

What America REALLY Needs

By Don Bendell

Tommy was sick to his stomach. Bradley, Jones, and Joe were approaching him near the swings, and Mr. Clayton was the playground monitor. Tommy knew the three bullies would take his lunch money again, and Mr. Clayton, the nerdy science teacher, would not even see them let alone stop them. Tommy was nauseated, knees trembling, he could feel his heart pounding in his neck, and hear it beating loudly in his ears. His mother wanted to go the school board meeting and joined a national anti-bullying campaign, hoping she could find a solution to his problem. His father, however, told him to simply stand up to the three bullies, and they would back down. Then he went back to his beer and reality show. Tommy had made up his mind that he would listen to his dad.

The three surrounded him in a half circle, and Tommy stuck out his chin defiantly, saying, "You aren't taking my lunch money again, Bradley."

Jone's punch from the right rear caught Tommy behind the temple, and he saw stars spinning around and his knees got wobbly. This scared him even more, and Tommy could not help but start crying. These three did not care about grades, but he got straight As, and all he could think of was the principal's ominous warning, "Anybody who fights in this school will be suspended, both parties."

He fell on the ground, and Bradley immediately kicked him in the stomach while Joe kicked him in the back. Panic-stricken, Tommy cried trying to get his wind back and felt Bradley's hands as they fished the bills and coins out of the front pocket of his jeans. The bullies taunted him some more then walked away laughing. Tommy lay there

sobbing as he thought about the fact that his dad was a baseball and football player in school, and it was easy for him to fight back. All Tommy did was sit and play video games and get increasingly heavier, as his mom did not want Tommy to “get overheated” when he played.

This little scenario and the characters are all fictional, but it is an all-too-familiar story being played out on playgrounds and in neighborhoods all over America. It is also indicative, in small part, of what has happened to our nation, the “sissification” of America. Moms and dads have not prepared children for society, so mom and dad handle bullies, not the child who actually needs to work their way out of bullying crises in order to develop societal survival skills. However, our national problems envelop so much more than bullying. We see our nation’s youth playing horribly bloody and violent video games with no conscious thoughts or concern about those they are shooting with incredibly accurate but fake electronic automatic weapons and laser-sighted guns, grenades, and bombs. The goal is to excel to higher levels in video games or to beat a higher score, but there is no discussion about the side effects of blood-letting, of death, and mayhem. The results: Our children become desensitized to excessive violence, to political correctness so now-enmeshed in societal mores, what used to be immoral is oft-times now considered commonplace. They see a Walt Disney-generated heroine, Hannah Montana, magically transformed into Hannah the Slut seemingly overnight, sexual innuendo has become a second language for many children, and the objectification of girls sets up a whole new generation of victims. Again, our children become desensitized to this. Our leadership in Washington has changed so drastically. Gone are the statesmen of yesteryear. Now, we have poll-watchers who sway in the wind like willows, blowing one way and then the next.

What is wrong with America, and besides the time-worn simple answers, how can we correct it? The answer is Cowboys!!!!

I have been very fortunate in my life. I am very proud and feel very blessed to be a disabled Vietnam veteran, specifically a Green Beret (US Army Special Forces) officer, and two of my six grown children are decorated Green Beret sergeants-first-class now serving. I also have been a serious student of the martial arts for over 47 years and have been fortunate enough to have some national success and recognition there. Third, I am also very blessed to be a best-selling western author with over 3,000,000 copies of my books in print. What inspired me and guys like me to achieve such things in life? Hokey, corny, idealistic characters who influenced us as children. Heroes, with names like Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Gene Autry, Rex Allen, Annie Oakley, James Arness, the Range Rider, Cochise, the Cisco Kid, Lash LaRue, the Lawman, Cheyenne Bodie, Maverick, the Lone Ranger, Sky King, Buffalo Bill, Red Ryder, Superman, Wonder Woman, most of John Wayne's characters, and many, many more.

When I was a child, we did not worship at the altar of any like Justin Bieber, Peewee Herman, or Spongebob Squarepants. We believed in men and women we saw on Saturday morning television or Saturday matinee movies who always stood up and were counted. They taught us to fight injustice, stand up to bullies, to believe in God, country, freedom, morality, and hard work. Those corny characters I saw made me aspire to become something much greater than myself. They did so for a generation of us. Young kids like me in those days grew up believing that your word was your bond, your handshake was a signed contract, you played by the rules, you stood up for the oppressed, respected your elders, and treated everybody with friendship and openness.

I actually believed that if you were hurt or wounded, you bit down on a piece of leather, sucked it up, and accomplished whatever your goal was. Patriotism was not only a good thing: It was a great thing. Service in the cause of freedom was a proud and noble thing, and humility was simply the way you acted. Men and boys were to open doors for women and girls and you treated them with respect. No matter how strong a woman might be, she wanted a man who would always make her feel protected and loved. Marriage was a comfortable partnership, not a competition. My heroes of old boasted about their faith in God and did not hide it behind a cloak of political correctness and they got a lump in their throat when the National Anthem was played.

