

## Thank You Mr. Lieber

Just yesterday, one of my personal heroes unexpectedly and unfortunately passed away. Hearing the breaking news was absolutely devastating, as is writing this article right now. In all honesty, I'm still having a really hard time fathoming that one of the most talented storytellers of history has passed. For this article, I'm just going to speak right from the heart, so forgive me if my thoughts are a little jumbled.

When I was four years old, an accident occurred. An accident that was as life-changing as the time Peter Parker was bitten by the radioactive spider. This "accident" was the time I first saw 2002's *Spider-Man*. I remember walking into the video store every Saturday morning with my dad; each week we would pick out a new movie to bring home and watch. Despite us often times picking from the 3-for-\$1 VHS tape section, one week we chose from their DVD section. As I was going through the titles, one cover stood out to me the most. It was a rather simple image of a costumed man climbing up a building. Thinking nothing of it really, my father and I bought the DVD and watched it that night. Even though I was so young at the time, the moment I saw Tobey Maguire's Peter Parker, I saw myself. And even though the origin of Peter Parker had so many multiple and complex layers, somehow four-year-old me was able to understand it all. Peter Parker did not become Spider-Man by accident; and I did not watch this movie by accident. There was a reason why Pete became Spidey, and why I became a devout Spidey fan.

As I grew up with the character of Peter Parker, I began to read many of the comic books, specifically the ones that started it all, the original run of *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, these books added so much to my personal data bank of Spider-Man lore. The way Stan Lee wrote the character was unfathomably magical. I was able to read, understand, and enjoy every word of what he wrote when I was a little kid, and get that same enjoyment and much more as I read it now. I have grown up with this character, and continue to grow up with Peter Parker, especially since the MCU Peter and I are growing up at the same time.

For me, I think the reason why I love Spider-Man so much is because of what he stands for. He stands for justice, hope, courage, equality, and would give his life to save a life. He's the person I think we all aspire to be. We all know the story: Peter Parker became the Spider-Man to avenge the death of his uncle and use his newfound "curse" to the good of mankind, etc. etc.

*"This is my gift, my curse. Who am I? I'm Spider-Man."*

-Peter Parker (2002's *Spider-Man*)

Spider-Man represents one of the most important life lessons a person can learn, and will most certainly be the quote I use the most when I have kids one day:

*“With great power there must also come great responsibility.”*

I mean c’mon, how AMAZING is that quote? I swear, I will always live by that until the day I die. It’s the quote that everyone on planet earth knows, but still (man, can’t wait to get that quote tattooed one day).

The most important thing that I have to remember when I talk about how much I love Spider-Man is how much it personally impacted and inspired me. Stan Lee, as a storyteller, inspired me unlike anyone else. From Iron Man, to the Avengers, to the obvious Spider-Man and beyond, Stan Lee inspired me to tell stories. He taught me that I can make a powerful statement that applies to global issues while using the premise of costumed geeks in spandex running around New York City. So many filmmakers and film enthusiasts nowadays give zero credit to comic books and superheroes. What these people fail to recognize is that comic books paved the way of modern storytelling. These characters define the modern protagonist of any story. Whether that story is in an independent drama or an epic blockbuster action flick, every good protagonist in modern media draws parallels to the modern protagonist that was established in comic books. And at the very core of the creation of the modern hero, you’ll find Stan Lee. Stan “the man.” Generalissimo. Stanley Martin Lieber.

Mr. Lieber, without you I would be a completely different person. I wouldn’t have been inspired to become a storyteller if it wasn’t for you. You inspired the generations before me to become excellent storytellers so they too, can inspire my generation and the many to follow. Your work and what you stood for as a person will never be forgotten. You shall forever be on the tier of Mozart, Shakespeare, and Walt Disney. The world owes you an unpayable debt.

On behalf of all storytellers, on behalf of the Marvel fan base, and on behalf of all of the children you inspired and will continue to inspire for centuries upon centuries.... thank you. May you rest in peace. Excelsior!



*Photo Caption:* I had the great honor of meeting one of my heroes, Stan Lee. I met him for the first time in 2013 at New York Comic Con. I then was fortunate enough to meet him earlier this year at ACE Comic Con. There, Mr. Lieber signed an original copy of *Amazing Spider-Man #33* from 1966. After the signing was complete, I spoke to Stan's assistant for a little while. It was just a general conversation about comic books and I found out that Stan's favorite book he ever wrote was *Amazing Spider-Man #33*.

I'll never forget at this same convention (ACE Comic Con) when I reached out to shake his hand, greeting him by "Mr. Lieber." One of the convention staff bodyguards said Stan wasn't allowed to shake hands, but Mr. Lieber didn't care. He shoved his body guard out of the way and made sure he shook my hand. That moment right there made me just want to tear up. Stan was a class act who loved each and every one of his fans like they were family. He attended hundreds of conventions over the years and met millions of people who admired his work. His life's mission of making people happy came true, as he will always continue to bring smiles to the entire world in the times we need it most.

*"Let's lay it right on the line. Bigotry and racism are among the deadliest social ills plaguing the world today. But, unlike a team of costumed super-villains, they can't be halted with a punch in the snoot, or a zap from a ray gun. The only way to destroy them is to expose them-- to reveal them for the insidious evils they really are. The bigot is an unreasoning hater-- one who hates blindly, fanatically, indiscriminately. If his hang-up is black men, he hates ALL black men. If a redhead once offended him, he hates ALL redheads. If some foreigner beat him to a job, he's down on ALL foreigners. He hates people he's never seem-- people he's never known" with equal intensity-- with equal venom. Now, we're not trying to say it's unreasonable for one human being to bug another. But, although anyone has the right to dislike another individual, it's totally irrational, patently insane to condemn an entire race-- to despise an entire nation-- to vilify an entire religion. Sooner or later, if man is ever to be worthy of his destiny, we must fill our hearts with tolerance. For then, and only then, will we be truly worthy of the concept that man was created in the image of God-- a God who calls us ALL-- His children."*

-Stan Lee