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**“Heroes and Role Models: Louis Armstrong”**

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**May 14, 2011**

For my hero and role model I chose my favorite and most inspiring musician of all time, Louis Armstrong. Before I get started on the paper, let me tell you the difference between a hero and a role model: A hero is someone who is known by many people and is also someone who has done something good that was nationally recognized. A role model is someone who you personally look up to, would want to be, and is someone who inspires you.

Louis Armstrong was born in New Orleans's in 1901, the grandson of slaves. His neighborhood was nicknamed the “Battlefield” because of frequent fighting between gangs. When Louis turned seven, he worked before and after school collecting used bottles and rags and delivering coal for the Karnofsky family. His life was changed by the Karnofsky's, who were Jewish, and he wrote about the discrimination they faced because of their religion, and I quote him:

*“The Jewish People never betrayed their own people. Stick together’ yes. I watched the Jewish people take a lot of abuse in New Orleans’ ever since I was seven years old. I felt very lucky to get a job working for them. We suffered **Agony** right along with them, only worse. They did not **Lynch** them, but us Negroes, anytime they got ready.”*

With the money they paid him he was able to go and buy his first cornet. Louis wanted this cornet for a very good reason; he wanted to learn how to play so that he could play with **his** role model, King Oliver. Because of King Oliver and his kindness in letting Louis play with him, Louis had exclaimed later in his life, *“If it had not been for Joe Oliver, jazz would not be what it is today.*

Now, let me explain why Louis Armstrong inspires me. Louis Armstrong inspires me for multiple reasons; I’ll go down the list. He inspires me musically because he is the hero and the role model of all musicians, trumpet, and jazz players. As a virtuoso trumpet player, Armstrong had a unique tone and an extraordinary talent for melodic improvisation.. Through his playing, the trumpet emerged as a solo instrument in jazz and is used widely today. He was a masterful accompanist and ensemble player in addition to his extraordinary skills as a soloist. With his innovations, he raised the bar musically for all who came after him. He didn’t want to think of it this way, but he was THE king of jazz. Technically, he brought jazz to life. And I think he was very modest, what I mean by this is he never thought that he was the greatest at playing jazz or brass instruments. He thought everyone was just as good as the other. (I’m sure he recognized that some musicians were better than others—maybe it would be more accurate to say that he believed there were other jazz musicians who played as well as he did) In 1964, he recorded his biggest-selling record, “Hello Dolly!” The song went to #1 on the pop chart making Armstrong, at age 63, the oldest person to ever accomplish that feat. In the process, Armstrong dislodged the Beatles from the #1 position they had occupied for 14 consecutive weeks with three different songs.

Some musicians criticized Armstrong for playing in front of segregated audiences and for not taking a strong enough stand in the civil rights movement suggesting that he was an Uncle Tom. (*Uncle Tom is a term for a black person who behaves in a subservient manner to white people*). Billie Holiday countered, however, "Of course Pops toms, but he toms from the heart."

Armstrong was a major financial supporter of Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists. Armstrong mostly preferred to work quietly behind the scenes, not mixing his politics with his work as an entertainer. The few exceptions made it more effective when he did speak out. Armstrong's criticism of President Eisenhower, , calling him "two-faced" and "gutless" because of his inaction during the conflict over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957, made national news. As a protest, Armstrong canceled a planned tour of the Soviet Union on behalf of the State Department saying "*The way they're treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell*" and that he could not represent his government abroad when it was in conflict with its own people. The FBI kept a file on Armstrong for his outspokenness about integration.

Another characteristic I admire about Louis Armstrong is that he was very subtle and very calm; He had many offers to go live in Beverly Hills and live in a very nice house. In the end, he decided to stay in Queens and play for the kids in the neighborhood. He chose to live a very homey lifestyle. He never wanted to go and be pampered in Beverly Hills because he had better ways to live his life. In his music, some people hear random notes; I hear a way of thinking. And to be able to play the way he does requires him to think very calmly. It's in his soul and will to spread peace and to play his trumpet.

Another way Louis Armstrong inspires me is how he used the trumpet in ways nobody had before because, for example, there are people like Dizzy Gillespie who used the trumpet as a loud and proud instrument. There are others who play different styles of the trumpet, some soft and quiet, some loud and brassy, and some who play somewhere in the middle. Louis Armstrong played the trumpet in many different ways.

What makes a musician worthy of my admiration is the fact that he is willing to go out there and just be able to play something. This is especially true for me with a jazz player because while they're soloing they have a lot to think about. For example he might be thinking, "Ok a chord changes in the next three beats, so I have to switch my thought process." It's very hard. The thing that's great about it that has earned my admiration is that they know they are going to make a mistake at some point. The fact is that almost every musician during their solo makes a mistake, But a good jazz player knows how to blend it together well enough so that the audience thinks, "Oh, that was a cool little change, what'd he just do?" My Trumpet teacher, Mike Shobe, says, "If you're going to make a mistake, make a loud one!"

Armstrong kept up his busy tour schedule. He toured Africa, Europe, and Asia under sponsorship of the US State Department with great success, earning the nickname "Ambassador Satch." And after spending many years on the road touring and working for the government, Armstrong settled permanently in Queens, New York in 1943 with his fourth wife, Lucille. There he continued to develop his playing. During the next thirty years, Armstrong played more than three hundred gigs a year. Unfortunately, in 1973, the great Louis Armstrong/Satchamo died of a heart attack.

A while back, I went to Louis Armstrong's house and the second I walked into the house there was a feeling that no other house has. The feeling was a fluffy, warm feeling as though Louis Armstrong had never even left. There's not really a word for it but there's just this sense of joy and happiness.

Even though he and his wife are gone, I still feel their presence there. One example of that is that when he would come home from a tour, he would go to his window, and start playing his trumpet. He would play it out the window so that everyone could hear, and the kids would come running and his wife, Lucile, would make cookies for the kids. They just acted like he was a normal person. They knew he was amazing; they didn't need to emphasize that any more. In Louis Armstrong's office he always had a record player behind his desk. It was always playing music, but not his. He had his ideas about his playing; he wanted to hear other peoples' ideas. He wanted new ideas. He wanted to mix them with his to make something new.

Whenever I play my trumpet I always keep Louis Armstrong in the back of my head. When we got our dog, before I started playing the trumpet, this must have been coincidence or fate because we named him Louie. Afterwards I started playing my grandfather's trumpet and I fell in love with Louis Armstrong. Now whenever I look at my dog or play the trumpet I get this feeling. This feeling that I don't get while I'm in school or while I'm doing anything else. This special little feeling that comes out just for those moments. It's very warm and fuzzy. It's nice.

For all of these reasons I hope you can understand why my hero and role model is Louis Armstrong. The one final thing I'm going to say is, remember the Karfonoskys, the Jewish family who had lived in his neighborhood. Louis had felt such a large connection to the Jewish people that for the rest of his life he wore a Star of David around his neck in thanks for the life that they had been able to give him. He wrote: "When I reached the age of eleven I began to realize that it was the Jewish family who instilled in me singing from the heart. They encourage me to carry on."

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