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Silent Heroes Among Us

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Silent Heroes Among Us



As I watch my friend deliver extraordinary opening remarks at the inaugural "Heroes Among Us" luncheon presented by the fire foundation in the town where I live, Novato CA, I think about how many silent heroes there are out there and in here, in this room, filled with one hundred distinguished, local citizens. She is the President and CEO of our community bank and at this moment, she is a silent hero: her husband has been activated with his FEMA (Federal Emergency

Management Agency team to the toxic oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico. He's living at a fish camp and sending back some shocking photos. I imagine the media will be getting them soon enough. What we've been told so far, is but the tip of the iceberg.

As the Chair of the event, she quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson: "A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer." The folks that have been designated heroes on this particular day, have indeed stood strong five minutes longer. Some are firefighters whose cited heroism occurred off the clock, "on their time and their dime" as the Fire Chief explains, while some are ordinary citizens. They are adorned with blue ribbons and gold medals and shortly will receive a statute of a firefighter with a helmet on, a universal symbol of fire service. Some have donated money; all have donated immeasurable hours of time.

I work with my husband (who has always been my silent hero) and my daughter, and we do a



lot of work with fire, police and sheriff departments. I am always amazed at the dedication in these organizations. In my estimation it is unwavering dedication to the daily task at hand keeping their communities safe. They are my clients, but I am their client as well. I just received an email from the Executive Director of the fire foundation, who is a recently retired Fire Marshall and is thrilled now to have more free time for philanthropic activities. He thanked us "for being extraordinary members of our fire family." For those who don't have personal relationships with members of these public service organizations, I think this best explains how they view their agencies and the people who work with them family. A big extended family working in an interconnected, committed network of good deeds and services. The line gets pretty blurred between "on the clock" and "off the clock" efforts, because they are so often "efforting" on behalf of their fellow man, without individual recognition.

As for the recognized heroes, on this particular day, of those who are currently working full time jobs in local fire departments, four went to Haiti to help in the relief efforts - flying in doctors to remote areas of the island, assisting in paramedic services as "roving angels," doing their share to help this ravaged community. One is eyeball-deep in fundraising for cancer prevention, one is the chief elf for the ever expanding Christmas toy drive, one heads up a summer "fire" camp for disadvantaged children. When accepting their honors, to a one, they dismissed their individual actions in favor of the bigger picture. After their brief moments in the sun, they no doubt will put their medals and statues in a place of honor and get back to their work as silent heroes. Because for them, there is always much more to be done.

Of the lay recipients, one will stay in my mind for a long time. One will help me to remember that each day we are here together - as friends, lovers, family, community - is a precious gift. A retired Colonel wore his recently deceased wife's medal with pride. As he accepted her posthumous award, and acknowledged her tireless legacy of community philanthropy, he was overwhelmed by his personal grief. At the same time, he

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