

My View: “Not all Heroes wear capes”, Eileen Needham

My neighbor’s son came off the school bus a bit disgruntled. I watched him as he carried his cumbersome backpack on his 7-year-old shoulders and headed directly for his house.

Eileen Needham, of Hamburg, believes in the power of kindness and serving others.

Usually, he would toss the backpack on the ground and glance toward our house to see if we were handing out candy. That day, he did not even look in our direction. His usual precocious self was slightly tempered.

His sister and cousins also sauntered off the bus without their usual gleam. When I asked their parents why the children seemed to lack their usual enthusiasm, they informed me that their regular bus driver took a day off.

The reaction of the children caused me to pause. I feel certain that their bus driver, “Mr. Don,” does not realize the daily impact that he has on the children. It also reminded me of a national news feature I watched regarding a former FBI senior executive, Mike Mason, who responded to a plea in the media to combat a shortage of bus drivers in Virginia.

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Mason was one of the highest-ranking African Americans in the history of the FBI, a former Marine and an executive at Verizon after his FBI career. These days he drives a bus for children with special needs and donates most of his salary. Last year Mason told CBS he is relishing his new role.

“This is not hyperbole. I’m smiling every day I start that bus up. ... I’ve done some important things, but guess what? This is important too.”

From the outside looking in, these two bus drivers do not appear to have much in common. Mr. Don is easily recognizable due to his “Duck Dynasty” beard, while Mason still looks like a Marine officer. However, both men are retired from law enforcement and continue to be impactful role models. They also both responded to critical needs in their communities. Although I have never ridden on the bus with either of them, I suspect Mason’s routine might be a bit more conventional than Mr. Don’s.

I have been told by neighbors that Mr. Don dresses as Santa for Christmas, has introduced the kids to music by Journey, and shaved his beard last year after promising the kids he’d do it if the Bills made the playoffs. He even took the time to write individual letters to the children during the remote learning mandate.

Somehow, he has developed a perfect balance of discipline and entertainment that connects with the students. My neighbors laughed as they told me their children regularly sing “Don’t Stop Believin’,” as well as other Journey songs. His effort and personality have been a positive influence in an otherwise difficult time for schoolchildren and parents.

So, if you are ever discouraged with ongoing negative news reports, remember that everyday heroes are out there. They may not be as obvious as our deserving medical professionals and first responders, but they are cloaked in goodness. They are ordinary people leading meaningful lives who strive to make the world a better place.

In the midst of life’s craziness, remember that you are not responsible for changing the world. You are responsible, however, for being kind to the person next to you. If we follow this simple rule, the world will begin to heal. As Mother Teresa once stated, “What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.” She also said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

So thank you to all the everyday heroes, especially the bus drivers who don’t stop believing.