Award-winning essays on courage
written by sixth-grade students participating in
The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s *Courage in My Life* program
The Board of Trustees and staff of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to those individuals and organizations that gave so generously of their time, talent and energy to *The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond, Volume XXIV*.

**Editing**
Alexandra Marshall

**Northeastern University, Design and Production**
Stacey Bakaj, Graphic Designer and Project Manager

**Perspective Photo**
Craig Bailey, Photographer

**NU Reprographics**
Denis Skarep, Layout, Prepress and Production

**Roxbury Community College Media Arts**
Marshall Hughes, Pamela Green and Oliver Seagle

Founded in 1898, Northeastern University is a private research university located in the heart of Boston. Northeastern is a leader in experiential learning, interdisciplinary scholarship, urban engagement, and research that meets global and societal needs.

www.northeastern.edu

---

**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc.</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Public Schools</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Essay Judges</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Alexandra Marshall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage in My Life</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max’s Story</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Stephanie Warburg and Charlotte Harris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Courage Essays**

**ASHLEY ALEXANDRE** – Joanna Principe-Zesk, Teacher
*William Barton Rogers Middle School*  
12

**MARTIN, TWOMBLEY – CHRISTINA TERRANOVA**, Teacher  
*Ferryway School*  
14

**JACORY MARTIN** – Joanna Principe-Zesk, Teacher  
*William Barton Rogers Middle School*  
16

**JASMINE WONG** – Melanie Smith, Teacher  
*Josiah Quincy Upper School*  
18

**HUNTER STEVENS** – Jacquelyn Wesner, Teacher  
*St. Columbkille Partnership School*  
20

**JOHN ALLEN** – Matt Elliser, Teacher  
*Neighborhood House Charter School*  
22

**KAVSHA HERNANDEZ** – Amanda St. George and Sue Pearce, Teachers  
*Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*  
24

**SAJED ZIADE** – Ayasha Osmany, Teacher  
*Alhuda Academy*  
26

**JASON SERVIL** – Nate Lewallen, Teacher  
*McKinley Middle School*  
28

**PIERO CAMPOS** – Brittany Haracz, Teacher  
*Bellisini Academy*  
30

*The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond, Volume XXIV* is a publication of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. and The Boston Public Schools. © 2015 The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc.
Danisha Garcia – Dan Cesario, Teacher
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School 32

Chloe Bancel – Leila Huff, Teacher
Buckingham Browne and Nichols 34

Yalizeth Lopez – Laura Cennamo, Teacher
Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School 36

Balquis Said – Celestine Henry-Williams, Teacher
James P. Timilty Middle School 38

Naomi Bethune – Amber Malm, Teacher
Patrick Lyndon K-8 School 40

Zach Butler – Danae O’Bryan, Teacher
Linden S.T.E.A.M. Academy 42

Sean Wu – Scott Larivee, Teacher
Mary Lyon K-8 School 44

Fernando Correia – Natasha Evitts, Teacher
Oliver H. Perry K-8 School 46

Harriet Shane Gerochi – Jane Wright, Teacher
Salemwood School 48

Bianca Van Zile – Aaron Cohen, Teacher
Jackson Mann K-8 School 50

Syrah Arena – Colleen Clifford, Teacher
Beebe School 52

Kamila Peralta-Virtue – Helen Sullivan and Monica Wood, Teacher
Hurley K-8 School 54

Meg Henning – Erin Hannon-Foley, Teacher
Roosevelt K-8 School 56

Honor Paton – Leila Huff, Teacher
Buckingham Browne and Nichols 58

Brady Sullivan – Erin Walsh, Teacher
St. Patrick School 60

Daniela Baez – KC Currie, Teacher
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School 62

Emperis Matthews-Quarles – David Russell, Teacher
McKinley South End Academy 64

Frida Swallow – Jeanine Stansfield, Teacher
Warren Prescott K-8 School 66

Timothy Medico – Jamie Richardson, Teacher
South Boston Catholic Academy 68

Noor Hassan – Kendall Allen, Teacher
Malik Academy 70

Griffin Long-Sinnott – Amy Higginbotham and Monique Harris, Teachers
Dennis C. Haley Pilot School 72

Nashani Swain – Karen Douglas, Teacher
Martin Luther King, Jr. K-8 School 74

Carlos Herrera – Dan Cesario, Teacher
Sarah Greenwood K-8 School 76

Edison – Dawn Avery, Teacher
Curley K-8 School 78

Graviel Sanchez – Carolyn Miller, Teacher
William B. Rogers Middle School 80

Amina Naidjate – Hamzah Henshaw, Teacher
Al-Noor Academy 82

Christopher Whyte – Monica Linari and Erica Prince, Teachers
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School 84

Kayla Monteiro – Melanie Smith, Teacher
Josiah Quincy Upper School 86

Emily Rose Gross – Amber Malm, Teacher
Patrick Lyndon K-8 School 88

Aja Swank – Christina Terranova, Teacher
Ferryway School 90

Courage Beyond Boston

Saniah Dawson – Brittanii Wilder, Teacher
Malachi Wilkerson Middle School in Birmingham, Alabama 92

Fizza Rasheed – Aniqa Mudasir, Teacher
Lahore Grammar School in Lahore, Pakistan 94

Benjamin Marsden – Julie Larrea, Teacher
Phoenix Country Day School in Phoenix, Arizona 96
The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond

Volume XXIV is dedicated to

Elizabeth Evans D’Ascensao

In her eight years as Executive Director, while deepening The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s founding commitment to the sixth-graders of the Boston Public Schools, Elizabeth has also guided the organization into a significantly expanded outreach. The program is implemented throughout the Boston Public School network, along with local parochial, private, charter and pilot schools, religious academies, independent schools, and programs meeting special needs. It has also been adopted nationally in 27 states and, internationally, in 10 countries. With her diligence, intelligence, organizational abilities, and foresight, she has led The Max to what it is today: reaching over 150,000 students globally.

As a tirelessly creative administrator, she encourages and sustains the dedicated teachers upon whom the curriculum relies, and her devotion to the students is made evident in her joyous appreciation of them and the courage they so generously demonstrate. Her balanced leadership has allowed the organization’s Board of Trustees to secure the broad support necessary to enlarge the curriculum’s goals while still maintaining its original defining focus and intent. The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s dream is that in discovering and sharing their own courage, children will identify with their classmates and, by extension, with their peers in the City of Boston, across the country, and around the world.

This edition of “Courage In My Life” essays is the evidence of Elizabeth’s many talents, and on behalf of the sixth-grade students and teachers represented here, as well as those whose courage essays have been celebrated in past years, we gladly dedicate this book to Elizabeth, with gratitude and love.
A girl experiences the failure of having to repeat 4th grade and not only finds the courage to learn from mistakes but realizes, unexpectedly, "It turned out I had an opportunity to help other kids who needed it." A boy sees the importance of "staying strong, staying full of pride, and never giving up," and declares, "I plan never to let my ADHD take control over me." Another burdened by ADHD and Aspergers feels bad about being disruptive in class, wants to apologize, and dares to trust his classmates to forgive. A girl diagnosed with alopecia understands that "People are going to talk about you if you are different," but she advises, "Let them talk! You have more important things in your life to do."

In a brave declaration, a student writes, "To me, courage means being yourself, even if others don’t accept who you are. I demonstrated courage when I told my classmates I wanted to be male instead of female." The struggle is resolved with the decision, "By showing my true self, and asking others to respect and acknowledge who I really am, I feel I have made the courageous choice." This then leads to the lesson, "I believe it takes courage to be who you are without caring what others think, but it helps to have good friends who accept you."

Such eloquence is exceptional, but it is gratifying each time a student’s writing lives up to the often dramatic and always affecting experience being described. When the Courage Curriculum was initially implemented, it seemed more important to stress content over form. Gradually, however, with the teachers’ guidance and the powerful examples of the books the program incorporates, the focus has shifted sufficiently for the students to feel encouraged not only to identify their personal courage but to claim their own voices. Each essay in this collection fulfills this ideal by revealing in their own words not only what these children want to say but what they feel needs to be told.

---

Alexandra Marshall is the author of six books and many articles and short stories. She has coordinated the annual selection of essays since the founding of the Courage Curriculum.
Courage in My Life

The mission of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. is to strengthen the character development and literacy skills of students. The program empowers children to discover, then recognize, the role of courage in the characters they read about, in the lives of those around them, and in their own lives: past, present and future.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is a year-long language arts program dedicated to strengthening the character development and literacy skills of students in Boston and beyond. The organization was founded to honor the life of Max Warburg, a courageous sixth-grader whose steadfast determination and heartfelt hope in the face of his battle with leukemia continues to inspire our work.

