

Will Barkeley

*"...to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds,..."*

In every society, people are expected to make the right decisions in the face of adversity. No matter the situation, people have the option to challenge reality, or sit back and let a flawed culture shape the way we live. One man in my life has been a strong example of being proactively brave in the circumstances he was placed in. My father, Bill Barkeley, suffers from Usher's Syndrome, a rare progressive disease that strips him of his sight and hearing as the years go on. In 2007, my father embarked on an amazing endeavor to show the world that no matter what happens to a person, they can still contribute in major ways.

Throughout my father's childhood years, he knew he was different. He couldn't play football because of his hearing aids. After giving up driving because of his visual limitations, it seemed as though he would never lead a "normal" life like everyone else. But he would not settle for anything less than success. Aside from being a successful employee at a major furniture company despite his limitations, he also decided to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. My father knew how daunting this task would be, but he had a strong desire to advocate for the disabled of society and promote assistive technologies for people who suffer.

Though my father could have chosen the negative course of action that I mentioned earlier, he didn't because his mind isn't wired that way. It must have been frightening climbing the tallest mountain in Africa with only a pinhole of vision. But isn't that what courage is? It is the absence of fear; optimism in its most basic form. With heroic personality, he decided to undertake the challenging climb despite the risks involved.

When people are faced with difficulty, they make decisions based on emotion and circumstance. While that is acceptable due to flaws in human nature, a truly courageous person makes that decision based on what is right; not what they want, need or desire. Many of us don't even realize that every choice we make involves different possible end results. A person instilled with courage doesn't worry about how they will benefit from a result, but instead worries about what is best for the people they are fighting for and takes into account what sacrifices must be made.

I do not believe that courage can be defined by a dictionary. It is an abstract concept; a virtue non-existent unless put into action. Courage, in my mind, is the lack of fear. It is the decision to fight when it would be easy to give up. This idea is captured best in the prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola when it states, "Teach us, good Lord, to serve as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward..." My father embodies all of these values; he is courage in its most glorified state.