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**“Heroes and Role Models:  
Mel Brooks and Al Gore”**

**by Isaac Mann  
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Heroes and role models may sound similar, but they are entirely different. A hero is willing to make a greater personal sacrifice than a role model. He may see an impending problem and do everything in his power to solve it for the benefit of the entire community. A role model is someone you want to be like.

My role model is Mel Brooks. He’s one of the most brilliant comedians that has ever been on the big screen. Despite being 83 years old, Mel Brooks is a very active and healthy man and I would like to be as healthy and active and full of humor at that age as he is. Equally impressive is the fact that he maintained a happy marriage with Anne Bancroft for to 41 years, which is very unusual for someone who has made his life in film.

Mel Brooks was born January 28, 1926 in Brooklyn. He attended PS 19 and then graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School. His big break came when he was chosen as a writer for the famous TV comedy series “Your Show of Shows”, where he met Carl Reiner and Sid Caesar. He won an Oscar for best original script for one of my favorite films, “The Producers”.

“Blazing Saddles” is one of my favorite comedies of all time. While satirizing the film industry, Brooks gives us his own take on cowboys and Indians. Most of the cowboys are not heroic, but rather oblivious, forgetful, and racist. The Indian chief is none other than Brooks, himself. When he encounters a black family in an open wagon, he speaks to them in Yiddish. Throughout the movie he plays with racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes, and points out the absurdity of discrimination.

He often uses his Jewishness as a basis for humor. In Spaceballs, his spoof on Star Wars, “The Schwartz”, is Brook’s version of “The Force”. Dark Helmet, addresses the light sabers, saying “I see your Schwartz is as big as mine.” Besides making a really good penis joke, Mel Brooks makes his Jewishness larger than life—a power to be reckoned with. Mel Brooks directs, sings, writes, and acts in this movie and in others. He clearly shares several of my values, for instance, Artistic Expression, Humor, Determination, and Independence.

My favorite Mel Brooks movie is the original 1968 film, the Producers. The Producers opens as Max Bialystock flirts with one of thousands of old ladies who are his patrons. You can see clearly that he doesn’t enjoy this, since the scene pauses for the beginning credits just at the right time for the audience to see Zero Mostel’s classic suffering face. What I love about The Producers, besides the phenomenal performances by Gene Wilder and Zero Mostel, is how bold and revolutionary a film it is. It takes different stereotypes and prejudices, sexism and homophobia, and even some of the most horrible parts of history and turns all of this into one of the funniest movies ever made. I love how there isn’t one non-humorous character in this movie except for the audience who watch the stage “Springtime for Hitler” number. This audience represents us, as movie-watchers. We might never have

imagined enjoying a pro-Nazi play but Mel Brooks makes us laugh at every appalling detail. I want to work in the film business because I find it so interesting, but I want to be bold in the same way Mel Brooks was with The Producers.

My hero is Al Gore. He has always paid attention to the environment. Long before the entire world saw the value in environmentally friendly technologies, Al Gore learned to love the land. Since his father was a senator from Tennessee, Al spent eight months of the year living in Washington D.C. and the other four months farming on his dad's huge property in the countryside. His mother read to him from Silent Spring by Rachel Carson. This book, published in 1962, exposed some of the dangers to the Earth and its population from the use of pesticides and other chemicals. These experiences made him realize how much the health of the Earth was being overlooked.

Gore has always recognized the importance of family. After his son was hit by a car in 1989, he started rethinking his values. He appreciated his family more, and he took more careful steps to ensure that the world would be a good place for his son to inhabit well into the future. He began thinking more about the environmental crisis. When his sister, Nancy, a co-founder of the Peace Corps, died of lung cancer as a result of smoking cigarettes, this only intensified his commitment to issues of health and safety.

Al Gore served in the Senate and the House of Representatives for the state of Tennessee from 1976-1993. When he was Vice President under Bill Clinton from 1993 to 2000, he wrote Earth In The Balance, which advanced our knowledge of environmental problems. Many despaired after he lost the 2000 election to George Bush, but Al Gore apparently didn't. He took it as an opportunity to rededicate himself to the task of educating the world about the environmental crisis.

He won the Nobel Peace Prize for the book An Inconvenient Truth in 2007. This book addresses global warming as the most dangerous environmental problem facing the world. It is worth noting that Gore has given 100% of profits made by this bestseller to non-profit companies that work to fight global warming. Al Gore is a true altruist.

One thing I learned from An Inconvenient Truth is that in 1997, there was a Kyoto conference that addressed environmental concerns. Thirty industrial nations agreed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. In 2001, George Bush refused to sign the Kyoto

Protocol. Instead, Bush hired people like Philip Cooney to be head of environmental policy even though Cooney had made millions of dollars in the petroleum industry. The scientific findings of global warming reported by the Environmental Protection Agency were edited by Cooney and struck from their reports.

After reading An Inconvenient Truth, I realized a lot important things. There are many signs of global warming. We can observe that the polar ice caps are melting, glaciers are melting, the sea level is rising, and wind currents and ocean currents are stronger. The frequency of hurricanes, in general, has gone up by 50% since 1979. Rain forests have become even wetter and deserts even drier as a result of these changes in water and air currents. The greater absorption of carbon dioxide in the ocean is preventing the development of coral and coral reefs that are very important to the eco-system. Species are now disappearing at the rate of the last ice age. What's more, the United States is responsible for more than 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions. Al Gore makes the compelling case that these changes are not just the natural fluctuations in the environment but that they are linked to the increase in carbon dioxide emissions from cars and industry. The CO<sub>2</sub> causes heat to be trapped in our atmosphere. Now, I find Gore's proclamations to be very bold, and necessary for human survival. His persistent public assertions and organizing of others to address these issues, is heroic.

Al Gore has spent the last eight years challenging the false belief that we have to choose between the economy and the environment. An example of this false logic is in the car industry. The Japanese have worked harder than we have to create fuel-efficient cars. Consequently their car manufacturers are doing a lot better than Ford, General Motors, or Chrysler. Thinking about the environment makes economic sense. My family has just purchased a Prius which is a hybrid car manufactured by Toyota. Although it is more expensive than a standard car to purchase, the savings on gasoline will make it a great deal in the long run.

Al Gore gives good advice for what we all can do to help the environment. We can switch to energy efficient bulbs and hybrid cars. We can choose to use wind energy to heat our homes. We can walk or bike to school or work and not always choose to burn carbon fuel. We can step up our efforts to recycle so as not to increase landfill and require more plastics to be produced. We can eat less meat, for the production and distribution of one pound of animal protein is far more expensive in terms of energy costs than the production of one pound of plant protein. Eating more plant protein is healthier as well.

While Mel Brooks has provided a model of a life that is long and healthy and artistically vital and full of humor, Al Gore has inspired me to become a person who wants to learn about the environment and help to save the planet.