Since the program’s inception in 1991, the Courage Curriculum has positively impacted the academic performance and increased the essential knowledge of over 150,000 sixth and ninth grade students in Boston Public Schools and surrounding charter, pilot, public and parochial schools. By connecting with Max’s story and with award-winning literature featuring courageous young people, students come to recognize and celebrate the role that courage plays in their own lives. Our work with talented classroom teachers allows us to empower young people to continue to act courageously, to the benefit of their classmates, families, communities and themselves.

Through two school-based programs, Courage in My Life and The Courage of My Convictions, the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum works to improve the reading, writing and critical thinking skills of students; to inspire participants to celebrate acts of moral courage in their own lives and the lives of others; and to train and support teachers in the use of the Courage Curriculum to improve their own instruction and to engage and inspire their students to make meaningful connections to literature. The success of the program is evidenced by the resulting quality of students’ writing and individual pride in their work, and the direct correlation between its emphasis on literature content and writing competency.

Both programs use a layered approach that reinforces classroom work; individual reading, writing and critical thinking skills; professional development and training opportunities for teachers; and draws families and the larger community together for a culminating event to celebrate the outcomes of the program and the students’ efforts. Although it is intensely focused on classroom practice and teacher instruction, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum also disseminates this work on its website; in training institutes for teachers; in this annual publication of essays and at an annual awards luncheon for Max Warburg Fellows. The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has been featured in academic journals and other publications positioning the program as a national model for character education program and excellent school and community partnerships.

Our sixth grade program, Courage in My Life, focuses on exploring and understanding the nature of courage, while our ninth grade program, The Courage of My Convictions, emphasizes the importance of putting courage into action. The Courage in My Life curriculum features the following novels: Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Patterson; Facing the Lion: Growing up Maasai on the African Savanna by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton; Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli; Number the Stars by Lois Lowry; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor; and Taking Sides by Gary Soto.

Today, nearly 100% of Boston Public Schools’ sixth-grade classrooms benefit from this curriculum, reaching more than 3,500 students and their families annually. The curriculum is also taught in classrooms across the country and as far away as Pakistan, Cambodia, and Lebanon. The Courage Curriculum’s sixth and ninth grade programs continue to grow on a local, national and global scale. Max Warburg’s legacy continues to inspire young people to recognize and celebrate the courage in their lives.
Max’s Story
By Stephanie Warburg and Charlotte Harris

Max Warburg was born and brought up in Boston, Massachusetts. Not long ago, Max lived in an apartment near the center of the city with his parents and his brother, Fred. Max was two and a half years older than Fred. Max had wavy light brown hair and bright brown eyes, and Fred had straight black hair and hazel eyes, but when they smiled, they looked a lot alike even though Max was much bigger.

The boys liked sports. They liked to swim in the summer, ski in the winter, and sail whenever they got a chance. Mostly, their father, who was an architect, had to work, but as often as he could he took the boys sailing, teaching them to tie lines, trim sails, and steer a course.

“Here,” he would say, “Max, you take the wheel. Fred, you hold this line tight and Max will sail us out of the harbor.”

And Max would. He’d stand at the helm the way he thought his father stood. Eyes on the sail to be sure it didn’t spill its wind, both hands on the big wheel, and feet spread apart, wind blowing his hair and puffing out his jacket, Max would play the part of the captain, dreaming of the day he would have his own boat. He knew exactly what he wanted. A sixteen-foot, drop-centerboard boat called a 420, just the right size for a twelve-year-old, which he figured he would be before he would ever get his 420. Then he could take Fred on some great sails, even on the days his dad was too busy. Better yet, then he could race and maybe win.

He knew what he’d call his boat, too. Take It To The Max, he’d call it, not just because it had his name in it, but because it sounded like the sky was the limit and that’s how Max felt.

Max had other dreams. Ever since he was little, Max had been good at imitating people. His mom would talk to someone on the phone, and when she hung up, Max could imitate her ‘talking to a stranger’ voice or ‘talking to her best friend’ voice perfectly. He could hear an accent once and reproduce it exactly. He could mimic actors and other kids, making his friends laugh and fascinating everyone with this ability.

“You ought to be an actor when you grow up,” people would tell him. So he started looking at the actors on TV with his mind on learning acting skills and camera angles.

“Mom,” Max said one day, “Do you think I could ever be on TV?”

“Well, I don’t see why not if you work at it,” she told him. Max’s mom was an artist, and it pleased her to see her son interested in growing up to be in one of the arts. Max joined a children’s theater group and went for acting lessons. He started to gain the confidence an actor needs, and signed up with an agency that looks for children to act and model. One day a call came.

“Max, do you think you’re ready to act in a television commercial?” the agency representative asked. “Sure I am. Will my friends be able to see me?” he replied.

“No this time. This commercial is going to run in New Jersey, but maybe next time. Will you do it anyway? Right away?”

“Oh, yes! This is my first chance!” Max ran to get his mom, and, alive with anticipation, Max, Fred, and their mom drove to the studio. They parked and went inside to spend a day taping and re-taping. Max watched the
professionals, followed directions intently, and caught on quickly to what was expected of him. When the long day was done, Max tried to guess when the next time would be that he would get a chance in front of the cameras. He couldn’t have guessed then that six short months later he would be a frequent talk show guest, but not for a reason anyone would want.

For Max, acting was fun and easy, and so was schoolwork. He loved to be with his friends in school, and he loved to read and figure things out. He loved to laugh and play jokes. At school, they called Max the peacemaker. Kids would argue or get to fighting, but Max would get into the middle and try to calm things down. Being a good sport and thinking of the other guy were Max’s way. In tense situations, Max would be the one to lighten things up with a joke.

Not everything came easy. Living in the city surrounded by buildings and pavement, Max didn’t have much chance to play ball, but he wanted to. As soon as he was old enough, Max joined a baseball league. They played on the Boston Common. Max was the youngest player and afraid of the fast balls coming straight at him over home plate. A couple of times he didn’t get out of the way of the ball and it hit him, but he didn’t let it get him down. For one thing, he knew Fred was watching and he knew as the big brother he’d better get right back up. Max was philosophical about his shortcomings. “I’ll be better next time,” he would say, and then he’d work at it. He never missed a practice. Even though he never got to be the best player on his team, by his third season his teammates knew they could count on him for a solid performance.

During the summers, Max and his family left the city for the seashore.

One morning in July 1990, when Max was eleven, Max’s mom needed something at the hardware store, and Max was looking for something to do. “I’ll go. Let me do it,” he said, and he got on his bike and pedaled off toward town. About a mile from the house his front tire hit a pocket of sand the wrong way. The wheel skewed around sideways and Max fell the short distance to the ground. He landed on his shoulder, the breath knocked out of him. Hot burning pain filled his stomach and chest, making him curl in a ball and squeeze his eyes shut.

Max knew something was wrong, more wrong than just a fall from his bike. Max’s mother knew something was really wrong as soon as she saw him walking beside his bike, steps slow and head down. Before he could get in the house she had him in the car and on the way to the local hospital emergency room.

“Max fell off his bike and he doesn’t feel right,” Max’s mom told the doctor. The doctor felt Max’s back and side and the smile left her face. “What’s this here? His side is all swollen. I think he’s ruptured his spleen. Max is in trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?” Max and his mom said, almost at the same time.

“I’m not sure, but we need to find out fast,” said the doctor, frowning with concern.

She called an ambulance to take Max to Children’s Hospital back in the city. Siren and lights clearing a path, the ambulance rushed up the highway to Boston, barely slowing down for the tight corners near the entrance to the hospital. Max was wheeled straight into the emergency room.

“This doesn’t look good,” the emergency room doctor said.

“If my spleen is split, why don’t you operate on me and sew it up?” Max wanted to know.

“Can you sew Jell-O? That’s what a spleen looks like. Not much to look at, but good to have because that’s what your body uses to clean your blood. Mrs. Warburg, this boy is going to be here for at least ten days.”

Sad and frightened, Mr. and Mrs. Warburg made their plans. Max’s mom would stay with him, and his dad would take Fred back to the shore to keep things as normal as possible for him. The news from the hospital wasn’t good. It looked as if Max had leukemia, a dangerous cancer in his bone marrow, but the doctors weren’t sure which kind of leukemia he had. Some kinds were less difficult to cure, and some were easier to bear than others. Hoping their son had the commonest kind that could be cured, the Warburgs started to learn about leukemia.

The results of the blood tests came back. Max had a rare form of leukemia, found in one in a million children. The lab doctor told Max’s parents, “Now that we’ve seen these results, I wonder how Max ever got himself off the ground and back to the house the day he fell off his bike. He must be a very determined boy.”
“Yes, he is,” Max’s father said. “He is going to need to be.”

