

Heroes In My Life - Influence, Inspiration, and Motivation for my Aspirations

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My heroes come in all shapes and sizes, children and adults, men and women, real and fictional. I'm blessed to know some of the real ones on a personal level. A recent lunch with three of my living heroes inspired this article. Spending time with them started my creative wheels spinning as I thought of the value heroes bring to my life. Please visit the Photos section of our website to see a picture of my recent heroes lunch.

Some are characters in my best-loved books, or in my favorite films. Others are people who have come in and out of my life: teachers, mentors, colleagues, friends, supervisors. They don't have to be larger than life or have super powers. Part of what makes them heroes for me is they are living on the same earth, doing the same things I do, many times in the same way. Along the way, these people experience the same trials and setbacks of life as anyone else. It is what they have done with their lives that make them heroes for me. Heroes take risks all the time; they are fearful and human and flawed as I am. Yet they keep moving forward as I do, continue striving as I do. They get frustrated and impatient as I do and they are angry and sad sometimes as I am and they keep on going and have resilience to get up after being knocked down by circumstances in life. Something else I admire about my heroes is how they stay true to who they are, they remain down to earth and humble, they continue to preserve their integrity. Regarding the ones who I know personally, they also impress me with their accessibility. Some of them are often in the public eye, and yet they take the time, as with this recent lunch experience, to share their lives with new people.

I first encountered one of my three lunch heroes, Dr. Yvonne Kaye, at a training/workshop in the fall of 1995. She was a featured speaker at this workshop and I remember being mesmerized not only by her stories but also by her incredible presence. The story I remember best is when she told of making a phone call to one of her heroes, Dr. Victor Frankl, an author and lecturer she had long admired, and how surprised and impressed she was when he answered his own phone! When she finished speaking, I was compelled to go up to her to meet her. I always knew I wanted to be a psychotherapist, and along with that I wanted to work for myself and teach at the college level and be a speaker at workshops someday. Today, thirteen years later, I have achieved and continue to move forward with those goals as I hoped to back then. But in 1995, I was still doing 'time in the trenches' of various clinical treatment employment settings, to establish a professional reputation and build a work resume. At times I felt fearful and lost and sad about how long it seemed to be taking for me to get to where I wanted to go. At that time it also seemed like 'hard time' in those trenches for a variety of reasons. In fact when I heard Dr. Kaye speak at that workshop, I was in my third job setting since finishing grad school and I knew it was far from the last stop on the train for me. So I was feeling all of those feelings on the day I heard Dr. Kaye's speech.

I stood in line to talk to Dr. Kaye, and when I shook her hand, her handshake and her direct gaze were warm and caring and full of strength and wisdom. I said to her, "I want to be you now." And she said, "Go ahead." I walked away with tears in my eyes, feeling

accepted and supported and validated and encouraged and empowered, all from a single handshake and a few brief moments. I will never forget that experience, and it continues to inspire me as I move along my professional and personal path in life. I believe in things coming full circle, so what a treat it was to share that memory with Dr. Kaye at our lunch together. Read more about Dr. Kaye and her work and life at her website, www.yvonnekaye.com.

The recent heroes lunch included two others besides Dr. Kaye. The woman who was kind enough to bring Dr. Kaye and me together is Deborah Reast, another female business owner and colleague. She has a personal concierge business called Yours Mine and Hours, and of course there is a website! Visit Deborah at www.yoursmineandhours.com, to learn more about what she has to offer her clients. You can also learn more about Deborah right here at our website. There is video of Deborah in our Videos section, and she is also featured in the Radio Archives section. I am so grateful to Deborah, who knew I admired Dr. Kaye and graciously offered to put the two of us together. She deserves thanks for her efforts to make a dream of mine a reality.

The restaurant where we met for lunch is owned by another hero (I told you there are many!), Alison Barshak, and her restaurant is called Alison at Blue Bell. Website, you ask? Take a look at www.alisonatbluebell.com Being a 'foodie' and admiring women who strive and succeed as I want to, I have followed Alison's career for years, ever since she used to chef at Central Bar and Grill at the Bryn Mawr train station. How good the food was there, and how I enjoyed reading about her in the press over all these years, and how I admire her ability to get past her setbacks and create new triumphs. When I went to her restaurant for the first time a few years ago, I noticed she went around to the tables and talked to her guests, and I thought well of her for that personal touch. Here again was someone who despite her fame and success retains that approachable demeanor. At that first dinner in her restaurant, I introduced myself to Alison and told her how I had followed her career since Central Bar and Grill. Since then, whenever I am at her restaurant she makes an effort to come and spend a few moments with me, and I was thrilled when she recently introduced me to someone as "one of our favorite customers." What an honor!

