



HEROES:
WHEN
HUMANITY
TRIUMPHS



HEROES: THE TRIUMPH OF HUMANITY

Some people do what they are told.

Some do what they are asked.

And some simply ask, "What needs to be done?"

Some people respond to the call of duty.

Some go "above and beyond" the call of duty.

And some seek to define the call of duty.

Heroes are ordinary people who make extraordinary efforts to reach beyond themselves to transform the lives of others.

(I)

Pain Should Not Be Wasted

In 1996, Gerda Klein accepted an Academy Award for her documentary *One Survivor Remembers*. In her remarks she said, "I remember the bitter cold, the hunger, the loneliness, and the fear. I stood with a rusty bowl in my hands praying that there should be enough food left in the kettle, and if by some miracle the ladle brought forth a potato, I was a winner. I don't want our children and grandchildren to live in a world where a potato is more valuable than an Oscar, but I don't want them to be in a world where an Oscar is so important that one forgets that so many still don't have a potato."

This is the story of a U.S. soldier, his wife, and the value of a potato.

Lieutenant Kurt Klein was an army intelligence officer during World War II. Near the end of the war, in May 1945, he took part in the liberation of an all-female death march. The march had begun in the dead of winter when 2000 slave laborers were forced to begin a three-month, 350-mile march from Germany to Czechoslovakia. Fifteen-year-old Gerda Weissman was one of only 127 women who survived the march. At the time of her

liberation, she weighed 68 pounds, her hair was all white, and she had not bathed in three years.

Gerda was the first person Lieutenant Klein found in the empty factory where the women had been abandoned. After years of brutal treatment at the hands of men in uniform, Gerda was dumbstruck when this soldier asked her to take him to “the other ladies.” She obliged, and in a polite manner, Kurt held the door open for her. That simple, kind gesture marked the beginning of Gerda’s reintroduction to humanity. In the months that followed, Kurt kept an eye on Gerda as she regained her health. Then one day, he told Gerda that his unit would soon be returning to the States. He asked if she would return with him, as his wife. A short while later, they were married in Paris, later settling in Buffalo, New York, where they raised three children.

In 1998, the lieutenant and the survivor established the Gerda and Kurt Klein Foundation. The mission of the foundation is to educate young people about tolerance and compassion for all people, and to inspire them to work to alleviate poverty and hunger through social action. In the Kleins’ words, “We want to make the world a more positive place for today’s young people, and for the future.”

Kurt died unexpectedly in April 2002. Today, Gerda maintains an active speaking schedule focused primarily on inspiring young people. “I want to continue the work that was so important to both of us. As he often said, ‘Pain should not be wasted.’ By helping others, you ultimately help yourself.”

(II)

PRIVATE JOHN GALIONE

“There was only skin left on our bones. It took me months to recover and for over fifteen years, I had nightmares every night. I thank the brave and courageous American soldiers who rescued us. Without them, I would not be alive.”

Michel Depierre, liberated from Mittelbau concentration camp

On April 5, 1945, Private John Galione and his 104th “Timberwolf” Infantry Division was encamped at Lippstadt, Germany. Rumors abounded about slave labor camps, and German atrocities, but no one knew for sure. There was a smell in the air, and something told Galione that the smell was significant. That night, unable to sleep, he decided to investigate. Reasoning that the most logical way to transport prisoners would be by rail, he left camp under the cover of darkness and began to follow some train tracks. Despite not finding anything after several hours, Galione’s heart told him to keep going, which he did—for five long days.

In the early afternoon of April 10, Private Galione came upon an abandoned train car. It was filled with dead bodies. In the distance, he saw a tunnel running into the side of the Harz Mountains. He knew he had found something big. After escaping a brief encounter with a German guard, Galione circled the camp and found a gated and locked area containing hundreds of emaciated, almost lifeless prisoners. The prisoners watched in silence, staring as Galione tried in vain to break the huge lock on the entrance. They said nothing. They only stared.

Galione knew that he had to report his discovery as soon as possible. After coming across two American officers in a jeep, the three men returned to the camp. In the dark, early morning hours of April 11, they broke through the fence and entered what seemed like the gates of hell. The emaciated survivors could hardly be distinguished from the corpses strewn everywhere.

