Baton Rouge woman named national hero

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Two Louisianians — including a 14-year-old boy — are among 16 people named national heroes.

The teen-ager swam through rapids to rescue a woman after a canoe accident.

The other is a Baton Rouge woman who held onto a gunman’s arm to keep him from shooting a co-worker.

D. Robert “Bobby” Young Jr. of Forest Hill was canoeing with family and friends on the Buffalo River in Arkansas last May when a canoe tipped and Velma Messer, 37 and a non-swimmer, went into the water.

“I saw her go under,” Bobby said Friday, between his eighth-grade classes at Forest Hill Neighborhood School. “Her head went under water and she was waving one hand in the air, so I swam to her through the rapids and pulled her up.”

Bobby said he was wearing his life jacket and felt safe through the whole thing.

“I sort of floated, bobbing up and down, over to Velma,” he said. “She hung onto my jacket and then my daddy came and pulled us both back to shore.”

“I just did what comes naturally,” he said.

Mary Elizabeth Brayboy, 46, of Baton Rouge, was at work when an angry man stormed into her office threatening to shoot a co-worker. She is an editorial assistant with The Star, a patient publication at the Gillis W. Long Hansen’s Disease Center in Carville.

She said she didn’t have time, at first, to be afraid.

On March 29, 1984, just after lunch, a patient who had done some work for The Star’s printer came in, angry because the printer wasn’t pleased with the patient’s work, she said.

“He had a gun, and he pointed it at the man he was angry with,” she said. “I was standing there, and I realized he was getting ready to shoot.”

Brayboy hit the gunman’s arm, and his shot was deflected. It wounded a bystander’s leg.

“When he attempted, for the second time, to shoot the gentleman he had missed the first time, but the gun misfired,” she said.

“I shouted and got him by the shoulders,” she said.

“He turned and looked at me, and I guess he saw fear — by this time, I was starting to be afraid — and he turned and ran. Then, I tried to help the wounded man, as much as I could, and called for medical staff from the hospital.”

At the moment of crisis, Brayboy said, “I realized the man with the gun didn’t think life was important, and I realized that I did.” The gunman is now on parole, she said, but is no longer living in Louisiana.

She said she would help save a life again in a similar situation, “but I’m not going to go looking for it. I don’t know how people can just stand around and do nothing.”

The two were among 16 people from 10 states and Canada to receive the honor this year.

The recipients were each given checks for $2,500.

The commission has honored 6,985 Americans and Canadians since it was founded in 1904 by industrialist Andrew Carnegie.

Three of the 16 people honored Thursday died in their rescue attempts.