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Inspired by war veterans, teen writes two books

Meet Nicholas Rider, an accomplished writer at the ripe age of 18

By Kristi O'Harran, Herald Columnist

Nicholas Rider didn't contact me about his impressive resume. He wanted to know about me, which is a great way to get my attention.

The 18-year-old needed to interview a journalist for a Civil Air Patrol project. I answered his questions about the world I work in, then tossed him a few queries.

I learned he is home schooled, has his pilot's license and is frequently asked to speak on television and on the radio. He offered to send me two books he wrote.

Books?

Eighteen years old?

Two volumes of "America's True Heroes" arrived. Each more than 300 pages long. And about my favorite topic to boot -- war veterans.

When Rider was about 8 years old, he took an autograph album to the front of a supermarket. He was inspired by his grandfather, John Haney, who served in World War II with the U.S. Marine Corps.

The youngster, who lives in Sultan, introduced himself to veteran-types, politely asking for their signatures, and the conversation flowed.

"I was surprised by how much they wanted to talk," Rider said. "They fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War and Iraq."

He said at first he was shy talking to them, but was intent on his mission.

"I got over my shyness," he said. "It really got to be fun."

He decided to write down their stories.

"America's True Heroes" are filled with stories and pictures he collected by visiting retirement homes and friends of friends. His first book is in its third printing. For more information, visit <http://www.nicholasrider.com/>.



Nicholas Rider of Sultan wrote two books about veterans. His grandfather, John Haney of Sultan, was a U.S. Marine in World War II.

Rider said it's important that people have something more than dry dates and names to illustrate history. He wants veterans honored while they are alive.

Read in the books about Jeffrey Crandall, who served in the U.S. Marines and Air Force; Jose De La Luiz Garcia, Navy veteran of World War II; and Gary Staples, who saw service in Vietnam with the Air Force. Rider included stories about those who served in the Merchant Marines and Coast Guard, too.

He said he joined the Civil Air Patrol almost six years ago because of his admiration for the military. CAP, the auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, offers aerospace education, cadet programs and emergency services such as search and rescue.

Capt. Mark Norton with the Paine Field Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol has worked with Rider for about a year. It's hard not to be amazed by the young man's accomplishments, Norton said.

"I'm fairly dubious about people who have his kind of portfolio," Norton said. "But Nick is for real."

Norton said he looks for flaws in Rider, the highest ranking cadet in the Paine Field Squadron.

"He is on a vertical trajectory," Norton said. "He's a stellar guy. There's not a single issue."

Rider is nominated for Cadet Commander of the Year for the Washington Wing of CAP. At his home, I met his mother, Mary, his father, Rick, who works at Boeing and sister, Stephanie, 16. Stephanie Rider said she loves to study. Her father said she is usually seen with a big book under one arm. The family doesn't watch TV, preferring to screen old movies they check out for free at the library.

"All of our favorite movie stars are dead," his mother said, laughing. "We only turn on the computer when it's absolutely necessary."

Her son builds model airplanes. Keeping physically fit is an addiction, Rider said. He has served as Cadet Executive Officer, instructor, and staff member at several Western Cadet Academies. Last summer he received the Outstanding Cadet Officer award for his work at the Arlington Fly-In.

He wears his hair in a crew cut, shines his boots and wears a uniform with CAP. At one CAP camp, he soloed in a glider. When he wants to go flying, he rents an airplane in Snohomish.

At the Arlington Fly-In, Norton spent a week with members of his squadron. He said in that amount of time, you see the good and bad about people.

"Nick is quiet, studied," Norton said. "You can see him collect his thoughts, to not just shoot off from the hip is refreshing."

Due to allergies, Rider was told he can't join the Navy. He said that broke his heart, but for the next best thing, he aims to become a lawyer. He is going to take online college classes at home. That will allow him to keep working on his books, he said.

Nick is 18 going on 72, his mother said.

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