As a youth, I would play with a stick for a week. On Monday, that stick might be a sword like Zorro's or Robin Hood's, and I would climb a tree in my yard pretending I was scaling a castle wall to save a damsel in distress. On Tuesday, it would be a bow and imaginary arrows as I tiptoed around the neighborhood, an Apache warrior and member of Cochise's band of Chiricahuas. Wednesday I would turn the stick into a Winchester carbine or a soldier's M1 rifle, as I fantasized some other magic adventure. I dreamed about someday living in the mountains of the west on a real ranch with a real horse, like I do now.

Around the world, one figure is revered as a true hero: the American cowboy. In 1968-1969, as a Green Beret, I lived with the nomadic aboriginal Jeh tribe of Montagnard tribespeople along the border of Laos, in South Vietnam's Central Highlands region. The "Yards" never called me by my name. They called me Trung-uy (meaning Lieutenant) Cowboy. I wore a cowboy hat and a six-shooter around camp and they were fascinated by this. They had never seen television sets, magazines, or movies. They wore loincloths and carried spears and crossbows when we came, and

they ate mountain rice, monkeys, rats, and other jungle animals. They were some of the most primitive people in the world, but every man, woman, and child knew what a cowboy was. Cowboys were their heroes, too.

A decade ago, I gave a sixty-some year old successful Korean businessman a cowboy hat, bolo tie, and cowboy belt and buckle. They became his prized possessions, and he still wears them with his business attire.

Years ago, an older friend of mine was visiting the Holy Lands with his wife and was in line to see one of the historical attractions in Jerusalem. He was dressed the way he normally dressed and became surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd calling him “cowboy.” Many asked for his autograph.

Why are people the world over fascinated with the American cowboy? Because of those longtime heroes, now missing from our TV and silver screens. They all had several things in common: They were tough-minded, rugged individualists, courageous, and they lived by their own strict moral code.

I wrote my own Code of the West years ago, which I live by:

Don Bendell's CODE OF THE WEST:

- Cowboys should treat women like ladies, period.
- Cowboys fight fair, but only when they have to, and when they do have to fight, they win.
- You know exactly where you stand with a cowboy. There are no gray areas, only black and white, but not when it comes to skin color.

- A cowboy is only as good as his word.
- A cowboy protects his family, spread, and community.
- A cowboy will fight for, and take care of orphans, widows, and those who are oppressed.
- A cowboy will go out of his way to avoid a fight and is always willing to share his grub, campfire, and water with ya.'
- And finally; A cowboy believes in his God, and he believes in America and will fight and die to protect either.

That is certainly not an original idea. Many of the heroes of my youth had a code they lived by, but in today's society if you ask most children and many adults what they believe in and stand for, they cannot tell you. That is a real shame and a major problem in our country. It is like a ship with no rudder that wanders aimlessly letting the wind and the tide decide its course. A man or woman who stands for nothing will easily fall for anything. That is what has happened to almost all of our politicians, in both parties.

I have written 27 books of several genres, but I purposely make less money writing westerns, trying my best to revive those heroes of my past for the children of the future. I know that such heroes can help save America if they are simply there for children, no, for all people to emulate. For America is a nation of heroes, and it was built upon the courage, quiet strength, and morality of heroes. By heroes, I do not necessarily mean cowboys or soldiers. It can be the teenaged mom and teenaged dad who took responsibility for an immature, unplanned pregnancy, instead of aborting their mistake. It can be the single mom raising four children when the man-boy father

abandoned them. It can be the young black child who listens to everybody in his neighborhood talk about being a victimized race which is owed a guaranteed rocking chair at evening-tide, but instead thinks about the strength and survivability of his ancestors. He simply works hard to get good grades and go to medical school, without ever once whining or complaining. It can be that one lone child who stands up to the school administration who are trying to force him to deny his or her faith and not pray when he or she chooses to. When we bring back the corny idealistic heroes, America will once again become a nation of principle. Success duplicates success and courage begets valor. We can start this very day, by making a personal decision to do our part to return to becoming one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. A journey begins with saddling up, mounting up, and taking the first few steps. Soon, those small steps turn into a trot, followed by a canter, and then an all-out hair-whipping gallop, as if you mounted up with wings like eagles. Then, before you know it, we will, once again, become America, the home of heroes.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Don Bendell is a best-selling author whose style has been likened to Louis L'Amour and Zane Grey, a disabled Green Beret Vietnam veteran, and a 1995 inductee into the International Karate and Kickboxing Hall of Fame. He owns the Strongheart Ranch in southern Colorado and is the author of the just-released western *Blood Feather* (Berkley-Penguin, Aug, 2013).

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