

Siren's "silent siren" fills chapter in nationally known author's newest book

by Nancy Jappe
Leader staff reporter

SIREN – As part of his odyssey to find heroes among our nation's small-town folk, nationally known author Brad Herzog from California paid a visit to the Pour House in Siren one morning not long ago. The young bartender handed him a framed newspaper clipping that was hanging high above the bar.



Brad Herzog

"Tornado Anniversary Edition," the newspaper from June 2002 proclaimed. "A year ago," the article began, "terror came out of the sky ..."

Herzog looked at the frightening photos that were reproduced in that paper – photos of a street of toppled trees, the Pour House with, as he put it, "its roof open like a sardine can," a car overturned in front.

The bartender then asked Herzog what he was doing at the Pour House in Siren on that day. "I'm on a bit of a journey," Herzog answered, going on to tell her about the stories told by Homer of heroes and of sirens, goddesses whose singing lured sailors to death on the shores of tiny islands.

"When I finish," Herzog said, "I am confident that my small-town bartender has found some enlightenment amid the dim tavern."

Actually, Herzog was on more than a "bit" of a journey. His journey to Siren and beyond started many days before, when he embarked on a mission. His goal, as he puts it in the book that came after: "Visit with other lives. Explore other places. Find coherence in the diversity I am sure to encounter. Accumulate the knowledge of journeys past and present as I rumble toward an understanding of the heroic ideal. Locate exemplars of that elusive concept. Court adventure and epiphany and insight. Then come home in one piece, and possibly at peace with (myself)."

In actuality, Herzog was on his way crosscountry to attend a college reunion in Ithaca, N.Y. His wife, Amy, challenged him to make this journey after Herzog, in the process of facing middle age, started asking himself questions like: "What kind of an existence have I crafted for myself? Can I claim to have lived a good life? Are my contributions in any way heroic? And in contemporary America, what constitutes a heroic life anyhow?"

"Go take a drive," Amy insisted," Herzog relates in the book. "You have thirty-one days. I'll meet you in Ithaca."

In other words, as Herzog put it, "Go away. Figure it out, she was saying. Don't come back until you do."

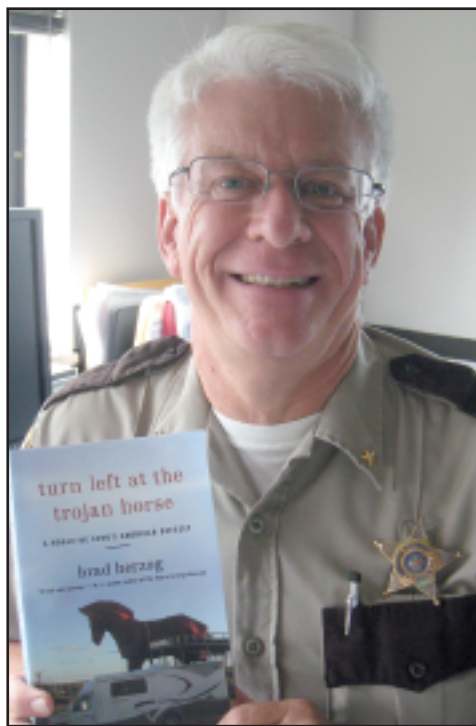
The result of Herzog's journey, taken on the road alone, notepad close by, resulted in a 2010 book titled "turn left at the trojan horse" (all in small letters).

Herzog, who is now on a summer two-month book-publicity road trip across the country in an RV with his wife and two sons, will be at the Barnes and Noble in the Galleria Shopping Center, 3225 W. 69th Street, Edina, Minn., at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 11, to autograph copies of the book. Dean Roland from Siren plans to be there, and Roland hopes other people in Siren and the surrounding area will come and join him.

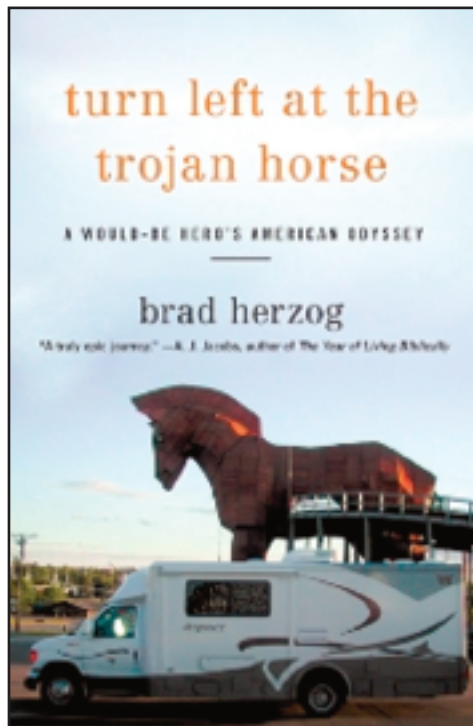
So, back to Herzog, armed with his impressive knowledge of Greek mythology to weave into the story he planned to tell, Herzog set out on that journey, leaving to cross country from, would you believe, the Cyclops Café in Seattle, Wash. In case



Brad Herzog and his family stand in front of their motor home. – Special photo



LEFT: Dean Roland, Siren, holds a copy of a newly released book by California author Brad Herzog. Herzog's book, "turn left at the trojan horse," all in small letters, contains a chapter titled "silent siren." Anyone who was around Siren June 18, 2001, will know that on that stormy night the village's warning siren was indeed silent as an F-3 tornado bore down upon the village. Herzog's book talks about a hero born that night. That hero was Siren's then-police Chief Dean Roland. – Photo by Nancy Jappe



you are not familiar with the journey of Odysseus, at one point in the story he and his 12 ships caught sight of the Island of the Cyclops – a place of early cave dwellers inhabited by a one-eyed giant named Polyphemus.

