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Does America Still Have Heroes?

“Up in the sky, it’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s Superman!” When most people think of the word “hero”, they think of someone in a pair of tights and a cape. Unfortunately, in today’s society we have let our children believe that this is what a hero looks like. In reality, the average hero is a normal, everyday person. That person could potentially be a family member, neighbor, or classmate.

The heroes of America today are ordinary people doing extraordinary things. The ongoing legacy of Matthew “Mattie” Stephanek is a perfect example. Mattie was a 14 year-old boy, born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy, dysautonomic mitochondrial myopathy. This phenomenally gifted young man knew that because of the seriousness of his illness, his life expectancy was very short. Therefore, he chose fulfilling and meaningful activities to bring purpose and enrichment to his limited years. Even though the majority of those years was consumed with painful suffering, Mattie’s resilience prevailed to the very end.

Mr. Stephanek was a jubilant, young American, talented poet and spiritual proponent of living life to its fullest potential. He wrote and published six books of poetry and one book of essays which made it to the New York Times Best-Seller list. His books were all labeled “*Heartsongs*”, each with a different form of inspiration. A heartsong is “a person's special gift to be shared with others... or a person's reason for being.” Mattie recognized his “heartsong” at a very early age, and passionately shared it with the world.

Little Mattie was also an amazing peace advocate and motivational speaker. His life's contributions were recognized and celebrated by many famous Americans, most notably, Oprah Winfrey. Mattie made repeat appearances on the Oprah Winfrey Show during various stages of his illness. He spoke on his appreciation and respect for fire fighters and his love for fire trucks. He was carried to his final resting place in a beautifully polished bright red fire truck, driven by his heroes, fire fighters. The late, beloved little warrior fondly called "Mattie" was an unforgettable inspirational model for young children and adults everywhere. He was a true hero.

John 15:13—Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

Private 1st Class Milton L. Olive, III is a true testimony to this profession of Jesus Christ. Entering the United States Army at the age of 18, Milton eventually found himself among the thousands of soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. He was posthumously decorated with America's highest military award, the Medal of Honor, for his selfless display of active bravery in the Vietnam War. Milton was the first African-American to receive the Medal of Honor Award.

"By 1965, Olive was serving as a Private 1st Class in Company B of the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam." On October 22, 1965, Olive's timely instinct prompted his brave action. He and his fellow soldiers were moving through the jungle in Phu Cuong, South Vietnam, when an enemy grenade was thrown in their midst. Olive acted selflessly and spontaneously by diving on the grenade to shield his comrades from what could have been a fatal impact for all of them. Instead, he courageously opted to sacrifice his life for the greater good of the men

he served with. His heroic act of valor has been historically noted in not only African-American History, but in American History as well.

The life and service of Private 1st Class Olive continues to be a topic of classroom instruction and military conversations everywhere. The city of Chicago, Milton's home town, honored his memory and service by naming a college in his tribute. Olive-Harvey College is now a Chicago landmark, located on the south side of the city.

It is obvious, that the heroes of America today do not wear masks, tights, and/or capes. Nor do they ask to be mentioned or known for their actions. Instead, they render their services for the benefit of others, with no regard for themselves. The majority of these selfless heroes is most often unknown, but that majority still continues to work and serve to enhance the lives of others.

Does America still have heroes? Yes. Americans of all ages, some who prefer to remain nameless, are serving to meet human needs in all walks of life, just as Mattie Stephanek and Private 1st Class Milton Olive III. Legacies are being molded and shaped everyday. Thousands of American police officers, fire fighters, and military service members take an oath every day, with no crystal ball to predict the individual dangers they will encounter. On behalf of these unselfish service members, the answer to the question, "Does America still have heroes?", is an obvious, overwhelming "yes."