The next day, tanks, medical teams, and the Red Cross arrived at Camp Mittlebau-Dora. Inaccurate directions given to some armored units ordered to support the operation resulted in their coming across yet another hellish camp called Nordhausen. And what

about that tunnel? Deep inside the mountain was a vast underground factory where prisoners from both camps had been forced to produce V-1 and V-2 rockets. These were the “secret weapons” that Hitler had hoped would turn the tide of war by raining death and destruction on London. . From 1943-1945, over 20,000 slave laborers had literally been worked to death there.

PRIVATE JOHN GALIONE:

- Walked for five days
- Saved hundreds and hundreds of lives
- Enabled America to capture Hitler’s V-1 and V-2 “wonder rockets.”

(III)

What I Do Is Nothing

Every Monday, David, a volunteer, picks up Mrs. Irene Hizme and takes her to Nassau Community Hospital. There, she gets a list of patients and begins making her rounds. Irene’s health is not good; she suffers from Multiple Sclerosis, relies on a wheelchair to get around, and needs a mouth-held stylus to use her keyboard. Irene is not a doctor, she’s a volunteer.

On an average day, Irene is able to visit 20-30 people in the hospital. David pushes her from room to room. “Different people have different needs,” she says. Mostly, I just let them talk. Particularly the people who don’t have anyone to visit them, more than anything else, they just need someone to listen. With those who are sleeping or too ill to respond, I just stay for a few minutes, hold their hand, or say a prayer. I like to leave stuffed animals with people--that gets a big smile. I try to keep in touch with some people after they go home. Particularly if they are older and alone, it means a lot if someone maintains contact. But really, it’s nothing. What I do is nothing.”

In addition to being a volunteer, Irene Hizme is also a Holocaust survivor with first-hand experience of one of the Holocaust's most sinister figures: Dr. Josef Mengele, who performed ghastly "experiments" on concentration camp prisoners—particularly twins, like herself and her brother.

"I remember the first time I saw Mengele," Irene recalled, he was wearing green, dark green. And I remember his boots. That was probably the level my eyes were. Black shiny boots. He was asking for twins."

In the three years that Irene and her brother Rene were prisoners in Auschwitz, Mengele experimented on over 3,000 sets of twins. Fewer than 200 survived.

After the war, Mr. and Mrs. Mayer Slotkin of Long Island adopted Irene, and initiated a search for Rene. After a six-year separation, the twins were reunited. Eventually, Irene married Sam Hizme and raised two daughters.

One could well understand if Irene were a broken woman. One could understand if she wallowed in self-pity. One could understand if she was bitter. She is not.

Irene Hizme is a sweet, frail woman. Talk with her, and you can't help but smile.

Does she need help doing tasks most people take for granted? Of course. But she would much prefer to help others, and to make the world a better place.

(IV)

A Different Sort of Sleepover

In February, the temperature in Kenmore, New York hovers around 28 degrees, sometimes warmer, and frequently much colder. On one particularly harsh day in 1987, Jerry Starr, a high school teacher, was complaining about how bitterly cold his hands got

when he wasn't wearing gloves. That same day, he saw a report on the local news about homeless people being turned away from overcrowded shelters. The thought of a homeless person chilled to the bone made Starr realize how relatively trivial his cold, gloveless hands were. It also made him think about what he could do to help.

Jerry Starr came up with an idea that would both raise funds for the homeless and raise awareness of their plight by literally putting people in the "homes" of the homeless. The idea was a mid-winter, outdoor sleep-out—in cardboard boxes, and no sleeping bags allowed. That first year, fifteen students, teachers, and parents spent a frigid night sleeping outside their high school with only occasional, brief trips indoors to warm up and avoid getting dangerously cold. As a result, they raised \$1,500, which they donated to shelters in Buffalo.

With each passing year, more and more people began to join the annual sleep-out held on the first Friday of February. Soon, students from other high schools were joining, and eventually word spread and schools in other areas began their own sleep-outs. By 1996, when Jerry Starr retired from teaching, his sleep-out initiative had raised over \$100,000 in addition to food, clothing, and other items.

