

The Unforeseen Hero

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On July 4, 1950, a firecracker baby was born, or so the child's grandmother told it. From that day forth, no one knew what course this life would take, but all hoped for happiness and health. Little did anyone know of the trials and obstacles that awaited this unsuspecting, tiny boy. He was a "little man" with simplistic and innocent mannerisms and morals who had to endure more than most, but was a hero nonetheless.

Fortunately, the child began life guided by two loving parents. The father of the child stood nearly six feet and there was a dense and mighty muscular build to his body like that of chiseled stone. His hair had begun to fade at the age of twenty-five and, by this time, was showing a horseshoe pattern of hair on his head. His forearms were broad and larger than his biceps, and his hands were vast, firm, and powerful. His face appeared leathery and dark from the beating sun, but his eyes were as blue as a clear sky. The father of the child endured the rugged life of the construction business his entire life. Since the man had chosen this lifestyle, he was rough as sand paper, tough as nails, and sometimes crude in his nature. His was a life filled with strenuous work. This factor, along with his time spent in the military, contributed to his fathering skills translating into discipline via an "iron fist." This fist would come down hard and relentless for respect and discipline of his children. The mother, on the other hand, had a more docile and delicate demeanor for guiding her child. She was a petite woman and had a soft, shapely build. Her hair was dark brown like the color of coffee beans, with eyes to match. She had thin lips matched with her thin, but round, face. It was a face of kindness and compassion, a

face that could not falter in loving her child. This woman provided the nurturing, guidance, and protection for her child. It was a love that could be felt by simply glimpsing into her affectionate eyes.

To some degree, the child would gain his traits from his parents, both physically and emotionally. As the boy grew, he tended to take on the mighty physique of his father but had a heart as soft as his mother's. The youngster had fair, glossy skin that seemed to have been sheltered from the sun. He carried the nose of his father, which was firm and slightly pointy. His hair was similar to that of his mother, black as coal that glistened in the sun like a new car. His eyes were a combination of his mother's and father's. They were hazel but tended to change colors, depending on his mood. The boy, though resembling both his parents in almost every fashion, stood unique in one. He walked like neither of his parents, nor any other ancestor that had come before him.

At first glance, a person might wonder what was wrong with him, but it was not the child's fault. The boy walked "normally" at one time during his life, but God only knew how long. As a small child, his grandmother had taught him to walk. For being only two years of age at the time, he walked graciously and without much assistance. One day, his grandmother got him up to walk and, unexplainably, his ability had vanished. With desperation, a bewildered and confused grandmother contacted the child's mother, and soon the child was rushed to the hospital for examination. It was later found that the young boy, still a toddler, had contracted the Polio virus. Polio had affected both his legs and had destroyed any hope of the child ever sprinting, strolling, leaping, or trotting like other children. He was now a paraplegic who would have to walk with the aid of leg braces similar to those "Forrest Gump" wore as a child. It was also imperative that crutches be used in order to stabilize his upper body weight.

From that day forth, it was a struggle for the parents, but not for the child. The young child never recalled the joys of having strong legs. So to him, this was simply the way life would have to be lived. He could not run with his legs; instead, learned to gallop while standing on his hands. He could not kick a ball with his foot, but could bat it with a crutch. He could not glide on the dance floor, but with the use of a wheelchair, he could dance gracefully and sometimes with attitude. He adjusted every aspect of his life in order to meet his needs and wants. He did not have use of his legs, but had a functional mind and upper body. His mind told him that nothing was impossible, and his body was the tool that proved it. This was a child of overwhelming determination, desire, drive, and devotion to overcome the obstacles that lay before him. This was a smart young boy who took every opportunity to absorb even the most miniscule amount of information in order to better his life.

It finally came time for the child to start school. Academics came effortlessly for the young boy, but trying to concentrate on his education was difficult for him. It seemed that sometimes children could be cruel. The other children began to taunt the young boy simply because he was different. The child was bewildered by this because the environment he had come from was filled with love and devotion to him. All children deal with a bit of taunting through their lives, but he had to endure a much more substantial amount due to his handicap. He was called names such as "Four Legged Monster," and "Crippled Freak." Children would strike him with closed fists, feet, and any foreign objects they could find. This child would sit against the wall of the school with his legs outstretched and other young boys would ride their bikes over his legs. This was a jovial time for the other children, but it was at the expense of this young boy. As strong-willed as anyone could be, the young boy could only endure seven years of formal

education. He finally quit school at the age of twelve, because the torments became too overwhelming to handle.

Fortunately, the small boy learned to read and to write, so he expanded his mind in other avenues besides what was offered in traditional education. He learned all he could about everything and anything. He came to the realization that he was good at practical application or "hands on work." When he finally turned eighteen, he decided to learn different trades at a junior college. He dabbled in the arts of how to be a jeweler, a furniture maker, a welder, a plumber, an electrician, a mechanic, and, finally, one day, he had found his passion and calling. He decided to become an Orthotic and Prosthetic Technician. He was a man now and had decided that since he was creative through use of his hands, he would fabricate artificial arms, legs, braces and other devices to assist others like him. This man, through an act of selflessness, and in spite of all he endured, had finally decided that he would take the craftsman hands of his father and the compassionate heart of his mother to help others in need.

This child later grew into a man who married and, even though the doctors said it was a miracle, he fathered one son. He raised this child with the compassion of his mother and the "iron fist" of his father, but with the wisdom gained from his own life experiences. He taught his child that no goal was impossible to achieve. He demonstrated that a strong man was compassionate, loving, and devoted. He stressed that there was no feeling greater than that of helping a fellow human being. This man's teachings reflected tremendously upon his child, and this child would carry his father's teaching throughout his entire life. Webster's dictionary defines a hero as "a man admired for his achievements and qualities." ("Hero," def. 1c). This man was truly a hero for his child. All who knew him were blessed by his life, and no one could have seen it better than me, his only son.

Work Cited

"Hero." Def. 1c. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. 9th ed. 1991.

Emile Whitaker is a Nursing major.

Dr. Slawson's comments on this paper:

Emile A. Whitaker IV (Anthony) is a nursing student at Southeastern. In this essay written in English 101, Anthony tells an exceptional story of "healing" and perserverance.