

Sara DenBraber  
The Courage of a Lion

I never knew the true meaning of courage until the day I walked into that long, dreary room. Gray recliners lined both walls, and everywhere you turned there was an IV pole. Nurses were walking around taking temperatures, monitoring blood pressure levels, and talking to kids who sat in the chairs. There were kids of all different ages sitting in those chairs. I saw babies, toddlers, and teenagers like myself. Some of the kids were sleeping, while others were playing on computers or watching the TV's that hung from the ceiling. There were kids doing crafts, playing games, reading books, or just talking to each other and their parents. Most of them had little to no hair. All of them had tubes coming from some part of their body, because they were all hooked up to an IV pole. Bags of liquid hung on the poles. Several of the bags were clear, a few were a yellowish-tan color, and a couple others were a deep, crimson red. This was the infusion room at the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital Hematology and Oncology Clinic.

I had just been diagnosed with a blood disorder called Idiopathic Thrombocytopenia Purpura not ten minutes before I had walked into this room. I remember feeling like the world had stopped. I wanted to burst into tears, and I was afraid. I was afraid of what was going to happen to me and what they were going to do to me. My nurse turned to me and said, "This is the room where you will stay during your treatments. It's called the infusion room. We'll give you your treatment through an IV like these kids here." I glanced around at all of the other kids who were getting treated. I figured that most of them had cancer, and the others probably had a blood disorder or musculoskeletal problem. After all, it was the hematology and oncology center.

That's when I stopped walking. I looked around yet again, and questions started to flood my mind. Why were these kids smiling and laughing? Isn't cancer supposed to be some horrible, deadly sickness? How could these kids be so happy and cheerful, while I was standing there feeling as if I had been dipped in the frigid waters of the Arctic? What was going on?

An adorable little girl, who could not have been more than six years old, looked up at me from her drawing and our eyes met. The answer to all of my questions hit me right then; these kids all had an impossible amount of courage. It wasn't as if they had had a choice of contracting cancer, and it was probably extremely hard and frightening for them. However, courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, courage to me is admitting that you are afraid, yet facing your fear no matter how badly you want to run away. These kids' courage is what was giving them the hope and strength they needed to persevere throughout their illness. They had to wake up every morning and worry about serious things like medicine and test results. They had to live their lives not knowing what could happen at the next fork in the road, and not being able to participate in activities that healthy kids could. To go through life that way at such a young age takes a lot of courage, and that is exactly what these kids possessed that I didn't. As the girl and I stood there staring at each other, I learned how to have courage.

People tend to think that great courage can only be found in important or famous people. They associate courage with heroes in movies or knights in fantasies. Excuses are made such as,

“Oh, I can’t be courageous, I’m not strong enough or great enough” and “I’m too young to have courage.” I disagree, because I will never forget that day when I walked into that room and saw the courage of a lion in the eyes of a six year-old girl.