Today, the effort is led by Steve Ash, a retired math teacher. Ash has brought together a dedicated group of school employees and retirees who call themselves Educators Totally Committed. Their goal is to spearhead a national "first Friday in February" sleep-out campaign in high schools and universities across the country. As of February 2005, they raised over a quarter of a million dollars. "Imagine the impact that schools throughout the country, even the world, could have on their communities," said Ash. And all of this because one man with cold hands heard about another man's frigid plight and decided to do something about it.

(V)

Best Buddies

In the fall of 1939, Adolf Hitler ordered widespread "mercy killing" of sick and disabled babies and young children.

The purpose of the Nazi euthanasia program was to eliminate "life unworthy of life."

Doctors and midwives were ordered to register children who displayed symptoms of mental retardation or other conditions listed on a form created by the Health Ministry. Three medical experts then made recommendations based solely on the questionnaire. No physical exam or review of medical records was required. The forms were marked with a red “minus” sign or a blue “plus” sign—with the latter being a recommendation of transfer to a Children's Specialty Department for lethal injection or slow starvation.

In the fall of 2004, a group of Purdue University students took a group of their friends—all of whom have mental disabilities—to a Boilermaker football game. The Purdue students were all active in the Best Buddies program on campus. Best Buddies does what its name suggests, fostering deep, long-term friendships by matching college students with people who have mental disabilities.

Best Buddies was founded in 1987 by Anthony Shriver when he was a student at Georgetown University. He'd been familiar with the challenges faced by the mentally disabled his entire life, having grown up around an retarded aunt. “What she did for me was develop a sense that every person has a gift and that every person can contribute. I remember going to church with my aunt. People would stare, but my mom stood tall and walked down the aisle with her. People might stare, but if you're doing the right thing, you should just keep doing it.”

Today, Best Buddies has chapters in over one thousand middle schools, high schools, and colleges. On a typical weekend, Anthony can usually be found having a good time somewhere with his wife, their four children, and their mentally disabled friend George.

One hundred thousand babies are born in the United States every year with intellectual disabilities. There are over seven million Americans with intellectual disabilities. One person, on one campus, established best Buddies in 1987. Today, 250,000 people a year are impacted by one of its many programs.

(VI)

Following a Higher Order

Following WWII, international war crimes trials were held in Nuremberg, Germany. Under the Principles of International Law that guided the proceedings, Principle IV states that:

"The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him."

Situated on the San River, in a region carpeted by picturesque meadows and meandering streams, Przemysl is one of Poland's oldest cities, dating back to the 7th century. Jews had lived in Przemysl for almost five hundred years, and the first record of a synagogue dates from 1560. When the war began, there were 24,000 Jews in Przemysl. Of those, only 400 would survive the Holocaust.

Following the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression treaty between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939, the San River became the demarcation line between Russian and German troops. On their way out of Przemysl, the Germans torched two of the main synagogues and burned part of the Jewish quarter. The Germans returned to Przemysl in June, 1941 when the Nazis invaded Russia. Upon their return, German occupation troops posted signs in the city declaring the Jews to be vermin and lice. Soon, a ghetto was established and all Jews were forcibly relocated there. . The citizens of Przemysl were free to take what they wanted from the hastily abandoned Jewish homes. Any Jew found outside the ghetto without his Star of David armband would be severely beaten.

In July 1942, the decision was made to liquidate the ghetto. Approximately 2,500 old men, women, children, and handicapped Jews were led into the thick virgin forest to be shot and buried in mass graves. Dr. Ignatz Duldig, who served as the representative of the Jewish community to the Nazis, was issued 5,000 work permits to be distributed to those

Jews who provided essential labor and services. The remaining Jews would be “resettled,” most of them in death camps.

At the time, Dr. Albert Battel, a lawyer, was a German army lieutenant serving as the adjutant to the military commander, Major Max Liedtke. Nine years earlier, despite being a member of the Nazi party, Dr. Battel had been the object of party scrutiny due to his friendship with Jews. At one point, he had been called before a party tribunal for the crime of loaning money to a Jewish colleague. Later, while serving in Przemyśl, he had been officially reprimanded for shaking hands with the Jew Duldig. Neither this reprimand, nor the fear of much more dire consequences, would deter Battel from making a fateful and courageous decision.

