

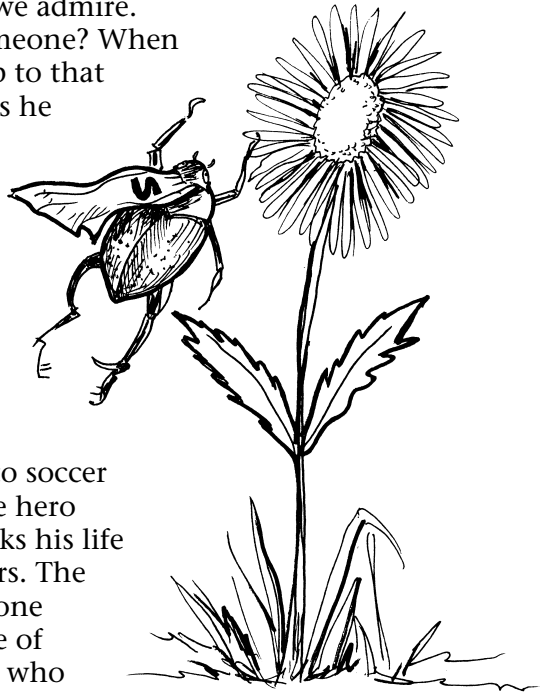
## Chapter 32

# Being Your Best

Almost all of us have people we admire. What does it mean to admire someone? When you admire someone you look up to that person, you see the good qualities he or she has. Let's call these people that we admire *everyday heroes*.

We are not talking about supersonic people who leap tall buildings in a single bound, or defy time and space to rescue some poor unfortunate souls. They look the same as everyone else. They eat normal food, shop at the same supermarket as you, and may even carpool with you to soccer practice. We are talking about the hero next door. The firefighter who risks his life time and time again to save others. The boy at school who defends someone weaker. The friend who takes care of injured animals. And the mother who spends an inordinate amount of time helping her son with his science homework. And these are just a few examples. But if you look around you, we are sure that you will find many such people.

Everyone likes a hero because they are people who go out of their way to help other people. They help all kinds of people. They will put themselves in a tight spot for someone else's sake. They like to help people. Anyone can be a hero. A person is not born a hero but becomes one by acting compassionately.



## What Does an Everyday Hero Do?

- ☉ *Stands up for the underdog.*
- ☉ *Speaks the truth.*
- ☉ *Takes risks to help other people.*
- ☉ *Shares the good things that he has.*

## Compassion in Action

It is important to remember that all people are different. What your best friend might do to reach out to other people may be very different from what you do. One way is not better or worse than the other, people have a variety of talents and strengths. Here are some examples of everyday heroism:

- ☉ *A scientist spends her life looking for a cure to a deadly disease.*
- ☉ *A surgeon moves from his comfortable home to a poor country in order to perform plastic surgery on deformed children and to train local doctors to do the same.*
- ☉ *A boy at school stands in front of a bully who is about to beat up a weaker student.*
- ☉ *A mother works two jobs to support her family.*
- ☉ *A group of teens goes to the local nursing home every Sunday to visit the residents who don't have any family members to visit them.*
- ☉ *A man volunteers to do accounting for a local community service organization.*
- ☉ *A group plants a beautiful garden in a low-income area so the neighborhood children will have somewhere green to play.*
- ☉ *A big sister walks her little sister to her dance class three times a week, even though she doesn't have to.*
- ☉ *A man takes care of his disabled neighbor's yard.*

Some of the most heroic actions seem small on the surface. Actions, such as those above, change other people's lives for the better. You don't have to be a scientist or a surgeon or even a firefighter to make a difference in someone else's life. Some people say that the best cure for unhappiness is making other people happy. Compassion goes a long way toward making that difference.

*I admire my mother the most, because... I don't know, I consider her to be my ideal in life. I like the way she presents herself, and the way she can handle her emotions in difficult times. She is a very good person.*

*Kate, 12*

## Who Influences You?

On a piece of paper, make a list of all of the people who influence you for the better, then write down the five people from your list who have the greatest influence. Why does each person on your list influence you?

*(Put the name of the person here)* influences me because she or he:

- ☉ *Believes in me and wants me to succeed.*
- ☉ *Understands me and has time for me.*
- ☉ *Knows how I feel and will listen to me.*
- ☉ *Always tells me the truth and respects me.*
- ☉ *Is someone I respect.*

Talk to a classmate about the people on your list, telling him why these people influence you. Can someone who influences you help you to make important decisions? Some young people have a hard time finding someone to look up to and ask for advice. If you are one of those teens, you may want to privately talk to a teacher you trust, and ask how you could be enrolled in a mentor program. Most cities have mentor programs—or a program that matches a young person with an adult who would like to spend time with him or her. Having someone to talk to, look up to and share time with can be a wonderful experience.

