

Heroines and Heroes

by

Bob Haider

Lynn sat nervously in her doctor's office as she awaited the results of another blood test and additional x-rays. Her gaze was drawn to a picture of her doctor with his family, and a tender smile surfaced through her anxiety as the snapshot brought loving thoughts of her own family. When the door opened and the doctor entered she knew instinctively what he was going to say as she could see the results on his face.

Later that night, she and her husband sat down with their twelve-year old daughter. "Bonnie, we need to tell you something, sweetheart," Lynn began.

Bonnie's eyes instantly welled up with moisture. "Are you sick again mom?"

Lynn attempted to speak but the words stuck in her throat as she eyed her daughter's pain. Bob took a deep breath and whispered, "Your mom needs another operation, sweetheart."

As Bonnie hugged her mother tightly, Lynn said, "You're a big girl but your sister is only three, so let's not say anything to her. We'll tell her when she's older, but not now. Okay?"

Bonnie nodded bravely through her tears.

Six years later, Bob reclined in his favorite easy chair on a Sunday evening watching television, as the whirring sound from a sewing machine could be heard through the vents from the finished basement below. Bonnie and Anne were in their rooms working on their homework they had procrastinated, and, as Anne struggled with hers she

came downstairs for help, “Dad?”

Half asleep, Bob emitted a muffled response, “Hmmm?”

“I need some help with my homework.”

Bob’s hands went to his face and he rubbed his eyes and attempted to reenter the world of the conscious.

“Will you help with my assignment?” she repeated in a frustrated voice.

Shaking his head to clear his mind Bob asked, “What do you have to do, Anne?”

“I have to give an oral report.”

“When is it due?” Bob asked, concerned about what he might hear in return.

“Tuesday,” Anne said.

Bob was relieved that it wasn’t tomorrow. “Well, that doesn’t give you much time.”

“I can’t do it.”

“Oh, sure you can. What’s the subject of your report?”

“We have to give a report on heroes and heroines and I’m not sure what they are.”

“Oh, I think you know more than you realize,” said Bob as he arose and went to the bookshelf. He grabbed the dictionary, flipped through the pages until he came to the word hero, and read the definition out loud. He then scanned down the page to the word heroine and read that definition too.

Anne listened attentively to both definitions, and said, “Those are the same, dad.”

“Yes, except that one refers to a man and the other to a woman. Now, would you like to do your report on a man or a woman?”

“A woman, dad,” Anne smiled widely.

Bob was not surprised by his daughter’s choice. “Okay.”

“Our teacher said we could do our report on anyone we want, but I can’t think of anyone, dad.”

“Well, would you rather do your report on someone from a long time ago, or someone from the present?”

“I don’t know. Which is better?”

“Oh, a person from the past might be more familiar to your classmates, like someone from your history books, but a person from the present might be more interesting for them, someone they’ve never heard about.”

“Okay, someone from the present,” said Anne with eagerness. “Do you know anyone, dad?”

A gentle smile crossed Bob’s face. “Oh, yes, but, before I tell you about her, you should write this down. Remember, this is your assignment.”

“Okay,” said Anne, as she sped away and returned a few moments later with paper and pencil.

Anne’s father spoke slowly, so Anne could write it all down. When he finished relating the story, he looked at his watch. “It’s seven-thirty. You go to your room and read what you’ve written, and say it out loud, just as if you’re giving the oral report to your classmates. Read it over and over again. Practice tomorrow night too, and by Tuesday you’ll do fine.”

“Okay. Thanks, dad,” said Anne delighted.

On Tuesday morning a young girl finished reading her report to her classmates and said, “Thank you for listening to this story about my favorite hero.”

The classroom erupted in applause just as it had for each of the previous speakers as each student supported one another in the shared trauma of reciting in front of their class. Amidst the applause, a wide smile crossed the girl’s face as she proudly walked to her desk and sat down.

“Thank you, Angela. That was very good,” said the English teacher. “Okay, next is Anne.”

Anne arose, walked to the front of the room, and turned toward her classmates.

“I decided to do my report on a heroine,” she began, as she proceeded to read the definition copied from the dictionary. “A heroine is a woman of heroic achievements or qualities.”

Then Anne read the story that her father had related to her...

“Ten years ago, a lady was told by a doctor she had cancer and needed an operation. She was very scared and when she told her husband she cried a lot. She was afraid because she didn’t want to die, and she didn’t want her babies to grow up without a mom.

“My dad says it’s okay to be scared, and he said it’s okay to cry too.

“The lady was very brave. She had the operation, and the doctor removed the cancer. Then the lady had to have chemotherapy, so the cancer wouldn’t come back. That made her hair fall out, and it made her stomach real upset too and she had to eat crackers a lot.

“My dad said that the lady didn’t dwell on her being sick all the time. She even became happy because she didn’t have cancer anymore, and then her hair grew back.

“Two years later, the doctor said the cancer returned. She was even more scared the second time because she would have to experience all the pain again.

“My dad said she was a very brave lady, she accepted what had happened and she was determined not to give up.

“After the lady’s second operation, friends of hers who knew about other people with cancer asked if she would call those people, to give them hope and to help them face the fear she had experienced, so they wouldn’t be so scared when they had their operation. She helped a lot of people that way.”

“My dad says that there are lots of stories about heroines and heroes in every big city, and in every small town all over the world, and that you don’t have to be famous to

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be a heroine or a hero.

“Thank you for listening to this story about my favorite heroine---my mom.”

The End