

FINALIST

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### **The Consistency of Courage**

A knight rides into battle to avenge his father and defend his betrothed. A woman takes her husband's factory job as he leaves for World War II. A civil rights activist risks his safety, as well as his family's, to fight for the rights of his black brothers and sisters. Whether it is constructing bridges for civilizations or digging holes, courage can be found on any given page in our world history textbooks. Although the acts displaying this trait change as often as our clocks turn, courage is as it has always been: when prefaced with passion, constructing history.

How can courage be constant when the world and its events change every day? Courage remains the same because people remain the same. The things we are frightened of today are the same things we were frightened of yesterday, so overcoming these fears requires the same bravery. A gay man coming out to his friends and family is afraid of disapproval; accepting his homosexuality is the epitome of courage. This same form of courage was found in Abraham Lincoln whose fidelity to emancipation risked the approval of many US citizens. Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani teenage girl fighting for education, bargains her safety as she proceeds to be a voice for her peers. Similarly, a Muslim infidel stayed true to his beliefs as he faced potential persecution by Crusaders. A fear of failure is overcome by a young adult who pursues her acting dream opposed to going to medical school, but also by any leader who has chosen to send his country to battle despite the chance of defeat. Nelson Mandela believed that "courage [is] not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." As long as humans continue to triumph fears, courage will remain the same.

Fear is natural in all living things, as is the need for temporary (even when artificial) fearlessness. Courage is instinctive and prehistoric, even preceding humanity. It is a force that affects survival. It is present in a squirrel leaping from tree to tree as it escapes its predator, but lacking in an opossum playing dead on a busy highway. Courage today is—just as it was in the past—a quintessential aspect of living. It can be recognized in a woman who chooses to leave her abusive fiancé; she conjures courage to avoid the dangers hiding in clouds of her amour. It can be found in a father who, understanding the potential peril in his current financial state, relocates his family to a more modest home nearer to a new job. It can be seen in a patient who has refused to accept cancer's affidavit of death, fighting her way through chemotherapy. These modern fighters are David reborn, battling their own Goliaths. Sometimes in order to survive, humans must find within an ancient audacity.

Courageous is not something we try to be, it is something we are forced to be by circumstances out of our control—circumstances neither optimum nor abundant. Humans have no choice of what courage is. It is not a trend, fluctuating in and out of circulation like snakeskin handbags or vegetarian

burgers. The specifics change and the leaders change but the movements remain parallel. This idea can be seen in the adjuration for equality: the Emancipation Movement to Women's Rights, Women's Rights to Civil Rights, Civil Rights to Gay Rights. These movements were represented by Abraham Lincoln then Elizabeth Cady Stanton then Martin Luther King then Jacob Appel. Courage was both the cause and the effect for these leaders, and one might infer that courage will continue to act as a catalyst and an example, for courageous is what we were meant to be. In the words of William G.T. Shedd, "a ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for."