On the long list of fictional heroes are two from childhood novels. Seven year old Lucy is the youngest of the four Pevensie children in the first **Chronicles of Narnia** story, and she is a hero not only for first discovering Narnia, but also for standing up to her siblings when they chose not to believe her story about having found a magic country in the back of an old wardrobe. How brave of her to hold onto her beliefs, knowing she was right, and how hard that is to do when others don't see it your way, especially when what you're telling them is a little far out there. All right, so she found a magic country, which isn't likely in the real world. But who was Lucy anyway? Just an ordinary child living in wartime, separated from her parents for her and her siblings' safety, living in a stranger's house, feeling lonely and scared. How about Sarah Crewe, in **A Little Princess**, another early favorite? Her belief in herself and her determination to live life with dignity and grace never wavers, despite what life throws her way. How strong she was in the face of

adversity, finding out her father had died, losing the comfortable existence that his money had provided for her, bearing the harsh treatment from the people with whom she lived and for whom she worked. Nothing magical about her life either, unless you count her imagination which she used as a coping strategy for dealing with her bleak reality. And then at the end of the book, when it is discovered that her wealthy next door neighbor was in fact a close friend of her father's who has searched for her, and finally she is found. All right, so maybe that's a convenient happy ending, but as I said I believe that in things coming full circle. Sometimes our trials are sent to us to test us, and our heroism is what helps us to earn the rewards.

Who are the stand-out candidates among my living heroes? Again, the list is long. I'll mention a few. There was a supervisor at the best part time job I ever had during my college years. This man and I clicked from the very beginning of my working for him. His criteria for acceptance and advancement was based on doing what he asked, when he asked it, and upholding his very high standards in terms of service. He was a consistent, fair, and understanding boss, with a great sense of humor, reasonable boundaries and reachable expectations. There was an English teacher whose course I took during my senior year in college who was a spellbinding lecturer and a remarkable human being. Going to her class was the highlight of my week during that semester, and I can remember thinking that if I ever achieved my dream of teaching at the college level (which I did!) I wanted to be as compelling a lecturer as she was. Sometimes when I am teaching or giving a lecture, I notice the same expressions on the faces of my audience that I used to have when I was listening to this professor. Those are happy affirming moments for me when I see those expressions.

Three of my grad school professors are important heroes. Again, there was the sense from them of being understood, accepted, validated, encouraged, supported, and empowered. Sometimes in grad school I was negatively targeted by other students for my opinions or my clinical style. I was upset by these experiences and approached two of the three professors privately to address my concerns, questioning my decision to become a therapist. These two professors reassured me that I was moving in the right direction and they helped me to understand myself as well as develop coping strategies for dealing with those negative target experiences. The third of these professors is my current clinical supervisor, and her constant understanding and support is an anchor for me in the often turbulent self-employment world. Here again, another self-employed female, and an awesome hero and role model for me as I journey forward.

I am so grateful to all of my heroes for their lives and for how they have touched my life. I carry them all in my heart. While at the recent heroes lunch, Dr. Kaye commented on something about me that left me with a glowing feeling. I was sharing with her the story of our first brief meeting together and how excited I was about this lunch we were having, and she remarked that I retain my innocent excitement of admiration about my heroes. Hearing this reminded me of a line from "Under the Tuscan Sun" - one of my favorite films. The line is, "Never lose your childish enthusiasm." To that I say right on! In fact, the central character of that film is a hero, because after landing in the midst of an adverse situation she didn't expect, she chooses to take herself out of the situation

to something so much better for herself, something she never expected or planned for or imagined, by her willingness to risk and trust herself even though she was fearful. Now that's heroism.

Sometimes it takes heroism just to get out of bed in the morning and face the day. Other times it feels like life is giving us wings to fly, and we feel like 'superheroes.' Then there are all the times in between those two extremes, where we need to remember to keep putting one foot in front of the other, and take it one day at a time. Think about your heroes, and remember to acknowledge and celebrate your own heroism. From there you will see how that provides opportunities to be a hero for someone else - another reward that comes from living a life in balance.