

A Chance to Be A Hero Everyday

By John Leonard, Executive Director American Swim Coaches Association

“Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child.”

“Everything we do for our children that they can do for themselves, makes them weaker.”

One of the really sad trends in American society is parental “concern” that removes adventure and opportunity for growth from American children’s lives. Yes, the world is a different place from the one I grew up in, and many other people, as well. In that world, we were not constantly supervised by parents, and most often, were pretty much totally unsupervised by adults for much of the summer and after school hours as well.

We got cuts and bruises, we did “dangerous things” and looked out for one another. One of us usually had a reasonable degree of sense, and rarely did anyone get seriously injured, but we constantly did “daring” things that helped us understand the limits to our ability (and we regularly exceeded what we thought was possible.)

Contrast that with the average child’s life today.

In those days, we prepared every day for our future independent lives. And then, we rarely if ever came home after high school, and certainly never needed our parents to “support us” later in life. (Ok, I know, we can all point to exceptions to that....)

Today, not so much.

One of the very best parts of swim practice is that EVERYDAY, you get to test your “Hero” capabilities. In every program in the USA, the challenge can be that you will “do something you have never done before” and “be a hero” in that growth. Challenge is the essence of swim practice and the child learns to fail, pick themselves up, and try, try, try again until they succeed. Whether it’s an eight year old learning to dive off the starting block, or a 17 year old senior trying to complete that set of 100’s on 1:05, the opportunities for “hero development” are there. And if coaches don’t offer that, athletes don’t accept the challenge and parents don’t support and applaud that, we’re not showing much confidence in our young people.

The days of 14 year old’s fighting off the Indians from Conestoga wagons crossing the great plains are gone. So are the 50’s when many of us took off at dawn and might not return home until after dark, with many “adventures” to grow from every day, but we can still go to practice, be completely responsible for our own success, and challenge ourselves to reach “hero status” every day.

And if you don’t practice and rehearse, you might really be clueless when you face that real-world challenge that all young people and adults do face, from time to time.

Heroes in practice prepare to be heroes in life.