

When I Grow Up, Mommy, I Wanna Be a Reality TV Star

by Leona Salazar

☒ A couple of weeks ago, I published an article about the media circus surrounding the anniversary of Michael Jackson's death. Several readers responded to that article and wrote about heroes, both past and present, and that got me thinking.

On the same day Michael Jackson died, First Lt. Brian Bradshaw was killed in Kheyl, Afghanistan. Around that time, I came across a letter in the Denver Post which asked the question, "Where is the huge outpouring of grief for soldiers?" In the letter, Margaret Kunzie wrote:

"...CNN aired a documentary about Jackson's life; during a break, they showed six flag-draped coffins being unloaded at Dover Air Force Base. Just a break in the continuing coverage of Jackson.... The young men in the six coffins averaged half of his age. There was no public outpouring of grief, tears and cries of 'Why?' – only the presence of fellow military personnel and their families. What does that say about our country?"

Sadly, I think it says loads about our country. Why little girls are imitating people like Madonna and Britney Spears is something I don't get, and, while my focus is primarily on American culture, I can't ignore a very disturbing video of a little girl performing as Lady Gaga in some sort of talent show in Brazil. Decide for yourself.

I'll bet the vast majority of young girls could name each one of the Jonas Brothers. Last week at Walmart, I saw a t-shirt

which read "Future Mrs. Justin Bieber." Now that's something to strive for in life, but maybe I should be happy it didn't read, "Justin Bieber's Future Baby Mama." While these little girls know dozens of song lyrics, how many could recite the Ten Commandments or the Pledge of Allegiance? How many know about Condoleeza Rice, Rosa Parks or Sally Ride? The answer might be in the "heap" (like the garbage at the dump) of almost 800 reality shows watched by their parents. Seemingly, the focus of many of these shows is to provide people their 15 minutes of fame no matter how badly they end up being debased – not very good role models for parents or their children.

As one person commented about my article, the media is in the money-making business and sex, celebrities and scandals sell. Apparently, true heroism doesn't. Who we choose as our heroes and role models is an indicator of our societal values.

I recently read an article, "The Philosophical Foundations of Heroism," by Dr. Andrew Bernstein, in which he describes what he believes is the meaning of heroism: A hero is an individual of elevated moral stature and superior ability who pursues his goals indefatigably in the face of powerful antagonist(s). Because of his unbreached devotion to the good, no matter the opposition, a hero attains spiritual grandeur, even if he fails to achieve practical victory. He then points out four components of heroism: moral greatness, ability or prowess, action in the face of opposition, and triumph in at least a spiritual, if not a physical, form.

From the obvious obsession with celebrities and their lifestyles and the ever-increasing popularity of reality tv, a rather perverted idea of heroism has been developing in our country. We are bombarded with the images of Paris Hilton (2,197,943), Kendra Wilkinson (691,685) and the Kardashian litter (6,567,427) – "celebrities" who have done absolutely nothing positive to deserve the adoration they receive. Unfortunately, the paparazzi, spurred on by the insatiable appetite of hero worshippers, fill the media pages with

pictures of these useless human beings who serve no purpose other than to waste our air, as my 97-year old friend used to say.

None of these air wasters are good role models, yet, I'm afraid, our very young people, for some reason, can't get enough of them. And, if you don't believe me, the numbers after their names are the number of "followers" they have on Twitter, who wait with baited breath for their next tweet. I just don't get it.

Why aren't we honoring our brave men and women who have voluntarily joined our Armed Forces to serve in foreign lands, to fight for something as sacred as freedom for all of us? Why should a celebrity's death overshadow the death of those young people who made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us? It makes no sense to me.

My heroes will continue to be people like Dave Sanders, the schoolteacher shot to death while trying to shield his students during a shooting rampage at Columbine High School in Littleton, CO; Jane Smith, a Fayetteville, NC teacher, who was so moved by the plight of one of her students, a boy dying for want of a kidney transplant, that she donated her own kidney; and my dear dyslexic friend who had the stick-to-it-iveness to study and prepare for numerous Bar exams only to pass it on the 11th try. For me, these are the true heroes of our time and possess the qualities Dr. Bernstein describes – ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Snooki, the housewives of New Jersey, Florida or wherever, Colton Harris-Moore, and their ilk, do not. And if you don't know who any of these people are, I applaud you.

I don't get it and, if you do, God bless you.