

## Where have all the heroes gone?

Daniel R. Castro

We are a society of hero worshipers. But we have had a dearth of heroes in recent years. Most of our leaders, superstar athletes, movie stars, CEO's, presidents and senators have left us disappointed, frustrated, and disillusioned. These days, we have to look beyond the glitz of Hollywood, the weak excuses of superstar athletes, and the "spin" of politicians and CEO's to find the true heroes.

Historical research shows that heroes have consistently followed the same set of principles over the last several thousand years without even knowing it. They have left us a well-worn trail to follow by their examples. Each of them, as individual role models, have joined together to form one giant, universal role model.

Heroes have an uncanny ability to look beyond the crisis of the moment and see a purpose so big and all encompassing that they forget, momentarily, about everything else, *everything* - including their own interests. These are the types of people who have always been our heroes - consistently over the last several thousand of years. These are the types of heroes we need more of today.

But who are these heroes and where do you find them? It turns out you don't have to look very far.

At my Dad's recent funeral in the little town of Castroville, Texas, a man came up to me and said, "Your Dad changed my life." I was shocked.

My Dad was a typical old-style Hispanic authoritarian figure, with a jaw of stone, not prone to show great affection to anyone, including his family. He was a strong disciplinarian. We were terrified of him when we were kids. He could be harsh and cold at times, but he was still my Dad and we all loved and respected him.

He grew up in poverty as a migrant farm worker, traveling with the cotton crop harvest from season to season, living in small tent-cities with all the other migrant farm workers.

At the age of 17, he left home to join the Air Force. He did his basic training at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, like so many other enlisted men during that time. As it turned out, he had a very high IQ and became an intelligence officer, interpreting code as it was transmitted by the Russians during the cold war.

After receiving an honorable discharge from the Air Force, he went to college at the tiny Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, where he decided to study to become a preacher. During the summers, he did volunteer work in the little town of Mason, Texas.

---

In that town, lived an impoverished teenage boy named Fred Zavala, who was being raised by his alcoholic grandfather in a one-room shack with no furniture in it except a rusty old bed

spring. He was an outcast. One day, a skinny Bible student came to visit. The student was out to change the world, one person at a time. The student invited Fred and his grandfather to church. At first Fred resisted. But, because of the student's warm enthusiasm and zest for life, Fred eventually went to church. It was a small Hispanic Evangelical church in Mason, Texas.

At church, Fred developed a crush on a girl named Janie. But Janie's father knew of Fred's background and circumstances and was, therefore, not fond of Fred. Fred was never invited to Janie's house when her father invited other church members over for dinner after church. Instead, he would walk slowly in front of Janie's house with his head held low, his hands in his pockets, gazing longingly at Janie's house, wishing he could go in.

Eventually, as the Bible student's time in that little town was coming to end, he tried to get Fred a job so he could learn a trade and earn a living. He succeeded in getting Fred a job at an auto-mechanic shop, but things didn't work out there. Then Fred got a job hauling rocks to building sites. Every day, under the hot, burning Texas sun, Fred faithfully hauled his rocks. It was not a glamorous job. But it was a job. He looked on with fascination at the skill with which the stone-masons cut and laid the stone to build beautiful structures. He thought, "I'd like to learn to do that." He made an internal decision to learn stone masonry from the masons to whom he carried stone. By watching them and asking questions, he eventually did learn stone masonry. He pursued this craft with passion until his masterful work began to be noticed by others. His work received so much demand that he eventually started his own building business.

Over the years, he did well financially, and he eventually bought houses and land. He even married his dream girl—Janie! He also started a Mexican food restaurant across the street from the nicest steak house in town. Eventually, the steak house went out of business and the bank asked Fred if he was interested in buying the building. Fred did so and he turned the steak house into a thriving business. Now after church in Mason, Texas, most people eat at either Zavala's Mexican Restaurant or Fred's Steak House. The outcast who was rarely invited to dinner is one of the wealthiest men in town and owns two of the busiest restaurants.

How did this turn around come to be? It started with a poor, young college student with a passion for people. He saw what no one else in that little town saw. He saw riches where others saw rubble. The vision then spread and grew in the heart of a teenage boy who *chose* to believe in a force higher than himself and thus, came to believe in his own abilities. It happened because two unique men pursued their dreams with passion, consistent dedication, and blood, sweat, and tears. Neither Fred nor the young Bible student will ever be famous, but both accomplished their dreams. Both have lived happy, fulfilled lives. Fred obtained all he ever hoped for. The student accomplished his goals as well; he helped turn the life of a young man around from that of a poor outcast to that of a wealthy, highly respected businessman in the community. The student was my father, Daniel M. Castro. That's why Fred Zavala came up to me at my Dad's funeral and said, "Your Dad changed my life."

We can now clone animals, and we may even be able to clone human beings soon. But we can't clone *character* and *integrity* and the kind of selflessness that makes up the heart and souls of heroes. So, where will our future heroes come from? They will come from within. When we learn to see through the eyes of heroes, we will see the kinds of things heroes see. We will see

riches where others see rubble. We will see opportunity where others see obstacles. We will be able to walk where heroes walk, and we will be able to act as heroes act. But first, it takes a decision. The decision behind the decision is to focus on a purpose bigger than ourselves.

When hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit, people from all over the U.S. invited complete strangers into their homes, and donated food, water, clothing, books and millions of dollars to the victims. It was a comforting reminder that if *we* ever suffer such a tragedy, there might be a few people out there who would come to our rescue.

When we help other people weather their storms, something unexplainable happens in the cosmos. Electricity starts to flow, we feel more energized, brain cells get more creative, people unite, hearts swell - and sometimes, just every now and then, miracles happen.

You don't have to look far to find the true heroes among us. You may not see them on TV or read about them in the newspapers. But they are out there . . . changing the world . . . one person at a time.

---

Daniel R. Castro, author of *Critical Choices That Change Lives: How Heroes Turn Tragedy Into Triumph*. To download the first chapter free, go to <http://www.dancastro.com>