

Her-oism: How My Grandmother Achieved The American Dream

A hero is someone who overcomes obstacles to help themselves as well as others. It is someone who inspires people. Traditionally, heroes are portrayed by someone with supernatural qualities in addition to being young and muscular. Until recently, that was my default image of a hero too.

On Thanksgiving, my family was getting ready to leave a friend's house. My mother was pulling up the car and bringing it to the driveway. I grabbed my coat and started to head out the door when my grandmother said, "I'm ninety-one, I can't do anything anymore."

My heart dropped. Is this the feeling that American society should be projecting onto the elderly? Is it the right to shove them in depressing assisted-living facilities, isolated from the rest of the world? Is it fair to attempt to silence their voices and tell them they should not vote? After all, these are the people who helped shape our country into what is today. These are the people who instilled in us the doctrine of hard work leading to success. They survived the Great Depression and World War II. This is the first generation where the idea of a working woman started to become a reality. Going back to the definition of a hero, I believe nobody around me fits it better than my grandmother.

Basilia Mary Chios was born on May 24, 1927, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Both of her parents had just come from Greece by ship to escape persecution from the Turks. Until she started school in New York City, she did not know a word of English. Teachers assumed she was an unintelligent troublemaker. In the 1930's, there was no support for students who were learning English as a second language. Quickly, my grandmother picked it up and proved those teachers wrong. She skipped grades, and ended up graduating high school at sixteen years old. For college, my grandmother went to Mount Holyoke, one of the Seven Sisters to the Ivy League. She studied history and economics and graduated cum laude. The summer after college, she learned shorthand and strengthened her typing skills in order to prepare herself for a career. She started working for the Bank of New York in 1949. As a woman, the only job that was first available to her there was the position of secretary. After a year and a half, she became the assistant to the economist of the bank. Then, she took night courses at The New York Institute of Finance to become a junior security analyst before leaving in 1955 to help her father with his

meat business. In 1957, she married my grandfather and had two children, the second one being my mother.

My grandmother overcame the obstacles of being a woman in the early twentieth century. She came from an immigrant family living in a Washington Heights apartment. The first woman from her neighborhood to leave town for college, let alone an Ivy League one. Everyone told her father that he was crazy, sending his daughter away from home to school and letting her work. Nevertheless, she persisted. She raised two daughters who learned the values of education and opportunity. Both daughters went to work, one went to Wall Street and the other became a teacher. She inspired them to instill in their daughters those same values. One of them graduated college and is now in business school, and the other one is, well, me.

Now, my grandmother lives in an apartment by herself and watches the six o'clock news. She loves playing bridge and giving me her winnings. She gets takeout from Zoë's Kitchen and goes to the beauty parlor. She sees shows at the theater with her group of friends. Most importantly, she votes.

So while my grandmother may not wear a cape and mask, or face danger at every turn, she is my hero. She is the American dream. She challenged the status quo. She motivates me to do well in school. Even though she no longer drives or keeps up with the latest technology, she still does a couple of things. My grandmother loves me, and continues to encourage me to be a strong, independent, woman.