It was Dr. Susan Parsons who told Max what he had. “Leukemia is hard to beat. You’ll have to have chemotherapy and radiation stronger than one hundred thousand X-rays. In order to test your blood and feed you, we’re going to have to make an incision near your heart and insert a tube. You can’t play ball and you can’t play soccer or ride your bike. If your spleen gets hit again, it will kill you.”

Max thought a bit. “Tell me what is going to happen.”

“Statistically, I think you’ll be okay, but you have to have a bone marrow transplant. Do you know what that is, Max? That means taking the fluid out of the middle of all your bones and then putting in the fluid from someone else’s bones in its place. We can’t do it unless we can find the right donor—someone whose bone and blood type match yours almost exactly. Often, not even members of your own family are a close enough match. Right now, there are about six thousand people out there looking for the one perfect match to save their lives. You’ll be joining them, Max. Your chance of finding a match is about one in twenty thousand.”

Again, Max thought a minute. “So, there are six thousand others. Okay, I’ll be six thousand plus one. I’ll be one of the lucky ones.”

“You already have been. Because you fell off your bike, we were able to catch your disease early, before there were other symptoms. If we get a donor fast, time will be on your side.”

After ten days of testing, they let Max come home to the apartment in Boston. Every week, in order to adjust his medicine, he had to go to the hospital for blood tests, which meant a little needle, and for blood samples, which meant a big needle and a tube. Max hated needles. His mother knew he hated needles and wondered when she didn’t see him flinch each week as the nurse aimed the needle toward his arm. Even the nurse, who had seen so many different kinds of reactions to needles over the years, was surprised by Max’s calm.

“What are you thinking about, young man?” she said to him on one of his visits to the blood lab, not really expecting a reply.

Max answered very seriously, “First, I wait and prepare myself. Then I put all my energy where the needle is going to go, then I make fun of the needle.” On his own, Max had found a way to conquer a fear that, if he did not get the best of it, could make it harder for him to get well.

No sports for at least six months, he’d been told, so he found a calendar, tacked it up, and drew a smiling face on the date six months away. Max had a goal. He knew he’d be sick for a while but he knew when it would be over. On the space for February 6, 1991, beside the smile he wrote, “Cured” and underlined it in red.

In September, Max went back to school. When he told Nurse Hoolihan at the hospital that the kids didn’t seem to understand what was wrong with him, she said she’d come to his school and explain. The kids listened carefully to Nurse Hoolihan, but it was Max they wanted to hear the answers from.

“How did you catch leukemia?” asked someone, saying out loud the big question in everyone’s mind.

“I didn’t just catch it,” Max said matter-of-factly. “First, I had to have inherited a particular gene and then I had to have what my doctor said was an accident in my blood cells. One cell went crazy. It started making the other cells produce too many white cells and platelets. My white cells are crowding out my red cells, and that’s not good for me. But, listen; no one can catch this from me.”

You could see the kids were relieved. They stopped sitting so stiffly and acting so polite. Even Max’s teacher and the other grownups in the room seemed to relax a little.

“What can we do for you?” Max’s best friend wanted to know.

“Don’t treat me funny. I’m not supposed to bump my spleen but I’m the same old Max.”

There were reminders at home, too, that his life had changed. Max had to choose whether to give up his kitten, Fantasy, or have her claws out so that she couldn’t scratch him and start an infection. Max couldn’t bring himself to hurt Fantasy that way, so he found her another home. He missed his kitten. “Be careful, Max. Be careful,” it seemed to him his mother kept saying. He missed hearing her say, “Off you go and have a good time,” without a worried look.
The hospital did what it could to find a donor for Max so he could have the transplant that could save his life. His parents were tested and Fred was tested, but no perfect match was found. Close relatives were tested and then friends of the family, and still no match. Wait, the hospital told them, a match might be found in the new national marrow donor registry.

His parents were troubled by waiting. The registry had too few matches and too many other people who were counting on the registry but hadn’t been helped. “We can help. We can learn how to do donor drives.” It was going to be hard, but they knew they had to try. What they didn’t realize at first was that Max would make the donor drive succeed. At first, only the family worked on the drives. Then they were joined by many of their friends, and soon, old friends were joined by the hundreds of new friends Max found through television and radio.

Max’s campaign for a donor was called the “Max + 6,000.” Always, Max wanted people to remember that this wasn’t just for him. It was for Max and all the others in America who needed the one perfect donor. Many people didn’t really know what leukemia was all about or about bone marrow transplants, or how to help even if they wanted to help. One morning, figuring he had nothing to lose and plenty to gain, Max called a radio station to see if he could make his appeal on the air. He spoke on local radio shows. He was invited to talk on Channel 4 and then Channel 7 and then Channel 2. Smiling into the camera, Max would say, “Leukemia is a blood disease that starts in the marrow of bones. I need new bone marrow in order to get better. Come have a simple blood test and see if you can be my donor. Perhaps you will be my MUD, my matched unrelated donor.”

Tom Bergeron, one talk show host, said to Max, “You’re good at this. You look as if you’re enjoying yourself.”

“I am, sir. I wanted to be on TV and here I am. Maybe this is what I was getting ready for. Even if no donor turns up for me, I can help someone else.”

For the people watching Max, it wasn’t pity that moved them; it was Max’s cheerful way of thinking of others before himself. The stations asked him back again and again. Hundreds and eventually thousands of people came to give a sample of their blood and promised to be a bone marrow donor if their type matched the type of anyone in need.

The Boston Globe and The Boston Herald picked up Max’s story. “Max waits for his rescue,” said one headline. “Max leads charge against disease.” The reporters who met him liked Max and wanted to help him. Their stories reassured people and gave them practical information about when and how to become a bone marrow donor.

At every donor meeting, there was Max wearing a “Max + 6,000” button and a red carnation. Red for blood, he said, and laughed when people asked how he could joke about something so serious. Max would shake each donor’s hand and say thank you. “You may not help me but you probably will help somebody,” he’d say.

Every week, Max’s white cell count got higher. Every week, the need to find a donor got more acute. “It may be getting too late,” Dr. Parsons worried. “We have to find a donor soon.”

Days slipped by. Weeks slipped by. Leaves on the trees outside Max’s window turned red and orange and then brown and fell away in the winds of early winter. Max, Fred, and their mom and dad talked about the little events of each day and about the distant future but not often about the immediate future. They talked about missing the rest of the summer at the shore and about Take It to the Max, the dreamboat. The boat came to mean so much. It meant another summer growing up. It meant having a future. By mid-October, nearly three months after Max’s leukemia was discovered, there still was no donor. “I’m going to order the 420 for Max,” his father said. “It will mean a lot to him knowing the boat is started.” He called the boat builder, who said yes, he could have the boat ready by spring. By the time Max was well; his 420 would be ready to put into the water.

With no donor found, surgery went forward to improve Max’s chances later on, just in case a donor could be found. On November 15, Max’s spleen was removed. He recovered for a week in the hospital and for six days at home. Then, on November 28, the hospital called. The lab had found the miracle match among the last batch of samples.

“Who is it?” Max asked.

“We don’t know, but it’s a perfect match!” the nurse said. Later, during long December days in the hospital, Max and his dad sent the anonymous benefactor a picture of the intravenous bag that held the life-giving bone marrow with a letter that said, “This is all we know of you but we want to
thank you!” Much later, Mr. and Mrs. Warburg learned that the donor was a
doctor in Seattle, Washington, whose great-, great-, great-, great-grandfather
all the way back to the 1800s in Europe was the same as Max’s.

Now, with marrow from the donor, treatment could begin to pave the way
for the transplant that might save Max. Chemotherapy would be the worst
part. “Your hair is going to fall out, Max,” Dr. Parsons told him. Max could
see that other kids in the cancer ward had little or no hair. “It’s part of
getting better,” he told Fred. But he wasn’t sure he would be brave enough.
He had seen others going for their treatment and returning exhausted and
in tears. He was determined he wouldn’t let the treatment sink his spirits.

First Max had a tube planted in his chest, as the doctor told him would
happen, for giving medicine, taking blood samples, and for feeding him
because he wouldn’t be able to eat normally. He would have to be almost
in isolation in a special environment called the Laminar Flow Room. In the
sealed room, ducts brought a steady, moving stream of oxygen down and
away from the bed, blowing foreign substances away from Max as his system
tried to accept the strange marrow and begin making its own blood.

