

The Wannabe

By Marilyn Reeves

The young driver ahead of me raced against the flashing red light and the clanging bell and made it through just before the black and white crossbars swung down. But now she sat stuck right in the middle of the track, unable to move backward or forward, paralyzed with fear. I leapt from my car, crawled under the barricade and yanked open her car door. She gave me a helpless look as I pulled her free of her seatbelt and thrust her in front of me, racing for the embankment just as the train came around the bend. The warning scream of the whistle was accompanied by a hideous screeching of brakes and then a loud metallic crunch as the engine smashed into the little car, shoving it sideways along the track for a good quarter of a mile before it finally slid off into the ditch in a crumpled heap. But I save the girl's life. That's all that really mattered.

Another time, as I walked past a tall building, I was suddenly accosted by the acrid smell of smoke. I looked up and could see flames shooting out an open window on the fourth floor. Then I heard a young child screaming for help. I threw open the entry door of the building and ran up the steps, gagging and choking on the roiling black smoke. But there she was, standing in the hallway, clutching her teddy bear and crying helplessly as the apartment behind her blazed in an inferno of fire. I grabbed the little girl and ran with her back down the stairs, just in the nick of time, as the firetruck pulled up to the curb. I received a Civilian's Medal of Honor and got my name in the paper for that act of courage.

We were marching down a ravine in the scorching afternoon heat of Afghanistan. Bullets were dancing and pinging all around us as we being fired upon by a gunman hidden in the rocks high up on the other side of the hill. Suddenly there was a loud explosion and the soldier in front of me screamed in agony as an I.E.D. blew off his left foot. Although he outweighed me by a good fifty pounds, I lent him my shoulder to lean on as I helped him scramble into a ditch and out of the line of fire. I tore off my shirt to wrap around his bleeding stump and waited with him there, giving him sips of water from my canteen, until the helicopter came to pull us up to safety.

These are just a few of the brave acts of courage I have performed in my lifetime. But the bravest thing I've ever done? My bravest moment was when I woke up from my fantasies and faced the fact that I'll never be a hero. I'll leave the real thing to those other good people who are a whole lot braver than I.