

Who Will Protect Our Protectors?

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I was watching TV the other night and came across a program on The History Channel about the great warriors of the past. Every culture seemed to have its own ideal warrior: the Maasai, Azande, and Zulu of Africa; the Huns; the Shaolin Monks of China; the Roman Gladiators, the Spartans, the Medieval Knights of Europe; the Eagle and Jaguar warriors of Aztec South America; the Samurai and Ninja of Japan; the Rajputs of India; the Scottish Highlanders; and the Byzantine Cataphract were all the great fighters of their civilizations. Most had to complete some sort of rigorous training process and graduate in a ceremony that inducted them into their status. This confirmed them as experts with one or more weapons (e.g. the shield and throwing stick of the Zulu, the archery of the Huns, or the axe and dagger of the Highlanders). They served their communities through various tasks, such as finding lost cattle or moving the herds to the grassy areas for grazing, which possibly required them to be away from their families for several weeks at a time. Their leaders, also great warriors, had exhibited countless acts of bravery. If any one of them did something to bring shame to their clans or villages, they all would be punished or fined. The warrior was held in high esteem and had great responsibility to the community.

One group known for their fierce warriors were the Lakota people, Native Americans led by Sitting Bull. When asked what made his warriors great, he said:

“Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another life. The warrior, for us, is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all the children, the future of humanity.”

You may be asking yourself, “What does all this have to do with today’s issues?”

This research prompted me to search for the true warriors of today. Who fights to the death for the defenseless? Who sacrifices himself or herself for the good of others? Who cares for those who cannot care for themselves, and, above all, who cares for the children? I ask you: *Who are the warriors of today?*

After some reflecting on our current society, I could only find a few groups that could compare with famed warriors. The first group is our men and women in the military and law enforcement. Without question these people are indeed warriors, putting their lives on the line by working each day to defend the defenseless. The other group of warriors, like Sitting Bull so famously said, “may not be what you think of as warriors.”

They are the teachers.

When we think of those who sacrifice themselves to defend and protect the future of humanity today, it is the teacher. As we remember the anniversary of the events at Sandy Hook Elementary school, we are reminded of the lengths that teachers will go for their students. Eight school employees were killed in the Sandy Hook tragedy. One was Victoria Leigh Soto, who sacrificed herself to save her students – throwing her body in front of the young children. In less extreme cases, I see teachers every day throwing it all on the line for students. They sacrifice time with their own children and families, sacrifice high-paying careers with lucrative benefits, sacrifice money out of their pockets for school supplies and materials for their students, and some even make the ultimate sacrifice like Soto and the other fallen warriors of Sandy Hook. These people are our modern-day warriors. These are the people we should hold in high esteem, the people we should revere.

So why, then, are attacked teachers met with silence from society? We as a collective must stand up and loudly proclaim that these are our warriors. Whether these attacks come from a gun-toting fanatic or a senseless budget-cutting legislature or school board, the cry should be loud. While events like Sandy Hook take place in an instant, cuts in education are a slow and silent acts of destruction. One is a pressure washer of tremendous force, and the other is the slow, dripping faucet that escapes national attention. The precious potential of our children is wasted all the same.

I’m sure that somewhere along the way you have encountered a teacher who used his or her shield to protect you, or to fight off the forces of ignorance for you. This teacher and teachers like him or her make a way out of no way. For this reason, we must rally around and celebrate our teacher warriors with great ceremony. How can you help defend our “warrior teachers”?