Except for daily trips to the Total Body Irradiation room—the hospital
people called it the TBI—Max had to stay in the isolated room and could
see few visitors. When his mom and Fred visited each day and his dad came
in the evening, they had to scrub like doctors and wear cover-up coats
and hairnets. Even a touch could harm, so there could be no hugs to give
comfort and love. Each morning the halls were cleared of contaminating
strangers so Max, inside a tent, could be wheeled through the empty halls
to the treatment room.

Knowing he’d be lonely and expecting he’d be scared, Dr. Parsons had given
Max a tape recorder so he could make a record of what was happening to
him. Max told his tape recorder, “Going to TBI is really cool, like being in a
space ship. The air coming in from the top of my oxygen tent is exhilarating.
I feel like a great explorer from the next century gliding in on his chair.”

The experience in the room wasn’t exhilarating. The drugs made Max sick.
He had to stay on a metal table, head on blocks, neck stiff and body sore,
for a long time. When finally he sat up, he threw up. The vomiting meant
he was done for the day. On his tape Max said, “The table is real hard and it
makes my head so stiff, but it’s fun because I can blast my music as loud as I
want so it reminds me of home.”

The first seven treatment days were chemotherapy and irradiation. The
eighth day, the transplant itself, wasn’t at all what Max expected. Instead of
an operation with doctors cutting him open, Max lay on his bed all alone
while the new marrow flowed into his body from a transparent bag of clear
fluid suspended over his head and connected to him by a clear slender tube.

“How is that going to get into my bones?” he wondered while he watched,
then later heard the doctors themselves marveling that the marrow sought
its way to the right places once it was safely in his system.

The blood count was critical. After the transplant, Max’s white cell count
was zero. They wouldn’t let him out of the Laminar Flow Room until his
count was 3,000. One day after the transplant, his count was 20. The next
day it was 100, then 150, then 300. Max had a long way to go, but he was
making it. His body was rebuilding. Slowly the days passed.

Max knew these days would be hard. The pains doctors had warned about
became the pains he felt. Max didn’t complain. Instead, he tried to cheer
up other patients stuck, as he was, in the hospital for Christmas. He got his
parents to help. Max’s mom and dad brought in a whole Christmas dinner
for all the kids and their families in the Jimmy Fund wing, the part of the
hospital where Max and the other children with cancer were staying. Teddy
Kennedy, Jr., who had cancer when he was thirteen and was now all grown
up, brought presents for the kids, along with living proof that they could
get better.

Max yearned for breakout day, the day the doctors would let him go out
of his room. Finally, early in the New Year, on January 2, Max woke to see
balloons on the isolation room door and crepe-paper streamers overhead.
The nurses, especially Nurse Rohan, his favorite, were celebrating for him.
This was it; he was out! He went by wheelchair to the hospital door, then
into the fresh air for the first time in 35 days, and then home. He loved the
smell, he loved the look, and he loved the feel of home! Everyone in the
hospital had been great to Max and he was grateful, but home was where
he wanted to be. Back in his own room, Max saw again the calendar with
the smile marking February 6. It was still almost a month away. “Not quite
cured,” thought Max. “But maybe I’ll be better by then. February 6 will be
a happy day.”
But it wasn’t. Before long Max was back in the hospital with a high fever. Dr. Parsons sent him home again, uncertain what was wrong. Back he went again for ten days and again he came home no better. Still he had a fever and still he threw up. On February 6, he went back to the hospital again. The smile he was now famous for was still there, but it seemed to waver at the corners of his mouth. Max went back to his isolation room and this time he would have an oxygen mask, the sign of mortal struggle.

Max’s mom and dad and Fred were at the hospital every day, staying with him until the evening when Max, heavy with drugs, fell asleep. The long days in the hospital were hard on Fred. He played with Max, but it wasn’t like the last time Max was in the hospital. One day, sick and exhausted after a treatment, Max was being pushed back to his room in the wheelchair. Fred had had it. Right on the edge of crying, he pulled hard on his mother’s arm, making it difficult for her to push Max’s chair. “Come on, Fred. Max needs you to help out,” she said.

Max was used to being the helper himself. Knowing he was needed, he said, “I can cheer Fred up. Put him here in my lap.”

Fred went into his older brother’s lap, glad to be riding the long corridor and glad to have Max acting like his old self. The two rolled along, Max’s head hidden and arms waving out from under Fred’s armpits, a four-armed, laughing pair all the way from Pulmonary to the Transplant floor. Hearing them, the nurses couldn’t tell that one of the laughing boys was perilously ill until, rounding the corner; they recognized Max and his family.

“That’s like Max,” they told his mother. “At night on the transplant floor, the younger kids cry. They’re in pain and they miss their families. I hear Max call to them, ‘Don’t cry. I’m here. You’ve got a friend!’ You have an unusually brave son, Mrs. Warburg.”

“I’m not sure he realizes,” his mother said. “He says to me, ‘Mommy, do you think I’m brave?’ I don’t know why he doubts.”

“How does he keep his laughter? How can he keep on smiling?”

“That’s Max,” said his mom. “That’s the way Max is.”

On March first Dr. Parsons told Max his life was threatened. The blood transfusions and medicines pumped into him weren’t working well enough. The doctors’ skills and the hospitals’ resources and Max’s own incredible will were losing against the disease. Max saw the solemn faces around him. His body swollen in places, emaciated in places, spotted with sores in places, Max looked Dr. Parsons straight in the eyes and said, “Well, okay, so what’s the plan? How are you going to get me well?” They looked at Max in disbelief, to see his conviction so strong despite his ordeal, and took heart themselves.

“Come here to the window, Max, come look,” said his father.

There in the hospital driveway below, high on a truck and with mainsail flying, was Take It to the Max. Max’s eyes widened in pleasure, his delight was evident in every gesture of his excitement. He glowed, knowing the care and love that brought his boat to him at this place at this time. Nurses and doctors all came to exclaim about Max’s treasure and enjoy his infectious happiness.

That night, Max stayed up until close to midnight working on a project with his dad. When he was ready to put out the light, Max and his mom and dad prayed together and thanked God for all the help He had given and all the people who had been so kind to him. Then Max went to sleep.

Max died in his mother’s arms, holding his father’s hand, at 6:55a.m. on March 5, 1991.

In the days that followed there was a terrible silence. The silence swelled and roared, because silences can do that if what you want to hear isn’t there and what you don’t want to hear is everywhere. Then stories started to fill the empty spaces, stories about Max.

Many stories ended with a shake of the head, a glance away, and the simple statement, “Max amazed me then. He was so brave. Children amaze me. I am amazed by the courage of children.”
What courage means to me is to try to have the strength to get through life without paying attention to those people who try to bring you down. The kind of courage I’m dealing with is my disease called alopecia. Alopecia is a disease that starts with bald spots on your head, and can lead to total baldness.

When I was about five years old, my grandmother was doing my hair. When she went to get the comb, I reached toward the back of my head to scratch it. I noticed that there was a bald spot. As I looked in the mirror on the table I noticed other bald spots on my head. I showed my grandmother and she suggested we go to the doctor.

When we found out I had alopecia, we struggled to find the perfect doctor to help my hair grow back. We tried treatments from sticking needles in my head to rubbing medicated liquids on my head. At one point, the treatments helped grow little spots of hair, but the new hair quickly fell out again. After the skin-damaging treatment, we just decided to put a hat on my head and let life flow.

From first grade to third grade I was getting bullied. I only had a couple of friends at that time. I’ve had my hat pulled off and got laughed at by multiple people. The way I showed courage was to think about the positive and thank God for not making it worse. I didn’t pay attention to those who thought of me as a “freak.” I tried to think of things that made me happy, to get my mind off the stress of being made fun of because I did not have hair.

What courage means to me is to do something that makes you burst into happiness. People are going to talk about you if you are different. Let them talk! You have more important things in your life to do. The way I show courage is by putting the situation behind me. Putting it behind me helped me become a happy, not bitter, young lady. Take it from me!
Do you know someone who is adopted? Well, if you do, they know what it is like to be scared of what lies ahead of you. Everyone has courage. For me, I didn’t know I had courage until I met a person who would change my entire life. This person was going to be my future dad. I did not know how this whole adoption thing was going to go, but at the age of seven, I knew it was time.

The first time we were supposed to meet we made arrangements to meet at McDonalds. I remember being very nervous at that time. As soon as I opened the door to go inside, there he was, standing in line to place an order. He smiled at me, and we sat down at a table to talk. It felt weird at first, and then he said, “Hi, I am Scott and you must be Marvin? I have heard a lot about you.” He told me a few things about himself and then asked a few questions about me. The first thing that I thought was that he was an old guy, at the age of 42. It was not what I expected, but it didn’t bother me all. I also realized that he had such a deep voice. Wow. The talk went well, and I was glad I found the courage to get out of the car and go into McDonalds that day. It actually wasn’t that bad.

