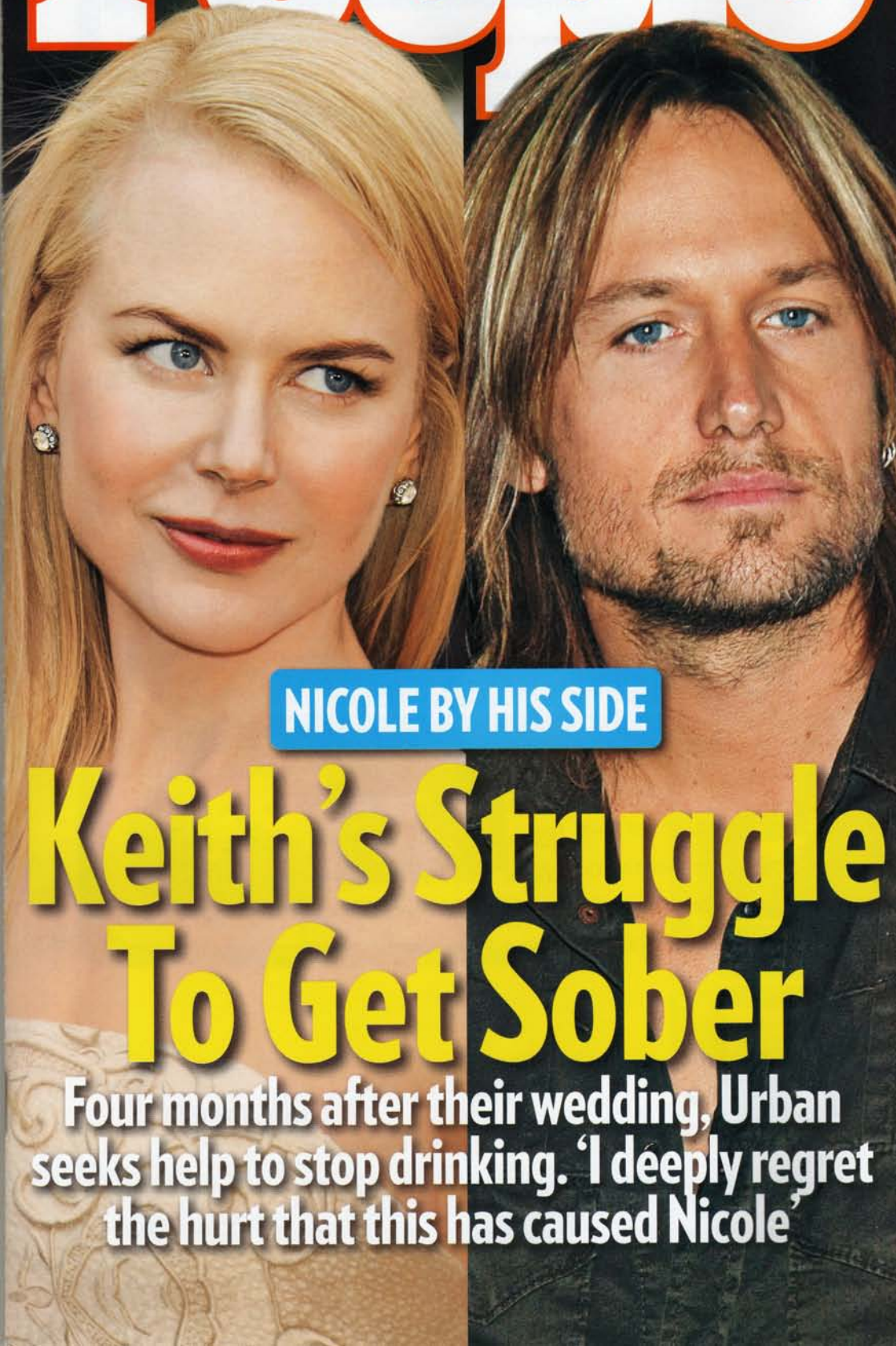


NOVEMBER 6, 2006

People

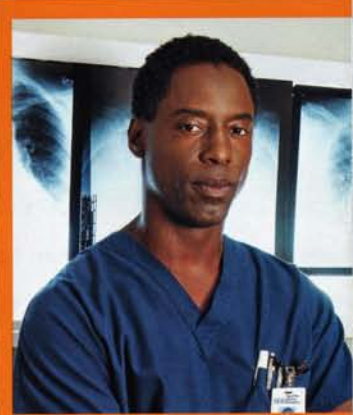
**HEROES
AMONG
US**
**OUR 2006
AWARDS**



NICOLE BY HIS SIDE

Keith's Struggle To Get Sober

Four months after their wedding, Urban seeks help to stop drinking. 'I deeply regret the hurt that this has caused Nicole'



**GREY'S ANATOMY
SCANDAL**
What Really
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Inside People



2006 heroes (from left): Coy, Decker, Taylor Crabtree, 16, Abel Delgado, 26, and Tracie Lee Dean, 35.

