

# 5<sup>th</sup> HERO ESSAY

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*"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."* -Joseph Campbell

It's mid-March, 2020. I'm on my way back from 5th grade camp, in the big banana colored box that is your bus. My class has to depart two days earlier than scheduled due to a new rapidly spreading virus...the Coronavirus.

I'm holding back tears. Some are screaming;—others worriedly texting their loved ones.

"See you in a couple of weeks."

"This won't last long.

That was the last time I saw my friends that year...

My Michigan hero is my next-door neighbor, Kevin Popp. During quarantine, Mr. Popp had a grand idea. Healthcare workers were all over the news, working hard to provide for their families and care for many in their darkest hours. Kevin Popp volunteered his free time, making large wooden heart shaped signs, each with a white medical cross with the stenciled words "Thank You." Mr. Popp paid for the wood, the paint, the vinyl letters, and the stakes out of his own pocket. During the first eight months of Covid, he made as many signs as he could, gave them away for free, and enlisted friends to drop them off to homeowners, hospitals, fire stations and the like.

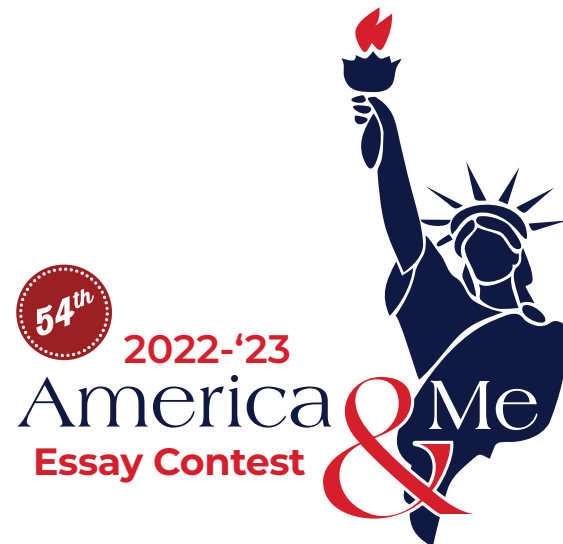
If you've heard of the phrase "paying it forward," this is an excellent example. In order to receive and display a sign, each recipient was asked to do two favors: buy a gift card from a local restaurant and deliver it to a facility employing frontline workers.

Kevin Popp's initiative accomplished three great goals: The signs created a visual image of appreciation for our front-line workers throughout many communities. The gift cards supported restaurant owners who were struggling to stay in business during COVID. Finally,

the gift cards helped ensure that frontline workers felt cared for and had food to eat during long tiring shifts.

Kevin Popp has taught me a wide variety of skills, including how to harvest pumpkins, clean up our beach, and how to pull nails from boards. Above all else, though through his heroic efforts two years ago, he taught me to be thoughtful and has shown me the importance of caring for others.

Although it was terrible to leave camp, as well as not see my friends for the year forward, there was a silver lining to this pandemic that came in the form of dedicated family time, as well as exploring new hobbies. But above all, spending time with my beloved neighbor, Mr. Popp. Kevin L. Popp will forever be one of my biggest inspirations. He is my hero.



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