I also remember when I used to go out with my future dad twice a week before the adoption, and each of those days I felt a weird feeling in my stomach before he showed up. Those were my nerves acting up again. We would always go out and find fun things to do, and he would always make me laugh. That helped to ease my nerves, but I was still anxious. Actually, it got better each time we met. Each day we did something different until finally I was able to see my new, nice, safe, sweet home and my new bedroom. I loved it. I even met the rest of my new family. By this time, I was starting to feel more relaxed and more comfortable, and I always looked forward to the next visit.

After a few weeks of this, I knew that I would have to get used to a lot of new things. Finding the nerve to accept new adventures, new people who care for me, and a whole new life was going to lead me to a good future. All of the nerves I had at the start had gone away. I am very glad that I had the bravery to accept all of these new things in my life. It is good to have courage to face new things that are scary at first. Otherwise, you may not know how good things can turn out. In my case, if I hadn’t had the nerve to face these new circumstances, I would not be standing here today. Having courage is a really good thing!

“I AM VERY GLAD THAT I HAD THE BRAVERY TO ACCEPT ALL OF THESE NEW THINGS IN MY LIFE.”
Courage to me means facing any problem confidently, and staying positive about the situation. You need courage when you are really struggling with something and you want to make a difference, or you have a goal you want to achieve and need to dig deep to push to this goal. I had to show courage when I had a problem and, with courage and determination, I solved it.

When I was ten years of age I was a very chubby kid. But that wasn’t the bad part. The part that really got me angry was when other kids used to tease me. It didn’t happen that often, but when it did, it was always when we had gym or went out for recess. I felt like a small fish in a big ocean because I was lost, while everybody had fun running around and playing. But I never underestimated myself because I knew that one day, it would change.

At that time I couldn’t go days without junk food, and it was such a habit that I thought it would never leave me. My best friend Raphael was fastest in the school. He told me if I beat him in a race he’d give me $5.00. When you are ten years old, $5.00 is a lot of money to spend on junk. I told him it was a deal, and a week later we raced and I won. It felt good to win, and after that race I started to run more often. I gained so much confidence and lost 20 pounds of weight by exercising daily and jogging. I joined the Boston Neighborhood Basketball League at the Roche Center in West Roxbury. Two years later, I became a cornerback for the Pop Warner Mattapan Patriots. This fall I became both outside linebacker and cornerback.

Now I am in middle school, on the basketball team, and I am powerful and fast. I stay after school during the off-season and lift weights, with my team and sometimes solo. If it wasn’t for that summer race challenge, I wouldn’t have become the confident, athletic, healthy person I am today. That’s my story of courage and what it means to me.
Courage can have hundreds, thousands or even millions of definitions. It can be as basic as raising your hand in class. My definition of courage is fairly simple: standing up for what you deserve, even if people say rude things about you afterwards.

Last summer, on a very hot rainy day, I showed courage. That rainy night, my dad got a phone call from my aunt about free water at Staples. My dad told the whole family about it, and rushed us out the door while he printed coupons. We hopped in the car and drove to the nearest Staples store.

In the car, my brother kept talking about how he would be so embarrassed if his classmates found him in the store grabbing a crate of free water. He said, “Hey Jasmine, you know the Asian stereotype is so true! We Asians get as much free stuff as we can!” I kept staring out the window, watching the raindrops fall, wondering what I would do if someone said something like that at the store.

Eventually, the four of us walked into the store, took the water and waited in line to “pay.” Suddenly, a man wearing a red tee shirt came over to us and started yelling. “Hey! You guys have been here already! Each family can only come once!”

I started worrying what would happen next. Then, my parents both said calmly, “We haven’t been here before. You must be mistaking us for someone else.”

We stayed in line.

The man again told us to leave. I noticed my palms were sweaty. I was worrying. Many thoughts ran through my head. I couldn’t decide what to do. Would I stand up, or would I run away from the situation? It was a dilemma that made me feel like my head was being torn apart by voices in my head. I felt as if there was an angel and a devil in my mind, trying to tell me what to do.

I made my decision fast. I stood a little taller, my intense eyes glaring at the man’s eyes. I said one, simple six-word sentence. “WE HAVE NOT BEEN HERE, SIR.” My voice was soft, but each syllable was pronounced strongly.

My mom continued the argument, bringing up the fact that she could file a complaint about this. The man seemed scared. He mumbled, “I don’t think I have seen you guys here. I believe I made a mistake. I’m deeply sorry.” Then he scurried away.

That day my family showed courage. We decided to confront the problem instead of fleeing from it. We stood up for what we deserved, even when people whispered mean words after. That is my definition of courage.
Hunter Stevens
Jacquelyn Wesner, Teacher
Saint Columbkille Partnership School

Courage is finishing what you started, having the ability to ignore stereotypes, and doing what you are called to do.

Entering medical school as an African American brought difficulties for my mom. She had to ignore all the people who said she couldn’t be a doctor and keep doing what she had been dreaming of doing her whole life.

My mom really enjoyed medical school until she met a really ignorant and racist teacher. She vividly remembers when he said to her, “You can’t be a doctor! Your education is and always been behind all of the other white students.” He then told everyone to rub her head for good luck. This very racist statement came from the days of slavery. My mom held her head high, went to her dorm, and tried to study. She kept thinking about what that professor said and she broke down, tears falling on her textbook. She called my grandmother for comfort. My grandmother said, “You’ve been through too much to quit now. Finish what you’ve started. You can keep crying on that book, but you keep studying.” That’s exactly what my mom did. In fact, she aced that class! She was determined to prove her professor wrong.

Twenty years later, my mom was the mother of three kids. We were living in Richmond, Virginia. One day, my mom and I were at the store and I realized my mom was staring at a man. He was about 70 years old with thin, white hair. She whispered to me, “That’s the man who told me in medical school that I could never be a doctor.” I asked, “Why would he say that?” She told me this story, but I was very puzzled. I wondered, how could she be so calm seeing this man? I said, “Mom, go up to him. Tell him how wrong he was about everything! Show him how well you are doing! Let him see how successful you are now!” But my mom said gently, “No, I don’t have anything to prove to him. That experience made me stronger. God will deal with him.”

That was a very important lesson for me to learn. There are going to be challenges you have to face on your own. There are going to be people who will put you down for no reason. To move past the hurt, you have to know that you’re strong and you can bounce back. And that takes courage.

“The Courage is finishing what you started, having the ability to ignore stereotypes, and doing what you are called to do.”
I think courage means to stay strong at a bad time and never lose hope. I show courage in my life by trying to do my best in school, even when I have a condition called ADHD which makes it hard for me to focus and stay still. I still try my best to focus and get my work done no matter what.

When I am in class trying to do work, I just feel like there is an energy bomb inside me about to go off but I always try my best to defuse it, and I do. I’m even having a bit of a hard time writing this essay, but as you can see, I am controlling myself and staying focused.

I plan to never let my ADHD take control over me. And it never will because I am ready to diffuse my energy when needed and light it back up when I want to use it.

This shows courage because I am staying strong, staying full of pride, and never giving up. I may not be the smartest, but I know I am smart. I will never let my condition change me, my pride, or my grades, because I show courage.

“I AM STAYING STRONG, STAYING FULL OF PRIDE, AND NEVER GIVING UP.”
I think that being courageous means being powerful while you may hurt inside. It takes courage to live every day while you’re hurting. That’s what I’ve been doing for the last fourteen years.

When I was only eight and a half months old, mi papi passed away. Even though I don’t remember him much, he played an important role in my life. Now that he’s not here with me, it breaks my heart. I stare at some girls and boys who still have their parents but treat them like trash, yelling, swearing, hitting and abusing them. The kids don’t appreciate that their parents sacrificed their lives for them. Their parents work extremely hard just to give them a roof over their head, clothes on their bodies, and food on the table. I just sit there and wonder why did papi have to go, por que? There are some days I hide in my room because I wish he was here.

My mother and aunts always tell me stories about him and how he treated me like his little princess. One day I was at my aunt’s house. Mi mama y mi tia started talking about mi papi and told me a story about him. When I was six months old, my mother wanted me to get my ears pierced for the first time. My father wasn’t thrilled about me getting my ears pierced. He was the person who held me while the man was piercing my ears. My mother said when the man stuck the needle in my ear, I started crying so loudly that my father’s eyes welled up!

