

Sounding a warning about an

He wanted to make this graduation speech special. For one thing, his son was a senior. But he was also worried about the kids, these privileged upper-middle-class students at the Hackley School in Tarrytown, N.Y.

In talking to them over the years, as teacher and headmaster, he'd noticed something disturbing: They knew celebrities galore and admired plenty of TV, movie and sports stars, but they didn't have any heroes.

So he decided he would speak to them about heroes, and offer examples — three female heroes.

And so, on that June afternoon in 1992, Peter Gibbon told the story of Eva Jane Price, a Christian missionary in China who helped opium addicts, the maimed and starving, and who was murdered in the Boxer Rebellion.

And of Kaethe Kollwitz, a German sculptress who battled social injustice and her own grief and despair by creating magnificent art.

And of Eugenia Ginzburg, who survived Stalin's prison camps through courage, curiosity and poetry (in a stifling boxcar bound for Siberia, she struck a deal with the

guards: Give us water; I'll recite Pushkin).

"True education is the habitual vision of greatness," Gibbon told his audience that afternoon, quoting the British educator Sir Richard Livingstone. He urged the students to look for heroes beyond the athletic field, the movie screen and the recording studio, and to be guided in their choices by "some sort of moral grandeur or loftiness."



Art Carey
This Life

Did his words transform many lives? Probably not. But they had a huge effect on the life of one person: Gibbon. Newsweek published his speech, and it elicited loads of mail.

Today, Gibbon, 57, is a research associate at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. And the subject he's been researching and speaking about at schools around the country is heroes.

Recently, Gibbon spent the day at the Episcopal Academy in Merion. Tennis-player trim, tweedy as Mr. Chips, he has a pensive, cerebral manner, the distracted air of an intellectual who is pondering five ideas at once. He is still a master teacher, in the tradition of Endicott Peabody, Groton's influential moral-

ist and character builder.

Growing up in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Gibbon admired baseball and tennis players but also devoured landmark biographies about Lincoln, Davy Crockett, Clara Barton, Kit Carson. It was hardly great literature but it gave him a sense of history and, more important, "an heroic outlook."

As a Harvard undergrad, he wrote a paper about Thomas Carlyle, an early advocate of cultivating and emulating heroes. In those days, Harvard men prided themselves on their appreciation of high culture, Gibbon recalled. They revered certain professors and adopted literary heroes, such as Samuel Johnson and T.S. Eliot.

Today, Harvard, and the world, has changed, particularly with respect to heroes.

"In America, we no longer have public heroes," Gibbon told the students. "Politicians speak in platitudes, and squabble. Corporate leaders downsize, then increase their own salaries. *Journalist* has become synonymous with *cynic*. Lawyers are seen as business-seekers not as problem-solvers, and doctors as wary technicians. Soldiers press buttons, athletes are mercenary" and to many youths, the President is "a joke," a Leno punchline.

Instead of public heroes, es-