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“Superheroes”

Once upon a time, I was about 3.5 feet tall with a penchant for embarrassingly uneven bowl haircuts. I was 6 years old, and I had just moved to Brooklyn from Hong Kong with the family. Mine's the typical immigrant story: My parents worked 14 hours a day, 7 days a week in a garment factory to support us, and Davie, my brother who was 4 at the time, stayed home with me. We learned how to take care of ourselves pretty fast. We walked ourselves to school, cooked, cleaned, and I tucked my brother into bed every night. One of my favorite memories is of me cooking with my brother (which we did every night to stay alive.) I was too short to reach the stove, so I told my brother to hold a chair steady as I climbed on top of it, where I then proceeded to cook fried rice in a wok that I could have fit in.

That's the way it was for the next 10 years, give or take a few feet. During all of this, I never talked to adults or anyone older than me for fear they would find out we were home alone. I mention this because I think that every child needs to learn from someone wiser, more experienced – learning anything from tying shoelaces to being a good person. As a child, I remember yearning desperately for someone who could teach me everything I couldn't learn to do by myself. And then... I found the next best thing.

To anyone else, Superman, Spiderman, and Batman were probably a source of amusement, but after the 30 minute television program ended, they probably went back to their lives. That wasn't the case for me. They were the role models I had been looking for! I emulated them to the best of my ability. I secretly thought that underneath every mild-mannered adult walking in a suit might have been a superhero in disguise, and I just had to work my way up to it. When I was 8, I took up wall-climbing and web-slinging for a day. EPIC FAIL. Don't do it! It hurts. A lot.

I then decided to try a different approach. I listened and watched, and I took their words as gospel. Even though Batman lost his parents, lived in crime-ridden Gotham City, he fought villains at night to restore justice in the world. Spider-man never asked to be bitten by a radioactive spider, but he knew that “with great power comes great responsibility.” I'm sure Superman would have like to go on a date with Lois Lane instead of saving Lex Luthor, his arch-nemesis, from a burning building.

My superheroes inspired me to see the good in people, even when they can't see it in themselves. They are the reason why I cannot fathom why one human being would want to hurt another. They are the reason why I not only have an obligation to help others, but also the need to fight for a better future. I've been blessed just being here in your presence, and everything

that's led up to this point has taught me that I need to teach these same lessons to today's children, without the cape or spandex.

Unlike the drunken Tony Starks of today (Iron man, for those of you who don't follow comics), the old school superheroes were worth looking up to. I would have turned out very differently if I grew up watching Hannah Montana (Sorry Miley!). But I have learned one thing from all of this: Even though I may have had the ultimate superheroes as my role models, there was something missing. First, they were 2 dimensional. Secondly, I was never able to voice my concerns about Kryptonite. Superman never responded to my letters. Thirdly, it wasn't a relationship.

So for those of you who are mentoring or teaching children, you may not realize (and they may not realize) that you are shaping their lives during their formative years. By simply talking to them, you are providing guidance that they may not be able to get elsewhere. They're fortunate to have you. So from the bottom of my heart I thank you. All I ever wanted as a 6 year old was a superhero to look up to. I now live vicariously through those children you teach and mentor, who look up to you. Thank you!