

Lisa Ndawillie  
The Meaning of Courage

The fearless are too often glorified. To enter a battle – whether it is emotional or physical – with the concept in mind that there is no adversary to fear is no nobler than the simple completion of life's mundane diversions. The fearless have nothing to overcome. It is the courageous that fear; it is the courageous that triumph. In our modern day world, where those who fear are seen with disdain, true bravery is an anomaly. However hidden, it is not vanished.

Courage can be discovered in the closeness of next-door neighbors and the distant, diverse lives of the global community. In the most unwonted places, the humble but valiant are found. Aware that she is her family's only beacon of light in a dark and desperate war, a strong and suffering Sudanese mother becomes her tribe's silent paragon as she caters to everyone's needs but her own. Worry may be her burden, but as she chooses hope over fear, courage is her backbone. No less captivating is the plight of a neighbor who will not repudiate his cancer's grim prognosis but also will not yield to it. Continuing with his daily life, our fearful and formidable friend becomes the inception of our own inspiration – inspiration to act in spite of our fear, not to be fearless.

At the age of fifteen, Sarah Armstrong illustrated to me the perfect picture of a courageous human being. I've known her for years from my youth group, but it was not until she went through what, for most, would be a devastating experience did she become my model of courage. She was sixteen, a key individual on the Grandville track team, and had the most gorgeous hair I'd ever seen; she was sixteen, about to leave for the state finals with track Grandville track team, and had just found out she had bone cancer. To say that the prognosis was devastating would be discredit to the pain that we all felt when the news arrived. Sarah, after a year and a half of chemotherapy, would need to have her leg amputated. We felt like we had been hit by a train; Sarah seemed like she had been hit by a ray of sunshine. She was the only one that seemed to realize that, by doing this, her chemotherapy would end and her cancer would be gone. I was amazed by the stories her uncle told me. Sarah hardly even let the doctor finish clarifying the operation before she began asking about prosthetics, talking about running with prosthetics, and speaking of her plans to become a physical therapist. Later, I couldn't help but ask my friend, "Weren't you scared? Why weren't you worried about losing your leg?" Her response will remain embedded in my memory forever. "Lisa," she said, "I was terrified, but losing my life was a lot more scary than losing my leg." Hers is true courage: not courage free from fear, but courage commanding fear.

The fearless ignore their greatest ally – their minds. Clever and resourceful, it is the courageous that are able to morph their emotions into a valuable rebuttal against psychological opponents. The mind can convince itself of almost anything when fear is involved: unlikely perseverance, atypical boldness, or even phenomenal ability. The courageous then become recipients of qualities that the fearless, because of their tendency to presuppose the neglect of any anxious emotions, cannot attain. Staggering superhuman strength, outstanding will to live, and undying passion emerge from moments drenched in fear. With this understanding, the courageous can cease to be aberrant. We must simply cling to the precept that to be courageous is to have the strength to place your sights and ambitions ahead of your fears, not to be fearless.