

Everyday Heroes:

T.A. Barron's Trail Leads Youth to Find Their Own Strong Examples

By Sharon Korbeck
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Tom Barron loves to hike. But as much as the children's/young adult author loves to scale the breathtaking terrain in Colorado, he'd much rather navigate another trail—the one populated by everyday heroes. And he wants as many children as possible to come along.

His passion for children and nature as well as the need for strong examples of heroism led him to write the adult/young adult book *The Hero's Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life* (Philomel, 2002).

Pop music lyricists might have us believe that “we don't need another hero.” But Barron would beg to differ. “There's nothing more powerful than real examples. If this book is about anything, it's to inspire youth to take their lives into their own hands,” Barron said.

Heroes, according to Barron, needn't be famous or rich. In fact, one of the overriding themes in his book is the true definition of heroism. “Heroes and celebrities are often confused in our society, and that is such a serious problem. Heroism is ultimately about character qualities, such as courage, perseverance, or compassion. Being a celebrity, by contrast, is just about fame—having a name or face or number on a jersey that people recognize. To use a camping analogy—which I do often!—one is a real meal in the pan and one is merely a flash in the pan.”

Barron didn't just happen upon the topic of heroism. He was inspired by his own life situation. The father of five children ages seven to fifteen, Barron said, “It wasn't until I had kids of my own that I realized the immensity of this idea.”

Further inspired in his youth, Barron credits his mother, Gloria, with shaping his life and thoughts about heroism. “The greatest inspiration she has given to me and my six brothers and sisters is her rock-solid belief in the power of every individual to make a difference to the world. She never lectured us to make that point. Rather, she has always lived that way,” Barron recalled.

His mother, now approaching ninety, is the inspiration for the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, an award given annually to youth who exemplify leadership, courage, and unselfishness. In the words of 2001 Barron Prize winner Estephania Chavez, “Given the chance, we can do anything, even if we're just kids.”

Gloria Barron's own heroism manifested itself in a twenty-year quest to establish a "touch" museum for children at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind.

The Hero's Trail provides youth with plenty of real-life examples of heroism at work—from the works of famous people to the gestures of the unknown.

Barron relates the stories of champion cyclist Lance Armstrong's valiant battle with cancer as well as that of nine-year-old Sherwin Long, who jumped into a pool to save his brother's life, even though Sherwin himself couldn't swim.

They're just two examples Barron uses to illustrate some of the ingredients of heroism: courage, faith, perseverance, humor, hope, adaptability, and moral direction. "If you could boil all of them down to their essence, mix them together in a great stew pot, and cook them over time, what a wondrous feast you'd have! Just one spoonful would be enough to empower a lifetime of heroic deeds," Barron said.

As Barron inspires his own children, he hopes *The Hero's Trail* will offer children everywhere similar heroic examples.

"All of us need heroes, especially young people because they need to know what amazing things other people have done in order to realize what gifts they may have inside themselves," Barron said. "Just as every apple seed holds the power to become a tree, every person, whatever his or her background, can make a positive difference to the world."

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T.A. Barron is the author of the five-book epic *The Lost Years of Merlin* as well as other books for children and young adults. For more information about T.A. Barron, visit www.tabarron.com.

For more information on the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, visit www.barronprize.org. To nominate someone for the prize, e-mail Barbara Ann Richman: ba_richman@barronprize.org.