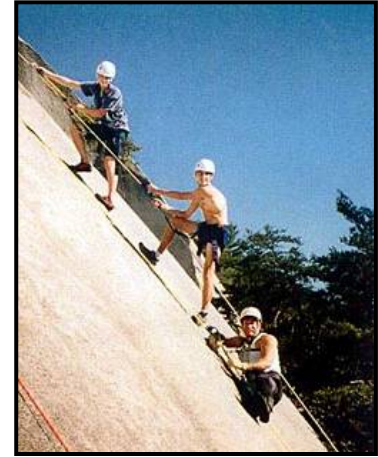


Heroes

By Erma Bombeck

Ironically, the two events happened within a day of one another. On the first Saturday of last month, a 22-year-old U. S. tennis player hoisted a silver bowl over his head at Center Court at Wimbledon.

The day before, five blind mountain climbers, a man with an artificial leg, an epileptic and two deaf adventures stood atop the snow capped summit of Mount Rainier.



It was a noisy victory for the tennis player, who shared it with thousands of fans, some of whom had slept on the sidewalks outside the club for six nights waiting for standing-room-only tickets.

It was a quite victory for the climbers, who led their own cheering, punctuated by a shout from one of them that echoed on the winds: “There’s one for the epileptics!”

The controversy that surrounded the tennis player’s frequent outbursts of temper was justified by pressure, “It’s not easy when it’s a one-on-one situation. You have to prove yourself.”

One man who climbed the mountain took 20 minutes to tie his own shoe. There was a lot of rhetoric exchange at Wimbledon regarding “bad calls.”

At Mount Rainier, they learned to live with life’s bad calls a long time ago. The first man to reach the mountaintop tore up his artificial leg to get there.

Somehow, I see parallel here that all Americans are going to have to come to grips with. In our search for heroes, we often lose our perspective.

We applaud beauty pageant winners; we ignore the woman without arms who paints pictures with a brush in her teeth. We extol the courage of a man who will sail over 10 cars on a motorcycle; we give no thought (or parking place) to the man who threads his way through life in a world of darkness or silence.

The care and feeding of heroes is solely in the hands of the public. Not all winners are heroes. Not all people with disabilities are heroes. “Hero” is a term that should be awarded to those who, given a set of circumstances, react with courage, dignity, decency and compassion – people who make us feel better for having seen or touched them.

I think the crowds went to the wrong summit and cheered the wrong champion.



Erma Bombeck

Was an American humorist who achieved great popularity for her news paper column that described suburban home life humorously. Erma also published 15 books, most of which became best-sellers. In 1970, her columns were read, twice weekly, by thirty million readers of 900 newspapers in the U.S.