

Unlikely heroes

There's a lot that newspapers can do to celebrate the spirit of heroism

An unexpected act of kindness or courage is what real heroes are known for. I first heard about Manjunath Shanmugam on the news. The IIM Lucknow alumnus, who was a manager with Indian Oil Corporation, was murdered in the line of duty in 2005.

The story was a 'routine' one in reporting parlance. I had to speak to his parents, friends, professors and write the copy. What emerged through several conversations was



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t h a t Manjunath was a kind, soft-spoken, happy soul, who believed in doing what is right, irrespective of the consequences. Once I was through writing about Manjunath, my cynicism had given way to a semblance

of faith, that there are heroes among regular folks.

Recently, I met another unlikely hero: Subhashini Vasanth, wife of Ashok Chakra awardee Col Vasanth Venugopal who was killed in an encounter with militants in Kashmir in August 2007.

The courage she showed in dealing with her personal loss in public eye was admirable. Her mission now is to create awareness about the armed forces among children and adults. Subhashini didn't mince words when she told me that the 26/11 Mumbai attacks were good.

She added, "People don't value their (soldiers') contribution until terror comes to a Mumbai or a Delhi." Her next remark also remains with me, "Youngsters feel a sense of pride about being Indian. But it is our responsibility to ensure they retain this feeling into adulthood."