

Taeyang Chang (11th Grade)
Rolesville High School



A Hero's Blueprint: Service, Sacrifice, and *Star Wars*

The garage lights were still glowing long after the rest of the house had gone to sleep. After spending another long day providing for our family, my father still sat surrounded by sheets of foam, paint, and scattered tools, carefully crafting *Star Wars* costumes for my brother and me. As a child, I only saw the excitement of becoming Commander Cody. Looking back, I see something far greater: a father whose quiet acts of service and sacrifice taught me what it truly means to be a hero.

The courage we remember from September 11 reminds us that heroes are defined by their willingness to serve others without the need for recognition. While some heroes are remembered in history books, others shape lives through countless everyday sacrifices. My father embodies both forms of heroism, dedicating himself to our country through the United States Air Force Reserve while serving our family with the same unwavering devotion.

Service is not simply what my father does; it's who he is. He continues to serve our country as an aircraft mechanic in the United States Air Force Reserve while also taking on another job to provide for our family. No matter how demanding the day had been, he rarely complained. Instead, he quietly gave whatever was needed, whether it was maintaining aircraft, supporting his fellow service members, or simply making sure my brother and I had everything we needed to grow.

Every morning, I rushed into the garage eager to see what had changed overnight. The smell of spray paint lingered in the air as another piece of armor slowly came to life. Foam covered the floor, hot glue clung to the workbench, and every new piece reflected hours of careful craftsmanship. At the time, I only saw incredible costumes. Looking back, I realize that every painted piece and every late night reflected my father's willingness to sacrifice his own time and rest to bring joy to his children.

When my brother and I won the costume contest, I celebrated the victory. My father simply smiled. As a child, I thought he was proud of the costumes he had built. Today, I understand that his greatest accomplishment was never the armor itself, but the memories he created and the values he passed on to us. Twenty-five years after September 11, we continue to honor heroes whose courage and selflessness inspire us all. My father reminds me that heroism is not always found in extraordinary moments, but in the quiet sacrifices made every day for the people we love. Although the armor eventually became too small to wear, the blueprint my father gave me for a life of service, sacrifice, and love is one I will carry with me forever.