicholas Scoppetta,
New York City
fire commissioner*

"Fire fighters do not set out to be heroes," says Mr. Scoppetta, who commands a team of more than sixteen thousand men and women. "When they take the oath of office, fire fighters realize they may be placing themselves in danger, but it is part of the job. A person does not have to rush into a burning building to be a hero, though. Author Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, 'Each man is a hero to somebody.'"

"Heroes come in all shapes and sizes."

"When I was growing up, there were very few female athletes to look up to, so I copied my sister, Jen," says Ms. Bird. "She excelled because she gave it her best at all times. It is important to realize that both males and females can inspire and lead the way for others."

In 2002, Sue Bird led the University of Connecticut's women's basketball team to the national championship. She now plays in the Women's National Basketball Association.

"Look for the people who are doing something for someone else."

"My heroes were my parents," says Mr. Rather, who has reported on most of the major news stories of the past forty years. "They worked with determination and heart to make sure my brothers, sisters, and I had what we needed. They impressed upon us that we were a family, a team, not just a collection of people who lived under the same roof."

"Having the biggest car, the most money, or the nicest house does not make you a hero. Heroism comes from within. There are heroes all around us—you just have to know how to look for them."

"A hero is someone like my parents, who give something back to others and ask for nothing in return."

"Right from the start, my parents told my sister and me that we could be successful, and then they showed us how," says Mr. Jeter, the star shortstop for the New York Yankees. "After my Little League games my dad would take me to the high-school field and hit me extra grounders and then pitch to me. My mom and sister would patiently field the balls I hit. My parents taught me that there may be people with more talent, but there is never an excuse for anyone to work harder than I do."

Derek Jeter is the founder and president of the Turn 2 Foundation, which inspires kids to become leaders.

*Sue Bird,
professional
basketball player*

*Dan Rather,
television journalist*

*Derek Jeter,
professional
baseball player*