

The Heroes of 2001

This has been a difficult year for almost everyone in the United States and most of the free world.

As we look back on the years of our life, we're more likely to remember some years more than others. In fact, we define our lives by those years that make a lasting impression in our minds. If you're as old as I am, you remember the year Kennedy was killed, the years of the Vietnam War, and the year man landed on the moon. If you're as old as my parents were, you remember the year Pearl Harbor was bombed, the resultant years of World War II, and the years of the Great Depression. If you're as young as my nieces and nephews, you'll remember the year Reagan was shot. If you are younger than that, you'll remember the boom and bust of the dot-com age.

Each one of us defines his or her life by the days and years that make a difference. Those events cause us to remember where we were, what we saw, and how we felt.

We remember the milestones that make up our lives, but usually forget the miles we may have traveled in between.

Between the attacks on September 11 and the bottoming out of the worldwide economy, it's been a year many of us would like to forget, but all of us will remember for the rest of our lives. It has become one of those "defining" years.

This year is a year of heroes.

First, we have the obvious heroes -- the hundreds of firefighters and law enforcement personnel who ran into the World Trade Center buildings, the passengers who fought their hijackers rather than giving in, who paid for their action with their lives. Plus, we have the men and women who died when the planes hit the Pentagon and the Trade Center buildings, whether they were a passenger, or were in one of the buildings that were hit.

Additionally, there are the workers who labor unceasingly to remove the tangled wreckage of what were once the tallest buildings in the USA, and the volunteers who support them in their work. There are also members of the fire departments and police units who traveled at their own expense to New York City to lend a helping hand. Additionally, we have the leaders of the US government and its allies, who refused to let the threat of terrorism stop them.

There's the amazing Rudy Giuliani, who seems to be everywhere, all the time, and George Bush, once dismissed as a country bumpkin from Texas, who rose to the occasion and has proved that he is more than just an "accidental president."

Most especially, our list of heroes includes the men and women of the armed forces. Always heroes, they keep the nations of the world free.

Last on the hero roster, we find each one of us who have lived through it. Despite all of the horrors of this year, we've kept moving along through life, no matter how difficult it may seem -- and we'll continue moving through the challenges that may lie in our path.

Each of us who does not shrink from the challenges that lie in our way are heroes. Each of us who helps our neighbor, or flies the flag, or gives blood, or contributes to charity, or just keeps going when we'd rather sit down and cry -- each of us are heroes in our own way.

Life makes heroes out of many of us, because ultimately, it doesn't matter what **happens** to us in our life. It's what we **make happen** that really matters. It doesn't really matter where we've been in our lives -- what matters is where we're going.

Let's remember this year as a year of heroism, not a year of destruction. Let's remember it as a year of change, not a year of pain. Let's remember it for where we're going, not for where we've been. Let's never forget the events of September 11, 2001, but let's always remember the heroism that this year has brought -- the sacrifice, the caring, the patriotism, the love and generosity. Let's remember those final calls from people who knew they were going to die -- they called to say "I love you." No more positive call could ever have been made, even in such a terrible circumstance.

So, let's end the year thinking of our heroes, and becoming heroes ourselves. Let's always remember their sacrifices for our sake. Let's always remember to express the words "I love you" to those who we care about.

Our lives are defined by the years we remember -- let's remember this one as a difficult year that began a wonderful era in the world -- and then work to bring it to pass.

Let's be heroes, each and every one of us.

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