

Librarian's Shelf by Pat Anderson

Read about everyday heroes at your library

Remember being asked "Who is your hero?" This question was the usual suggestion of my grade school teachers when making a writing assignment. I chose famous people--the President, an athlete, a movie star, etc. Never did it enter my mind that I might know heroes in my community!

Bob Dotson points out many such heroes in "American Story" (Viking Press). He refers to his heroes as "ordinary people doing extraordinary things." Bob's segments are often featured on the NBC Today Show earning him an Emmy as well as over 100 other journalism awards. He also writes and hosts "Bob Dotson's America" on The Travel Channel.

Bob grew up in the middle of America surrounded by ordinary people. His mother was determined to not let the polio that crippled his leg cripple his spirit. She was his first "ordinary person doing extraordinary things." He went on to climb mountains, fly in bush planes in the Alaskan wilderness, travel millions of miles with his film crew, and have the fun of doing this in a career spanning four decades. And he is not done yet!

Bob met Bud, a candy maker, who sold his business for a nice profit and retired at 54. However, his former employees could not find similar jobs and asked his advice. His solution? He opened a small candy store and employed all his former employees—even hiring their children when the former employees retired. His ultimate goal was to teach these people how to run a business, not just how to work in one. He offered to give them the business (no kidding!). Imagine his surprise when they declined his offer. They preferred being a worker to being an owner with more responsibilities. Bud found another buyer who employed these same people. Was Bud disappointed? Yes, but he said the important thing is finding what makes you happy, which his employees did. Bud founded ten successful companies and stands ready to help the people who contributed to his successes.

Petaluma, CA is a small town whose only claim to fame is that the movie American Graffiti was filmed there with a director and actors pretty much unknown. As Petaluma declined, it lost its only movie theatre. Seven twelve year old girls decided to do something about it. They formulated a business plan to make the theatre profitable. Figuring they had nothing to lose, they boldly wrote to George Lucas, the unknown director now of Star Wars fame. He forwarded their ideas to his business manager who praised their plan and allowed them to show American Graffiti outdoors on a brick wall as a fund raiser. This brought media attention and even an offer to build a theatre as part of a new shopping center under construction. The girls turned down the offer because the new shopping center was too far to ride their bikes. It took four years, but the theatre was built in the center of town. All the girls got jobs-at minimum wage-at the theatre doing all things necessary such as cleaning bathrooms and polishing the gold stars bearing each girl's name on the sidewalk in front of the building. As Bob puts it-the boss may make you a star, but you still have to polish it.

Most of the people Bob writes about have one goal and the persistence to pursue it. Those goals are as varied as helping boat people from Viet Nam reunite as a family in Oregon, a retired physician establishing a free medical clinic on a poor island off the Carolina coast, or a teen working eleven jobs to finance a chance to conduct the Boston Pops orchestra. Bob had the persistence to meet these people he genuinely liked. I think you will like them too.

We all need heroes. Look around you.