There are nights when I can’t sleep and all I can think about is mi papi. He is always on my mind. Whenever he pops up in my mind I start talking to him about my problems. Sometimes I think about my future and how, for the rest of my life, he won’t be here. When I have children, he won’t be here to meet them. If I get married, he won’t be here to walk me down the aisle. Just thinking about mi papi being absent in my life leaves me with a huge hole in my heart.

Being courageous is being strong while your heart is breaking. Every day I have to put on a mask and show that I’m courageous. As I continue my life without him, I know it will be hard as I grow older, but I know I will be able to go through it because I’m very courageous.

“It takes courage to live every day while you’re hurting.”
C-o-u-r-a-g-e. Courage. What does this word mean? Courage can mean many things to different people, but for me, courage has made me who I am today. After all, as Aristotle said, “You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor.”

As Muslims, we pray five times a day throughout the day. When I was six years old, I would be the first one to run with a gigantic smile on my face to stand next to my brother. I would play with his hand and he would hold my tiny fingers as a sign to stop and try to focus. However, last year, I started to feel totally different emotions. When I turned ten years old, I realized that as Muslims we are not alone, and the world does not belong to us.

Almost every year my family takes a road trip to Canada to attend “Reviving the Islamic Spirit,” a convention featuring the most respected speakers and thinkers in the Muslim world. The trip takes eighteen hours and we make several stops to attend to needs such as eating, using the restrooms and most importantly, praying. Traveling is not considered an excuse not to pray. We usually stand together in a horizontal line led by my uncle in a corner of a rest area, or sometimes on the grass, and perform a very peaceful and harmonious prayer.

This time, when we stopped at a rest area and my brother called me to join him for prayer, I hesitated. The floor was filthy, and all around us I could see people coming and going. I felt unsafe and uncomfortable. I thought I heard laughter and whispers. What if we were stared at? What if we were laughed at? What if... what if. The simple word “courage” was the total opposite of what I wanted to put it in action.

Then, I remembered an old saying, “A man of faith is full of courage.” A shiver and then a warm feeling rushed under my skin. I found myself standing straight. I repeated the words in my heart as if I were talking to God alone. No staring, no embarrassment, no knots in my stomach, no scratching my leg, no dirt or insect interrupted my whisper and supplication to my creator.

What I felt at the beginning was valid—the fear, the unknown, and the worry about peoples’ reactions. After all, we were a group of adults and children bowing and prostrating in the corner of a busy rest center. However, the courage of my family inspired me. My brother, waving to me to come to prayer, as if he was wiping out my hesitation, awakened my own courage. I took a huge step and tried to be courageous, and I believe I succeeded.

My public prayer was one of many acts where courage helped me with my insecurities and setbacks. I realized I should be proud of my religion and practice it with confidence. I now can pray anywhere without hesitation. It made me a strong believer. What Aristotle stated is true and relevant to my own life: “You will never do anything in this world without courage.”

“Courage has made me who I am today.”
Courage is being strong when you need to be and moving on from things that are hard in your life. Moving to Boston on January 14, 2010, after I survived the earthquake in Haiti, required me to put things in the past and live. I had to remain strong in the United States to start a new life.

On January 12, 2010, I was riding the bus home from school with my brother when this weird thing happened. The ground started shaking. My brother told me it was an earthquake. I was really terrified, but after a while, it stopped. We were almost home. I looked around and I saw a damaged brick wall and a dog with a severed leg. I also saw a damaged house. Finally, we reached my house. My mom was sitting in the back yard with my aunt, my grandma, and my uncle. I told my mom what happened and then I asked her, “What did you cook?” She replied, “I wasn’t able to cook anything.” An hour later, it was nighttime and I was having trouble sleeping because I was scared that something bad might happen. My aunt told me to sleep next to her. I did that, and later on I fell asleep.

The next morning, I woke up in my backyard. I asked my aunt, “How did I get over here?” She said, “We had to move away from the house because the ground started shaking again while you were sleeping.” Five minutes later, my mom’s friend came to bring us to the airport. When we got there, we gave the customs agents our passports. They took my little brother’s, my little sister’s, then my older brother’s passport. My older brother’s visa was expired, so he had to stay with the rest of my family in Haiti. After that, we left the airport and went home.

Later on, we went to Immigration to get my brother a new visa, but he wasn’t able to get one because he wasn’t born in the U.S. like me and our other siblings. A few hours later, we went to the airport. I was sobbing because I thought I would never see my brother again. To fly to the U.S., we boarded a C17A Globe Master III, which is a big plane made to carry tanks.

When we got to Massachusetts, it was cold. There was snow all over the place. I slept in the airport overnight. When I woke up, I was in a wheelchair. I wasn’t hurt or anything, I was in it because I was sleeping. We had to take the bus to my aunt’s house to stay overnight. We had eggs, bacon, and pancakes for breakfast at my aunt’s house. I watched some movies and then we went to find a hotel to live in until we could find a house.

It took lots of courage to overcome the earthquake. We lost our house, our family was separated, and I had to adapt to a new place. It takes a lot of courage to move on when you survive something like that. It also took a lot of courage to remember the earthquake and to write about it.

“Courage is being strong when you need to be and moving on from the things that are hard in your life.”
“I have a dream,” said Martin Luther King, Jr. He wanted a better world with education, love, rights, and equality. What courage sometimes means to people is being brave and facing terrible situations. But what courage means to me is trying hard and never giving up at the things we do. I am from Peru, which is in South America. I had to face a big challenge that changed my life forever. I had to leave my family and go to a new country. I showed courage by leaving my whole family.

I spent six years in Peru with my family. Peru is filled with so many ancient ruins and mountains, and it has a long history. In Peru I learned to love soccer. I was on a local team near my house. My family lived in a house that my great-great-grandfather built. My dad had found a job in the United States before I was born, and when I was six he wanted me to move with him. My brother was eight years old when we moved; he had a great academic life in Peru. My dad put me in this school that was all English speaking. I felt hopeless, and I remember how my brother cried the first day because he said that he was not going to be as successful in the United States.

In the United States I felt nervous, scared, and lonely. We had no family in the United States but us. My brother and I were the only Peruvian kids at our school, so it was hard to make friends or make connections with other people. In school I was expected to know how to read and write in a language I had never heard before. My grades were horrible and I had no one to accompany me as a friend. I knew I wasn’t going to succeed like this. This was all hard for me, but I never gave up and kept on going. Soon my grades started to go up and I started to speak some English. I realized that, with the help of courage, hard work will get you anywhere.

What courage means to me is working hard and never giving up at the things that I do. Even though I wanted to leave the United States and go back home, I realized that all of this was a lesson, and I could learn from it. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.” This means that if you do something and you fail once, try again, but differently; learn from your mistakes. I learned so much from this experience and am now happy that I came to the U.S.
Danisha Garcia
Dan Cesario, Teacher
Sarah Greenwood School

I was near my fourth grade English teacher’s desk when I saw something strange. It was a list of kids in my grade. I took a peek at the list and noticed that on top of the paper were the names of the fifth grade teachers. Underneath was a list of students. My name wasn’t on it!

I went home and cried for two hours. Later that evening, I told my mom what happened.

“I already know,” my mom said. “Your teachers called me last week and told me that you are not being promoted to fifth grade.”

“Is there anything I can do to stop this?” I asked. I knew that I had not done my best. I didn’t do my homework, I failed exams, and I was even disrespectful to my teachers.

My mom called the principal to see if I could go to summer school, but unfortunately, the principal said there was nothing anyone could do about it. I would have to repeat the fourth grade.

I was so embarrassed! What would my friends think? Would they think I was not as smart as they are? I was finally realizing that I had made a huge mistake by not doing my best.

The next day, my homeroom teacher had a talk with me about repeating the fourth grade. She said it wasn’t so bad repeating a grade because I could learn a lot from what I didn’t understand, and I could make new friends. After the talk, I felt a lot better.

On September 4th, 2012, I went back to fourth grade. It was not easy. I saw new faces. Everyone was asking me why I was held back. It was a bit embarrassing. Eventually, I got used to being in fourth grade again. I did learn a lot about what I didn’t understand from the year before. I also made new friends. It turned out I had an opportunity to help other kids who needed it.

I had courage to learn from my mistakes. I could’ve just given up and not done my best to improve, but I did. Repeating fourth grade was a new challenge in my life, and I made the best of the opportunity. It turns out it wasn’t the worst thing that has happened to me. It made me a better person.

“I HAD COURAGE TO LEARN FROM MY MISTAKES.”
I think courage is when something tough is happening to you in your life and you find the strength to move on. Courage makes you even stronger.

