

Hero or Villain: Steering Teens in the Right Direction

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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National Tragedies Can Be Avoided with Vigilance, Understanding & Guidance, says Novelist

For adults, high school is as near or far as the next or last reunion. But for thousands of teens, high school is a present hell of isolation, confusion and negativity, says novelist Ryan D. Pearson.

“Think about the young men who live in infamy because they somehow couldn’t channel their energy in a positive manner – Adam Lanza in Connecticut; James Holmes, the ‘movie-theater shooter;’ the two Columbine shooters; Jared Loughner, who shot U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords – some were extremely intelligent, and they were passionate, too,” says Pearson.

Precocious in high school, Pearson earned his law degree at age 21 and went on to write “The Element Series,” (www.theelementseries.com), which follows a teenager blessed with wealth and fame who discovers he has the added responsibility of super powers.

“One aspect I love about comic books and fiction is that the character arcs show how some become the villains, and those who stand by their values – the heroes.”

Teens, who have experienced life only as children, suddenly find themselves in very adult circumstances in high school – that last step toward adulthood, he says. For many gifted, talented, sensitive or otherwise misunderstood teens, he offers tips for surviving this last step toward independence:

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- Embrace what makes you different: Perhaps the most important struggle a teenager faces is self-acceptance. Many may believe that that straight-A, all-star jock with a perfect complexion has it made. Meanwhile, he may be experiencing his own inner turmoil. If you care about things no one else seems to care about; if you're better at chess than football; if you think you don't fit the mold of "pretty" or "handsome" – you might just be on the path to happiness. A great example receiving plenty of attention is the It Gets Better project, which encourages gay teens to embrace their sexuality. However, the concept can be applied to anyone who feels like an outsider. "There is only one you; don't be afraid of who you are," Pearson says.

- Perhaps the greatest commencement address: While life is just beginning after high school and college, it's rarely easy – that's the thrust of George Foster Wallace's 2005 speech to the graduates of Kenyon College. Wallace, a giant of contemporary literature, touches on some of the most important adult challenges: the potential loneliness of adult life, the importance of being well-adjusted and the difficulty of empathy – "Think about it: There is no experience you've had that you were not at the absolute center of." Truthful, unflinching and humorous, the speech has since resonated online.

- You can change!: A depressing mindset for unhappy high school students involves the idea that nothing about one's experience will change. "Everything changes – this is the one rule of life you can count on," says Pearson, whose went on a worldwide adventure after college. "Teens who go the villainous route often have an attitude that nothing about them or the world is going to be different unless they intervene with extreme behavior." In reality, one or two key shifts in thinking can change the course in a young person's life trajectory. Friends, parents and educators have the best access for helping a troubled teen to "see the light."

About Ryan D. Pearson

After completing a Bachelor of Laws degree at age 21, Ryan D. Pearson took a leap of faith by leaving the beautiful beaches of Australia to travel the world. He eventually landed in Montreal, where he lived for several years before returning home to write about his adventures. He overcame many challenging personal experiences and now embraces an audacious new lifestyle. Pearson writes about his own character arc – involving a supernatural and overzealous way of life – via character Reagan Jameson.