Our Kind of Heroes

Every week at PEOPLE, we bring readers the best and latest in celebrity goings-on. But we have also never wavered from our mission of—and passion for—covering the inspiring work of ordinary citizens. Americans give nearly \$250 billion a year to charitable causes, and growing numbers of people—65 million as of 2005—donate something just as valuable: their time. These men and women are our PEOPLE'S Heroes Among Us. In this issue, beginning on page 80, we salute five extraordinary heroes from 2006 and introduce four new ones nominated online by our readers: people who are doing amazing work in their own hometowns to help others.

When our honorees met each other for the first time—at a Los Angeles photo shoot on Oct. 20—the happiness

flowed. "It's humbling being here," said Houston police officer Bob Decker, 54, whose passion is helping the desperately poor along Mexico's Texas border. "These people really care about others—they're the best." Echoing that sentiment was Helen "Sam" Coy, 27, who turns around at-risk teenagers in Boston: "Getting together with caring folks energizes the soul." We hope you will find our heroes' stories of courage and compassion as inspiring as we do. Perhaps they'll even prompt action in your own life—and neighborhood.

LARRY HACKETT, MANAGING EDITOR

HEROES AMONG US, ON CBS AND PEOPLE.COM: TUNE IN TO CBS'S *THE EARLY SHOW* FROM OCT. 30 TO NOV. 3 TO SEE PROFILES OF THIS YEAR'S HEROES. STARTING OCT. 31, YOU CAN ALSO WATCH THE CLIPS AT WWW.PEOPLE.COM/HEROES2006

Photograph by JOE PUGLIESE

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People
HEROES
AMONG US

"Each of us has the power to be the answer to someone's prayer," says Bob Decker (far left, with Taylor Crabtree, Abel Delgado, Troie Lee Deas and Helen "Sara" Coy). "But we have to take action."

HEROES: THE BEST OF 2006

THE COURAGE TO CARE

Meet the best of the best—PEOPLE's five winners of the 2006 Heroes Among Us award—whose big hearts and unstoppable drive to help others inspire us. And on the following pages, we salute amazing hometown heroes nominated by our readers

Photograph by JOE FUGLIESE

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL: TRACIE LEE DEAN

OCCUPATION: Audi dealer general manager

PREOCCUPATION: The well-being of children—in particular, a sad-eyed little girl who appeared to be about 4, whom she spotted in an Alabama convenience store last January. [PEOPLE, Feb. 13]

MAIN TRAIT: Tenacity. Believing the child was in danger, Dean, 35, of Decatur, Ga., hounded law-enforcement officials and did her own sleuthing. Five days later the girl was tracked to a trailer, where she was living with two adults and a 17-year-old boy. After doctors determined that the girl had been sexually abused, the children were sent to a foster home. The two adults are in jail awaiting trial.

SECRET WEAPON: Gut instinct. “I get bad vibes all the time, about a person or place. I don’t think I’m crazy for feeling them anymore.”

NOT-SO-SECRET ADMIRER: An 80-year-old man who, having seen Dean on TV, sent her a silver necklace with two hearts symbolizing the two children.

UNEXPECTED DIVIDEND: Dean—on the board of Our House child care and shelter charity—was once a Big Sister and plans to become one again. “This whole experience,” she says, “made me want to be a better person.”



‘If you feel like someone’s in trouble and you feel like you can help, trust your instinct’



‘Take action, don’t be afraid of what people think, and do what you know is right in your heart’

THE BEST FRIEND: TAYLOR CRABTREE

MESSAGE OF LOVE: The Vista, Calif., 16-year-old has sent teddy bears (each one “pre-hugged”) to more than 20,000 kids hospitalized with cancer. [PEOPLE, Jan. 16]

PAINFUL MEMORY: At 7, she watched grandmother Louise Tharp, now 80, battle and beat colon cancer: “She was a high-energy person and chemo was so hard on her.”

RQ (RESOURCEFULNESS QUOTIENT): High. Started at age 7 by selling decorated hair clips to raise money, then assembled a network of 1,600 volunteers and negotiated a deal with Build-A-Bear Workshop founder Maxine Clark to buy bears for \$5.

BEAR BENEFIT: One nurse told her that MRIs taken when children hold their bears come out sharper, since kids are less frightened. Says Crabtree: “That’s proof of the power of hugging a bear.”

WISH: A bear for every patient. “I want them to know people care, even strangers.”

www.taybearhugs.org