The most courageous thing I’ve ever done is figuring out how to work with my learning disorder. I moved here in the first grade from France. Before moving, almost everyone around me spoke French and read to me in French, so when I arrived in Boston and started struggling in school, everyone thought it was because I was bilingual. I started to fall really far behind. I couldn’t read the book everyone in the class was reading. Kids called me stupid because I read and wrote my letters backwards. I came home crying one day asking my mom to homeschool me. I told her I could never go back to school. I started to think I was stupid myself because I wasn’t learning the same way the other kids were.

The following year in the second grade the same thing happened. I was falling even more behind in my school work and I couldn’t concentrate. The kids became even meaner and by the end of the year I had lost all my confidence. I felt like I couldn’t do anything and I had no future. My parents were very concerned. The school and my parents got together and had long meetings. I would wait in front of the door and try to hear what they were saying, but all I heard were mumbles. My parents took me to the hospital and special doctors were giving me the longest tests ever on my ears and eyes, and showing me all sorts of questions and diagrams. I remember as a seven-year-old being stuck in a metal room, alone, to be observed. The doctors were behind a glass wall. I felt like a dangerous lion that no one wanted to come close to. I knew that this was not a regular doctor’s appointment. I started to get the feeling that something was wrong.

The next weekend my parents sat me down to talk when my little sister was away. I knew it wasn’t good because they looked very serious. My parents told me that they had put me in the wrong grade. They said that with me having a summer birthday, I should have been in the grade behind my current one. That made a lot of sense to me since I was the shortest and youngest kid in my grade. Then they dropped the bomb on me, “We believe you should do second grade again.” My parents gave each other a look and I knew that this was not a regular doctor’s appointment. I started to get the feeling that something was wrong.

The next year it was difficult to see all the kids in my grade above of me move on to the next grade and do new things while I had to stay behind and do the same things. They looked down on me. I knew they thought of me differently. As for being bilingual, I realized that I should be proud. Being bilingual is not a curse, but a gift. I found courage to move on and I found new friends that were my age. School is a lot easier for me now. I have learned to work around my learning disorder. My learning disorder isn’t as strong as it used to be, which makes me feel more powerful. I still have to work harder than others to get to the same level, but I know that a lot of really smart people have learning disorders so I’m not worried for my future. I know I will have the same opportunities as other people. Many CEO’s have learning disorders, which is something that I remind myself of often. It heightens my self-confidence because I feel reassured that I can be successful, and that I can follow my dreams and make things work for me. Most people in my class don’t even know that I have a learning disorder. I’m not even embarrassed anymore, and I don’t care what anyone else thinks of me. Not being embarrassed of who I am is what I call courage.
Yalizeth Lopez
Laura Cennamo, Teacher
Maurice J. Tobin K-8 School

Courage is taking a risk at something you have never done before, like I did when I stood up to bullies. Courage is never giving up on yourself, and even if others are bringing you down, you will come back up. If you stop right there, you will never make a change or make others stop negative actions. Courage is to have confidence in yourself when people tell you that you can’t achieve your goal.

“Mustache girl!” those kids always yelled to me. I cried every day. I hated when they called me that, but I went along and laughed with them because it was my first day at a new school. It was 2009 and I didn’t want to start the school year with no friends. I just wanted to have friends so I could feel like every other girl. Their teasing really hurt me inside. They didn’t really like me, but as long as I had some friends that did care about me and some friends that did like me, I felt accepted.

On the first day at my new school, I went in the classroom so scared. I wanted to go home, but I couldn’t, so I sat next to the girls. All they did was laugh and talk in whispers. Then I sat next to the boys and they all gasped, “Hey!” “Oh my gosh, she has a mustache!” My whole body shut down like a robot that just turned off. I ran to the bathroom and started to cry, but then this boy in my class asked softly, “Are you okay?” I cried, “No!” Then he explained seriously, “Don’t listen to them. They just make fun of everybody, that’s just how they are.”

I wanted to hurt them in so many ways, but I knew that wasn’t right. I told my mom what was happening and she went to the school and talked to the teachers. My mom said angrily, “Just stand up to them!” At the end of the year, we were at the park. Swish! Kids were playing basketball and I went up to the three girls and four boys who called me “mustache girl” all year long. I began saying, “Can you stop bullying me? I am sick and tired of you guys calling me that. You don’t know how I feel inside, but you guys don’t care.” Ever since that day, they never called me “mustache girl” again.

I don’t know why they bullied me because I looked different. I know I was wrong for laughing with them. I should have just told them to stop from the beginning, but then I would have no friends. Eventually I found my courage so that I was able to stand up for myself, and not change myself for others. I am really happy I stood up to them all. My mom helped me to find the courage I needed.

“Courage is to have confidence in yourself when people tell you that you can’t achieve your goal.”
To me, courage means thinking of life as a race. You have to get through the obstacles to win the end prize. For example, school can be hard at times, but the end prize is a good education and a good job.

I showed courage by facing the challenges of growing up. Because of my religion, I have to dress a certain way. Because of this, I am easily judged at first sight. I try ignoring the people who do this. I learned that if you ignore bullies, they do not get the satisfaction of seeing you hurt. Moments like these do not hurt me a lot. That is because it happens to me so much that I am used to it.

Going to middle school has been an important time in my life. I miss all my friends and teachers from my last school. I miss elementary school itself. I had friends that stuck by my side at all times. When I was going through hard times and I felt alone, they would comfort me. I had many friends and I rarely felt lonely. Academically, middle school became stressful too. I have at least four academic classes and get daily homework from each one. At times, it’s hard to juggle all of that at once. Middle school has given me a taste of reality by throwing many challenges my way.

Courage has really helped me be optimistic throughout everyday challenges. If I did not have courage, I would not be where I am today. Many obstacles in life have hit me, but by far, middle school has been the hardest.

“Courage has really helped me to be optimistic throughout everyday challenges.”
“Hey, do you go to church?” a kid asked me.
“No, why?” I inquired.
“Oh, you don’t believe in God or Jesus, right?” he asked.
I shook my head, wondering why he would say that. “I do believe in God. And Jesus. But not in the same way as you do…”
He looked at me, puzzled. “Huh?” he said.

I was six years old when I started going to public school. I was the only Jewish kid in my class, but I wasn’t really worried about that. I was worried that I wouldn’t fit in because I was brand new. I really did feel like a yellow fish in a school of purple fish, not really fitting in with the kids at school. I didn’t come for K1, I started in K2, which means that I wouldn’t know anyone because I was not there to make friends in K1. My definition of courage is to stand up for what you think is right, even if you are the only one who believes in it.

The first day of school seemed as sad as a tiger’s eyes as I walked into the building. My friend Grace, whom I had met at the K2 orientation, greeted me as I walked into the classroom. I felt better instantly. I had a friend! However, I was still a giraffe among zebras. As I started to get to know everybody, I felt like maybe, just maybe, I could make some friends. Until the religion subject came up. When I said that I was Jewish, they treated me like an alien. Oy vey! I was just a KID! Just like them. I figured out that I’d HAVE to make friends because I may be here until the eighth grade. Nine years! Making friends was vital. My act of courage was to show people that I was a good, nice kid and that I would LOVE TO MAKE FRIENDS. I had to show courage because people would not accept (until I showed them) that I was Jewish.

So, I tried to make friends. Luckily I was friends with Grace Kennedy and she was (and still is) awesome. I will always be grateful that she wanted to be my friend, and she has to be the best friend ever. With my new friend by my side, I felt so much better! Whenever I tried to talk to someone, they basically didn’t really care. If they didn’t want to be friends, then I really didn’t care. I didn’t feel like a table groaning under the weight of a really heavy meal anymore. I felt like I was walking on air.

Now that I was not all alone, I was certain that I wouldn’t face problems anymore. I was wrong. Once word got around that I was Jewish, people started bothering me. They would ask questions until my brain hurt. Ow! I would answer them to the best of my ability, but I was six years old and I really didn’t know a lot about Judaism. Go figure. I was confused. Did I say the right thing? I wondered. I asked my mom, and she told me that I was just a kid and that I shouldn’t worry. I calmed down; I was feeling so much better! You know, Mother always knows best!

Now that I’m older, I know more about my religion. I am proud to be a Jew. I will never let anyone change my mind about my beliefs. I was and still am courageous. I will never let anyone bring me down because I am different. Instead I remember that being different is good. Don’t be afraid to let your true self shine through.
To me, courage means being yourself, even if others don’t accept who you are. I demonstrated courage when I told my classmates I wanted to be male instead of female. I first realized I wanted this transition in November; however, I previously have had thoughts about being a male. When I was younger, I would always cross-dress and play with less “girly” toys. Hot Wheels and Pokemon were my toys of choice over the normal Barbie Dolls and Bratz figurines. When I realized this, I was afraid of what my friends and family would think. I had kept it a secret for a few months, but I had told some of my closer friends, who I knew would be fine with it. The thought of not being accepted and “fitting in” to my group of friends and my family was scary.