*In my family my parents are my heroes, I learn everything from them, and at school I consider our teachers heroes, because the behavior of our class is very bad, and the teacher must be a real hero to tolerate us.*

*Andy, 13*

## Admirable Qualities

Throughout this book we have talked about qualities that make a person admirable—honesty, courage, respectfulness, being responsible and loyal and so on. Now it's your turn. What qualities do you admire in other people and in yourself? Let's make a list. Look below and pick the top five qualities for an admirable person:

<i>Honest</i>	<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Responsible</i>
<i>Respectful</i>	<i>Compassionate</i>	<i>Giving</i>
<i>Funny</i>	<i>Flexible</i>	<i>Is Fair</i>
<i>Open-minded</i>	<i>Can Admit being Wrong</i>	<i>Dependable</i>
<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Has a Positive Attitude</i>	<i>Courteous</i>
<i>Believes in Me</i>		

You may have items you want to add. We didn't list all of the possibilities. For example, you may have a friend (or wish you had a friend) who would never talk behind your

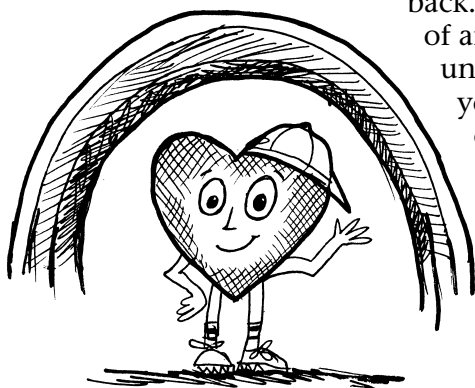
back. That's an excellent quality in a person of any age. We would put that quality under the category of being loyal, but you might want to write it out specifically.

What does your list look like?

Have you discovered what it is that you admire in other people? Have you thought about some qualities that you would like to develop in yourself as well?

*If I could be anyone, I would be myself the way I dream I could be.*

*Mike, 15*



## Being Your Best and Why You Matter

How can you be your best? When we mention being your best, we are not talking about being what someone else may want you to be, or what you think you should be. Rather we are talking about using your special talents and making choices that you feel good about. Being your best means having the staying power to develop healthy habits, take chances sometimes, and to be brave.

We hope that this book has helped you to understand yourself better. Maybe you have a clearer idea of future goals and dreams. Not to put any pressure on you, but you are the future. How you live your life is very important. In a few short years, say five or 10, you will be the adults. You will be the future moms and dads, business people, politicians and workers.

We just want you to have an ideal to reach for. We want you to find happiness, and the happiest people we know are those who

use their talents, and live their lives, based on values. It doesn't matter if you are cooking hamburgers or if you are on the stage in front of three million people. You are still the same person. You are just as important. *What you do* is not nearly so important as *who you are*.

Be patient with yourself, and be kind to yourself. Remember, it's okay to make mistakes! It is how you deal with mistakes that will matter the most. It takes time to change habits and to accomplish goals. You might be surprised how many new opportunities you will encounter. Having a good attitude will help you greatly. Seeing life in a positive light begins with how you see yourself. If you can be patient, understanding, and able to laugh at yourself (in a healthy way!), then it will be much easier for you to love other people. Never forget that you are an important part of the world, and without you, the world really would be different. Your life matters, no matter who you are or where you came from. Life can be an exciting adventure, if you are willing to take a chance and make the choice to live fully and love fully.

*Dreams give you something to look forward to. You can be anything you think you can. Life is always happening. You just have to decide if you are going to happen with it.*

Kathleen, 16

## Journal

Some of the greatest heroic acts go unnoticed. Do you think that it is important that heroism is recognized, or not?



## To Do

1. Write your own definition for the word *Hero* and make a list of heroic deeds that people can do on a daily basis. Write an essay titled: *The Everyday Hero*. What did your everyday hero do which merited being called a hero?
2. As a class, pick people you admire and plan an interview. Write down five or more questions you would like to ask that person about his or her life. What would you like to learn from that person? What do you admire in that person?

If you cannot think of anyone to interview, research an historical figure whom you admire instead. What qualities does this person have that you admire?



3. If you did not do the exercises in the chapter, go back through them and discuss them with your class.



## Key Ideas

- ☉ Real heroism can be found among everyday people.
- ☉ Deciding what you admire in others will help you to be your best self.
- ☉ It doesn't matter what you are so much as who you are.

**Let us endeavor so to live that when we come  
to die even the undertaker will be sorry.**

**Mark Twain**