

SECOND PLACE

Kallen Schwark

Forest Hills Northern High School

12th grade

Logical Courage

I crept into the audition room, consumed by apprehension. I prepared the only way possible – by pacing erratically, shaking, and mumbling the lyrics with low volume and high tension. Just thinking about everyone else’s potentially negative reactions to my performance made it difficult to breathe. Despite my impulse to flee, to run home and hide from any chance of failure, the possible result of being in the summer musical kept me inside that room.

Ever since starting high school in a new district, shattering both my web of friendships and my confidence, I never sought out activities that may have interested me. Public humiliation, no matter how small, was my biggest fear. Though musical theatre sounded like the perfect opportunity to sing, dance, and meet people who shared these same passions, it still took me three years to muster the courage to sing in public.

The director called me to come on stage. As I left my chair, I felt my eyelids and heart fluttering, my insides trying to force their way out. Every part of my body screamed at me to flee from the intense anxiety and lie down on the floor, but I trudged the uphill slope toward the most daunting act of my life. As the other auditioners stared at me, there was crippling silence – then the piano started. As the music played, the courage that had been building for three years erupted through my voice, surprising both myself and the audience. I won a spot in the cast, lasting friends, and a chance to enjoy the rest of my high school career knowing that the fear of a bad performance is nothing compared to the joy of involvement.

Courage is by no means the absence of fear; fear is what keeps us quick on our feet, keeps us alive. However, some of our fears are not warnings to be avoided but enemies to be defeated, and courage is the ability to discern between the two. Courage is not foolhardy and stupid; it is logical and intelligent. Courage allows us to act on our deepest desires and confront colossal obstacles; only after the most strenuous and debilitating of challenges will we earn the most meaningful rewards. Though retreat will seem like the better option, courage provides the mental clarity to remember that what lies across the finish line will be ten times as fulfilling as the journey was unpleasant. Once success is reached, courage lights the way to vanquishing other fears, causing a chain reaction of boundless accomplishments. During my audition, I persevered against the tauntings of my grossly unfounded fear to the very last note of my solo. All that came to me at first was overwhelming exhaustion from the effort I put in, but the self-esteem and chances to perform that I have reaped since that day are irreplaceable. Though I wish it arrived a little earlier than it did, my courage granted me the power to conquer my loneliness and to sing and dance with my new friends well after the final curtain call.