

## GRATITUDE AND THANKSGIVING FOR HEROES! Part 1

We each have people who have served as heroes at some time during our lives. Some of them are parents and siblings and other relatives. Some are the people who have mentored us in school and work: teachers, coaches, colleagues and supervisors. Today we have given out our Thanksgiving award to two of the current heroes of our church, two women who have given time, effort, talents, and support to this congregation to help it flourish. Each has helped to start and move along projects, served on the board and on committees, and generally made a heroic difference for First Unitarian Universalist Church! Thank you again Cindy and Pat for your inspirational service!

A few days ago, our nation remembered military heroes with Veteran's Day. The military service of our veterans helped to preserve the freedoms we enjoy today. My father fought in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne during World War II, after being dropped in a glider after the landing in Normandy and in time to be at the Battle of the Bulge, though he would never talk about the war except to mention people he met. My mother was in the Navy Seabees Reserves. Friends and parishioners served in Vietnam and more recent conflicts. Other friends and parishioners served in the Peace Corps and were conscientious objectors serving as members of the loyal opposition in their advocacy of peaceful solutions.

Who are your personal heroes? Some of mine are Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and Thomas Jefferson; men who shaped American Unitarianism and influenced the nation! I wish I knew more about the women who too often had their influence only behind the scenes, but who also shaped this movement and our nation. Universalists Olympia Brown and Augusta Chapin were the first women ordained by a major denomination in the United States in 1863. JFK and MLK were both martyred heroes! United Methodists, Rev. J. Holland Vernon, my supervisor during my Seminary Intern Year at Riverton, WY UMC and Rev. John Lewis, my colleague and Sr. Minister at Great Falls Montana First UMC were instrumental in encouraging and shaping my early ministry.

My parents, Alice and Morrie Klein, both Civil Engineers, heroically helped me to believe I could do anything I wanted, though I think they were both a little disappointed when I transferred out of the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois and wrote my own major in Religious Studies at Northern Illinois University. My brother Matt pushed me around a lot when we were kids, but also encouraged me to get involved in Football, Wrestling, and Student Council in High School. I also stayed in the band and Scouts and the Methodist Youth Group even after he quit them.

In my first act of Civil Disobedience, I wrote a scathing article in the Student Newspaper about the coaches telling us to go out and hurt opponents in Football early in my Senior Year of High School at the time I removed myself from the sports programs. The leaders and teachers in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, Scouts and Explorers, Band, German Club and German Club Band, and Student Council were also among my heroes! (The Football and Wrestling Coaches, not so much!) Several college and seminary professors also make the list of my heroes now that I think about it!

I'm sure I never thanked my Heroes sufficiently for their good influences on my life, so I hope they know from my responses and what they knew about the course of my life that they were among my heroes. Many of them are gone and the rest I have not seen in years, so telling them now is a little difficult.

Now of course I have been talking about the ordinary people who have made a difference in my life, but the concept of the Hero came from figures who were larger than life and accomplished amazing feats. There are Heroes like Hercules and Odysseus among the stories of ancient Rome and Greece, and Samson from the Hebrew Scriptures. In many ways the stories of Heroes, Judges, and Kings are among the most interesting and impressive among the Biblical stories, much as the stories of Heroes, Gods and demi-gods are among the writings of ancient Rome and Greece. Even though most of these stories portray events that are extraordinary and larger than life, they are memorable because they pass along significant human wisdom. As in the morality plays of the middle ages, there are lessons to be learned from the successes, failures, and foibles of the gods, goddesses, and heroes of ancient times.

Heroes show us what the best of humanity is and can be. They often become a symbol for what we all ought to be and do. Heroes are quickly forgotten in this fast paced world in which we are always needing new heroes. And heroes are often just ordinary people who at some point responded to a situation in an amazingly courageous way. The three young men from Sacramento who responded to the terrorist on a French train saved many lives and deserved appreciation, but the one who came home and was stabbed in the heart illustrates just how human heroes are. Heroes of the gridiron and other sports heroes also too often show their humanity in even more negative ways by how they treat girlfriends and spouses and by their gambling, drinking and use of drugs.

I guess I would name a few sports heroes whose stories I know, at least in part. Ernie Banks and Ron Santo were Cubs Heroes. Ernie was Mr. Cubs, devoting his life to his team. Ron Santo was an example of a man who struggled with health issues but always showed up to play. Don Kessinger was another of the great Cubs players of another era. I'm sure each team has several coaches and players who really exemplified the best of sportsmanship, leadership, and good relationships with others. Walter Payton and Dick Butkiss are the heroes that come to mind for the Bears, but each team at every level has its heroes!

Do we have heroes in the political realm? Maybe after they are gone a century or so. Washington, Lincoln, Ike, and Reagan are all heroes to some different groups, though not necessarily out of honest agreement with their policies! What kind of hero is Trump? I'm not sure I ever want to find out!

It is only in retrospect that I can name the people who were heroes to me. When they were all still around, I respected them and appreciated them, but I wouldn't probably have named any of them heroes until recent years. Each of them influenced my life for the better and now I can call them heroes.

Superman and Supergirl, Batman, the Arrow, the Flash and lots of other heroic characters came out of comic books, but each reminds us of the best in humanity and works to protect and preserve society. Their stories entertain us but also teach us about the things that are possible or almost possible when the community comes together and leaders arise.

Heroes deserve our appreciation, our gratitude, and our support. Heroes deserve to know that we recognize their willingness to stand up against whatever evil is confronting society. As a society we have often failed the veterans who have come back wounded in mind, body, and spirit from the wars of our nation. Health care and jobs for Vets have often been lacking, and mental health providers to deal with Battle Fatigue or PTSD have often been in short supply. Too many veterans are among those living on the streets of this and every American city. We need another kind of hero to find ways to provide homes, healthcare, addiction and mental illness treatment, and jobs for those forgotten heroes. Like too many children and teachers in poorly funded schools, the vets have also gotten the short stick from society. It really is time for some new ideas, some heroes with a different kind of courage to run for office and push for changes that will rebuild the safety nets, insure fair pay for workers, and make sure that people get the care they need.

I guess that's enough preaching, what I really want to do today is say thank you to some of those heroes who have made a difference in my life and also to give you each a chance to say thank you to some of your heroes. Thank You to all those who have touched my life and encouraged me in positive ways!

Now it's your turn! I invite you to briefly share the names or descriptions of some of your heroes as you thank them for making a difference in your lives!

To all our Heroes, Thank You! We remember you, we appreciate you, and we know that our lives are better because of you!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!