On the day the Germans began to remove the Jews of Przemyśl, Battel took a stand against the Gestapo and the Nazi policies which directed them. He asked the Gestapo to exclude all Jews who worked for the German army from deportation, whether or not they held a work permit. When the Gestapo refused, Battel, with the consent of Major Liedtke, ordered army troops to block the only bridge over the San River that afforded the Gestapo access to the ghetto. Later that day, Battel used army trucks to break into the sealed ghetto where he was able to rescue a hundred Jewish families. These Jews were taken to German barracks, placed under the protection of the army, and saved from deportation to the Belzec concentration camp. All of this took place in broad daylight, to the astonishment of both the German soldiers themselves and local Polish onlookers.

At the Nuremberg Trials, the defense of choice was, “I was just following orders.”

Lt. Albert Battel and Major Max Liedtke chose otherwise

(VII)

The Souper Bowl

A roster of heroes

The Souper Bowl

On January 15, 1967, the Green Bay Packers played the Kansas City Chiefs in the first Super Bowl. The halftime show featured two college marching bands, and the game didn't even sell out. Despite its relatively humble beginnings, Super Bowl Sunday would

go on to become the nation's most popular holiday-party-sporting event. Today, over 25 million pounds of chips and pretzels are consumed every Super Bowl Sunday. Clearly, the Super Bowl was an idea whose time had come. And so was the *Souper Bowl*.

In 1988, Brad Smith was serving as an intern at Spring Valley Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina. The Redskins and the Broncos were preparing to square off in Super Bowl XXII, and Brad had an idea. The idea was to get kids to take a soup pot from home along with them to whatever Super Bowl party they were attending. There, they would ask everyone to put one dollar, or one can of soup, into the pot. The money and soup would then be distributed to organizations that feed the hungry. In 1990, the idea was put into action. That year, \$5,700 was raised. The following year, youth groups across North Carolina were joining in the effort. By 1993, it was spreading across the country, and in 1997, Souper Bowl fundraising passed the one million dollar mark. By 2004, there were 12,000 "Souper Bowls" held across the country, and over twenty million dollars had been raised for soup kitchens.

"Brad and the Souper Bowl of Caring volunteers will make this a Super Bowl to remember. Today, I invite every American to join their team. An estimated 130 million Americans will watch the Super Bowl. Imagine how many hungry families we could feed if everyone gave just one dollar. One person alone cannot do everything. But these young people show us that one person can do something. Volunteers are heroes."

—First Lady Laura Bush

Heavenly Hats

Ten-year-old Anthony Suamico was visiting his grandmother in the oncology unit at a hospital in Green Bay, Wisconsin when he was struck by the patients around him.

"Imagine walking down the hallway of a cancer ward and seeing a gentleman in a wheelchair hooked up to all kinds of machines with no hair, or a lady lying in bed with a towel wrapped around her head. Or a boy, about your age, trying to have fun playing video games while at the same time rubbing his bald head."

Because of his experience, Anthony began to buy boxes of new hats and bring them to the hospital. Patients could pick out any hat they wanted, and they loved them: Their faces lit up when they put them on. It's astounding to see the difference a simple hat can make for a patient with no hair. Soon, Anthony had donation barrels in stores to collect new hats. After that, he began to email companies for donations, and eventually he launched heavenlyhats.com. So far, Anthony has sent over 80,000 hats to hundreds of hospitals.

No Home, Plenty of Heart

In the summer of 2005, after the fury of Hurricane Katrina, people were devastated, in shock, and dislocated.

Five hundred miles from New Orleans, volunteers were doing their best to help victims of the storm. A man walked into a relief center and up to one of the desks manned by a volunteer. "I'm homeless," he said. The volunteer looked up.

"I'm homeless but I'm ready to help."

The volunteer asked what the man would like to do.

"Anything I can. I may be homeless, but there's always someone in worse shape. I may not have a home, but I have a heart."

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