Herzog stopped in an Oregon town called Athena (sound similar to Athens, Greece?), and then to the town of Troy at the end of a treacherous, winding road marked with a sign reading "Primitive Road: No Warning Signs."

Questions he started to ask the local people revolved around: What, exactly, is a hero? What is a heroic life? What is the purpose of a hero? Is it something we strive for or is it a standard we can't possibly reach? Is it an overused term? Is there such a thing as a universal hero?

And the response – "Of course, the questions were easier than the answers," Herzog said. "Trying to zero in on an absolute definition of heroic achievement is like trying to find your way to the exit of an unworkable maze. Every supposition leads to more possibilities, so the task becomes exponentially more difficult, and

you wind up somewhere near to where you began."

On the next page of his book, Herzog goes on to say, "I am convinced there is a heroic quality to not just doing something but doing it to the best of your ability. Individually, it is an affirmation of spirit. Collectively, it furthers humanity."

And so, in his quest to find people who were cast into situations where they performed heroically, Herzog found himself in Siren, in the squad car used by the county sheriff to tour the area once patrolled by a police chief named Dean Roland. "This is my first time in a police cruiser," Herzog said. "It is a relief to be in the front seat."

"Remarkably, although there is a warning siren here, mounted on a pole in the center of town, it had been struck by lightning and severely damaged a few weeks earlier (before the tornado in 2001) – more proof that Zeus (chief god of the ancient Greeks) is a sardonic bas****," Herzog explained as he discussed his findings on that tour of the Siren area.

"The broken siren was so old that re-

placement parts weren't available," he said. "An appointment with a representative from FEMA (to discuss funding for a new warning system) had been scheduled for June 21 – three days after the tornado struck. So it was left to people like Dean Roland to sound the alarm."

Through talking with Roland about his experiences before, during and after the tornado, Herzog came away with the realization that he himself, because of the life he leads, is in a position to put some balance into his schedule, that he doesn't have to bend to someone else's agenda. "For every serious issue I tackle, I can follow it up by setting a course for whimsy," Herzog wrote. "Dean Roland doesn't get to pick and choose. The world comes to him, for better or for worse, sometimes at two hundred miles an hour."

Roland isn't the only person Herzog talks to in his cross-country journey. Each chapter tackles a different person and a different location – a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in Oregon, a lifetime hobo in Montana, a bomb-diffusing soldier from Wisconsin and a paragon of reliability in Ohio ...

His publicity material proclaims the book as "simply the story of one man trying to find his way." Herzog puts it this way: "My goal was to make it intimate yet epic, accessible yet enlightening. To me, that's the definition of a memorable road trip."

Brad Herzog is a graduate of Cornell University. He is a former newspaper reporter and a frequent contributor to national magazines. He had the memorable experience of appearing and winning some big money on the TV show, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," through which he became an overnight sensation. Herzog lives in Pacific Grove, Calif., with Amy, who did the photography for the book, and their two sons.

"I like his style of writing, interspersed with authors, his background and his faith, and how he can intertwine them," Roland commented. "I really enjoyed how he identified heroes in each of the towns he went through. I think he really caught the essence of that."

Roland recalled that then-Gov. Scott McCallum visited Siren the day after the tornado. McCallum was talking about a hero of the tornado. "I said (to myself), 'I hope I get to meet that guy he is talking about,'" Roland said. "That guy was me. I was just doing my job. That's all I have ever done, and it isn't about getting attention."

To Roland, that's the message of heroism – that the people Herzog visits in the book were great "guys" (used to mean both men and women), everyday people who were always there and were just doing their job, whatever it was.

When Herzog was asked how he discovered Roland and the role he played in the 2001 tornado, he answered: "I simply chose Siren as an interesting place that I wanted to explore (fitting the book's concept). Then I started doing research, primarily just Googling around on the Internet. I came across the tale of the tornado and Dean's role in it. I contacted him and asked if he could meet up with me when I came through town. Simple as that."

Herzog referred to "Seasons Without Shade," the book a group of concerned Siren people put together to describe feelings and events during and after the tornado. "I'm quite familiar with 'Seasons Without Shade.' How do you think I got most of my info about the tornado and the aftermath? Very well-done book."

Northern county wants to improve sexual assault response

by Laura Podgornik
Wisconsin Public Radio

DOUGLAS COUNTY - Douglas County's Sexual Assault Response Team is looking at a fast, effective response to fight sexual assault and help victims. This is a new effort to fight an old problem.

The SART committee is made up of police officers, Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse advocates, UW-Superior

health and safety officials, Douglas County health officials and the district attorney's office. CASDA Director Kelly Berger says sexual assault has been on the back burner for too long, taking a back seat to domestic violence. Berger says officials wanted to change the culture, and have more awareness and education about sexual assault.

UW-Superior campus safety Director

Gary Gulbrandson says it's important for the organizations to look at the big picture. He says sexual assault is a community problem, not just on the UW-Superior campus.

Superior police investigations sgt. Rick Hughes says this is an important first step to deal with sexual assaults in any community.

The SART committee is working on a

mission statement to include having a victim-centered approach, responding to cases within 24 hours when possible and holding perpetrators accountable when the victim sees fit.

The only other SART committees in Wisconsin are in Brown and Green counties.