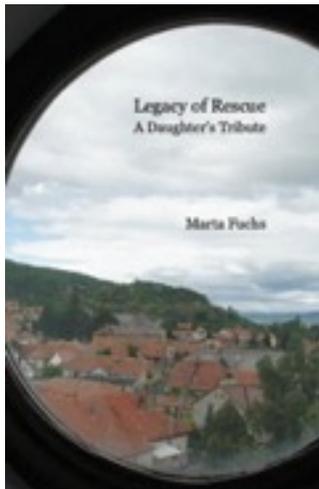


<http://www.focusonwomenmagazine.com/articles/how-to-be-a-hero-in-someones-life.html>



HOW TO BE A HERO IN SOMEONE'S LIFE

by Marta Fuchs, MLS, MFT



I am fortunate to have been raised by loving parents who despite the traumas and losses of war, continued to believe in the goodness of people and in the importance of helping others. They demonstrated through generosity of spirit and action the difference we can make in someone's life.

My father remembered as a child in Tokaj, Hungary, an old woman coming to the door selling a necklace of horrible smelling plants with garlic. He watched as his mother kindly gave some coins to the poor woman and thanked her. "She had to live from something, but it smelled so bad!" my father laughed as he told me.

You help those in need, and in a way that preserves their dignity.

When I was a teenager working summers at my father's screen-making shop, we often

reached for the stash of candies in the top drawer of his desk. Curious one day, I opened the second drawer and discovered dozens of folders, each for a different charity. My parents worked day and night since we had come to America as Hungarian refugees after the '56 Revolution, and we did have enough. But did we have enough to give to others, too? In folder after folder I saw that Dad had sent \$5, \$7, \$10 to dozens of charities ranging from the United Way to the Heart Fund to orphanages in Israel.

You don't have to have much to be generous. You help those less fortunate than yourself.

When the Jews of Tokaj, including my mother, were picked up in the spring of 1944, final destination Auschwitz, they were first forced to live on the temple grounds. Families were crammed into corners of classrooms and townspeople threw food over the fence. One of the town's bakers brought bread to them every day.

A year later, that same baker also gave free bread to my father and to the few other Jewish men who survived five years of forced labor in the Hungarian Army. "His name was Stajnovics but he had officially shortened it to Sztojan. He was Serbian and a very good man," my father said.

Generosity of spirit, choosing to care and help those in need even if they are different than you are. Thank you, Mr. Sztojan, for helping during those dark days.

As they began to rebuild their ransacked homes and shattered lives, my father and the men did not forget the family of the man who had saved them by defying Nazi orders to have them be liquidated at the end of the war. He said:

"Meanwhile, we sent packages to our Commanding Officer's wife and child. Some of the labor camp men knew that they were living in Budapest. We took turns sending basic food supplies, for life was hard for everyone after the war. These monthly packages went on for a year or more, and I remember each time it was my turn, she wrote a nice thank-you note. With one of these she included a picture of him. In response to the last package, she said not to send her any more because she had found a good job and now could provide on her own for herself and the child. At the same time, she wrote that she had received word from Russia. Her husband had died in a labor camp in Siberia. He was a young man, our Commanding Officer, only in his 40s. And he had saved our life."

For life was hard for everyone after the war. We help each other, somehow. We give back.

Coming by boat to America at 6 ½ years old, sea sick for 10 days and nights, I remember

opening with my brother our soft navy blue cloth bags from the Red Cross. Inside were all these treasures: tiny little soaps, toothpaste, and toys. We were so excited showing them to each other and playing with the drawstring to open and close the bags.

Years later in high school, I, too, made care packages for the Red Cross, joyfully placing little soaps and toothpaste in a different kind of bag, smiling as I imagined the children receiving them.

This isn't work, no matter how many hours I'm doing it. It's giving back, giving of my time, giving me pleasure, just like before.

When my daughter Sophie was in high school, she tutored kids at the local elementary school.

"One afternoon I was helping a quiet and shy little boy who was very sweet and very smart. The principal walked by, said 'hello' to me, and asked what we were working on. Towering over us, she said, 'Oh come on! I know you can write neater than that! Show Sophie!' The boy looked at me with very sad eyes and I said to him, 'Really? You can write even better than that?! Your handwriting is perfect now!'

"He started to erase everything he had worked so hard on and rewrote it all slower as neatly as he possibly could. Again the principal wasn't happy. The poor boy looked up at her as if saying, 'What's wrong now?' and once again erased.

"I stopped him. 'You don't need to erase all this! You're doing such a fantastic job! Just move to the next question.' The principal gave me a stern look but thankfully walked away. The boy sat back in his chair, sighed, frustrated and upset. 'Don't worry! I am so proud of you! Your handwriting is beautiful and you're doing so well.' From the corner of my eye I saw him gazing at me and I turned to look at him. He smiled at me: the biggest smile I had ever seen him make."

Validating. Reassuring. Speaking up. Comforting. Encouraging. Smiling. Generosity of spirit and putting into action what generations of her family embodied. Surely Sophie was a hero that day.