

My Hero

When I was a child, my hero was my imaginary big brother. He had whatever qualities I needed in a protector at the moment or whatever qualities were paramount in my current hero.

I seldom really needed a protector, but I suspected that a big brother could intercede for me when I was supposed to set the table or practice on the piano instead of reading the book I preferred. He would be happy to dust the curlicues on the arms of the living room sofa. He would love to dry the dishes when there was a game of hide and seek on a summer evening. I think you get the picture. I don't remember any bullies who bothered me on the way to school, but I'm sure he would have been there if I had needed him. And, of course, he would have pushed our little brother when he wanted to swing. But, alas, all his heroic actions remained in my mind. I simply envied my friends who had big brothers, although the girls denied that their brothers ever did any of those things for them.

When Lindbergh thrilled us all by flying solo across the Atlantic, I found a real, live hero. We were visiting my uncle and his family in Ardmore, Oklahoma, when the shout of "Extra" on the street told us that Lindy had made it to France. I lived through the long hours of his lonely, cramped flight and rejoiced in his safe arrival. I felt that his status as hero was cemented when he visited Dallas on his triumphal tour after he returned from Paris. I knew that he waved to me personally, not to those hundreds of other children as he rode down Lemmon Avenue from Love Field. The half holiday the schools enjoyed simply enhanced his grandeur in my eyes. I embarrassed myself by standing up and returning his greeting when I saw the newsreel of his trip to Dallas. Later I grieved with him and his wife when Jon was kidnapped, and I suffered through the Hauptmann trial. I so thoroughly glossed over his later political activities that I'm not sure that I ever really thought about them. They're certainly dim in my memory today; he retained the aura of his early flight.

