

Heroes

by Erma Bombeck

In 1981 John McEnroe won the tennis championship at Wimbledon, England. McEnroe was known for being temperamental on the tennis court.

On the first Saturday of last month, a 22-year-old U.S. tennis player hoisted a silver bowl over his head at Centre Court at Wimbledon.

The day before, five blind mountain climbers, a man with an artificial leg, an epileptic, and two deaf adventurers stood atop the snowcapped summit of Mount Rainier.

It was a noisy victory for the tennis player, who shared it with thousands of fans, some of whom had slept on the sidewalks outside the club for six nights waiting for tickets.

It was a quiet victory for the climbers, who led their own cheering, punctuated by a shout from one of them that echoed on the winds: "There's one for the epileptics!"

There was a lot of rhetoric exchanged at Wimbledon regarding "bad calls."

At Mount Rainier they learned to live with life's bad calls a long time ago. The first man to reach the mountaintop tore up his artificial leg to get there.



Heroes (continued)

Somehow, I see a parallel here that all Americans are going to have to come to grips with. In our search for heroes and heroines, we often lose our perspective.

We applaud beauty pageant winners; we ignore the woman without arms who paints pictures with a brush in her teeth. We extol the courage of a man who will sail over ten cars on a motorcycle; we give no thought (or parking place) to the man who threads his way through life in a world of darkness or silence.

The care and feeding of heroes is solely in the hands of the public. Not all winners are heroes. Not all people with disabilities are heroes. "Hero" is a term that should be awarded to those who, given a set of circumstances, will react with courage, dignity, decency, and compassion—people who make us feel better for having seen or touched them.

I think the crowds went to the wrong summit and cheered the wrong champion.





1. Who won the tennis championship at Wimbledon, England, in 1981?
 - A. Erma Bombeck
 - B. a disabled tennis player
 - C. John McEnroe
 - D. the former champion

QAR: _____

2. Five of the people who stood atop the summit of Mount Rainier the day before the final tennis tournament were
 - A. deaf
 - B. epileptic
 - C. blind
 - D. tennis players

QAR: _____

3. What are the major differences between the "victories" of the tennis player and the climbers?

QAR: _____

4. In paragraph 6, the author uses the term "bad calls" to refer to
 - A. confusion among the fans
 - B. mistakes by the referee of the tennis match
 - C. the personal hardships the climbers had to overcome
 - D. none of the above

QAR: _____