This school year, I asked my science teacher to call me “Zachary” instead of “Zoe.” I felt comfortable with telling him to call me this because I knew he would respect me. He also used male pronouns when addressing me. When he called me Zachary for the first time in front of the class I was nervous about what my classmates would say. They had said things like “Zachary?” or “Who’s Zachary?” Although I was nervous and a bit scared, I explained why I was being called “Zachary.” When I told them of my wanting to be a male, to my surprise, they accepted it and some even asked, “Should I call you Zachary now too?” When I explain it to others and say, “I am a boy,” my friends will back me up and say things like, “Yeah, he’s Zachary.” This makes me extremely happy, because I know my friends accept me for who I am.

This change from being female to male is important to me because I feel this is who I am and who I was meant to be. Although some may find it weird or disturbing, that doesn’t upset me. I have people who care about me. As the saying goes, “Those who matter don’t mind and those who mind don’t matter.” I have learned this year that part of being courageous is realizing what you are afraid of, but doing what you know is best. By showing my true self, and asking others to respect and acknowledge who I really am, I feel I have made the courageous choice. I believe it takes courage to be who you are without caring what others think, but it helps to have good friends who accept you.

“I believe it takes courage to be who you are without caring what others think.”
My name is Sean. I am eleven years old and live in West Roxbury. I have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and Aspergers. This means I have a lot of anxiety and have a very difficult time in class. This changed over time when I came to the Mary Lyon School in first grade. School was very difficult at first because I found it hard to control myself and sometimes couldn’t sit still. I sometimes ran around the room, disrupting the class and yelling, usually because I was in trouble. My teachers would have to take me out of the room to calm me down, and I would be kicking and screaming. The teachers held my arms firmly. It felt like bands of iron as I was escorted into a room where I screamed and cried like I was getting needles in my arm.

Once I calmed down I felt badly and embarrassed about my behavior, and I didn’t want to go back into my classroom. I thought, what if my classmates laugh at me or make fun of me? On the other hand, I didn’t want to make the situation any worse and I wanted to apologize to my classmates because I really did feel bad about my actions. Yes, I thought, that’s the attitude! That’s what I will do. I won’t be afraid of going back to the classroom, my friends aren’t that type of people. Finally, I made up my mind. I decided to walk back into the classroom. I thought I could at least keep my punishment from getting worse.

Slowly, I walked to the door of the classroom and opened it. I had tears in my eyes and my face was red from crying and screaming. My classmates were in the middle of a lesson, sitting quietly in their seats, listening to the teacher. I sat down. Not one of them even giggled at me. Once I apologized, my peers forgave me. Over time my classmates helped me get to where I am now.

It took a lot of determination to get where I am now. Today, I am a lot better at controlling myself. My friends and teachers helped me get to where I am now. I still struggle with keeping myself together, but I can pull it back together easier now. I still move around, but not to the extent of running around the classroom because I am determined to control my anxiety. Another reason I am much better today is because of my amazing teachers who had to put up with me.

I would like to end this essay with this great quote by one of my favorite saints. St. Thomas Aquinas said, “The principal act of courage is to endure and withstand dangers doggedly rather than to attack them.” It took a lot of determination to get back into the classroom. I’ve shown courage in these situations, each time getting a little better, to where I am now.

“I’VE SHOWN COURAGE IN THESE SITUATIONS, EACH TIME GETTING A LITTLE BETTER, TO WHERE I AM NOW.”
COURAGE IS FIGHTING THROUGH A CHALLENGE NO MATTER HOW HARD IT IS.

With the help of my family, I started to exercise and eat healthier. Even though it was tempting to eat junk food, I didn’t. I started eating more fruits and vegetables. I went back to my karate dojo and started taking classes twice a week. I also started walking, a lot. Every day last summer I walked home, about two miles from summer camp to my house. From walking, I started running. At first, I didn’t do as much because I was still feeling uncomfortable. Now, I know I really like running and I try to go out for a run a few times a week. I am twelve and I have lost about 20 pounds. I feel good in my clothes. I will never bully anyone about anything because I know how that feels too.
What is courage? I have heard many people say that courage is strength, bravery, perseverance, and determination. The meaning of courage for me is confidence. When I was in fourth grade, I was very insecure. I questioned myself about whether my body was normal or not. I was really skinny and people assumed that I barely ate. During that year I got bullied, and the bully always called me a lot of cruel things. He said I was fat, ugly, and that nobody wanted to be near me. Those words replayed in my head over and over again. The bully threatened me, saying that in the future he would kill me and put my blood all over the school. I was hoping he was kidding, but I wasn’t too sure.

I kept this secret from everyone because I was scared that if I told anyone, they might judge me poorly too. I didn’t want to involve anyone else in my problems. My only escape was cutting. I kept it to a minimum and only made tiny scars. Cutting made me release a lot of pain and stress even though I knew it was dangerous and unhealthy. I got addicted to the pain I felt when I cut.

I finally talked to a couple of my very closest friends. I told them everything from the bullying to the cutting. One yelled at me for being so stupid and kept on saying that I didn’t deserve this kind of pain. She turned a shade of pink and I imagined her as a cartoon character with steam coming out of her ears. Another stared at me, shock mixed with disbelief, and took my wrist to check for marks but didn’t find any because I didn’t cut in that obvious location to show scars. Another friend scolded me and kept on saying that I shouldn’t listen to other people’s opinions about me, and that I was beautiful and unique. They told me that if I felt like cutting again I should talk to them. From then on, if they heard anyone bullying me, they would comfort me and stand up for me. I was very glad my friends supported me and didn’t ditch me.

I have controlled myself and have not cut for one and a half years. It was very hard at first, but my friends supported and encouraged me to stop.

Writing something personal and sharing my story with others took a lot of self-convincing and courage. If you are as insecure as I am, always remember that you’re beautiful, unique, and different. I want to tell anyone who is reading my story that you are not the only one going through some type of pain. Please do not do anything that will harm you. I’ve heard that people commit suicide, overdose, and cut, like me, when they are hurting. If you want to release your pain, listen to music, read a book, talk to a very close friend or adult, or write. Do not bottle up your emotions and hurt yourself, because it is not healthy. This is my story and this is the meaning of courage to me: confidence.

“The meaning of courage for me is confidence.”
When I was little, the dark never scared me. I wasn’t afraid of the furnace in my basement and I wasn’t afraid of the “monsters” beneath my bed. I was afraid of the water.

I have no idea where this fear of the water came from. As far as I know, I’ve never had any bad experiences with water. But the idea of drowning, being deprived of air, fighting to stay afloat, that panic that clings to you just as you die scares me more than a guy with a chainsaw and a hockey mask.

If my friends asked me to go swimming, I used to say, “I’m not feeling up to it.” If my sister wanted to go swimming at the beach, I would say I was busy with homework.

One day, I decided that I was tired of being afraid. I needed to get over my fear. And what better way than learning to swim? I asked my mom to sign me up for swimming lessons.

Let me tell you, swimming lessons sucked. It was my first time swimming and already the swim teacher expected me to swim laps. I choked and sputtered and almost drowned. It took me forever to swim one lap and I was left breathless after swimming the shortest distances. But I took the lessons and I got better. I no longer choked and sputtered, and I could swim a couple of laps without feeling woozy.

And, most importantly, my fear of the water left me.

Courage to me is doing something you need to do even though you’re scared to do it. I was hesitant about the lessons, but I was brave enough to take them anyway. I was scared, but I had courage.
It was a Friday afternoon when I was six years old, at about 5:30pm, and the afterschool program had just ended. I was young, so I wanted to play on the playground, and I did, but I ended up making a bad decision. I climbed up the slide, and guess what happened? I fell off and broke my arm. I was really scared. I cried really hard and kept asking my mom if I was going to be okay, and obviously I was, but I didn’t know that. My mom wasn’t convinced that my arm was actually broken, mainly because when I was younger I cried even when I got a paper cut. My mom decided to take me to my normal doctor’s office, which is all the way down in Wilmington, thirty minutes away. When we got there I had to wait hours because I didn’t have a scheduled appointment and they didn’t consider a broken arm to be too serious. Eventually they gave me an x-ray and told me that my arm was broken, but they could only give me a brace because they didn’t have casts.

The next morning was Saturday and we went to get a cast at a special kid’s hospital, but as we got closer I started complaining that I didn’t want a cast because I was really nervous about what other kids at my school would think about it. I didn’t even want to show up at school on Monday.

Suddenly I woke up on Monday morning and it was time to get in the car to go to school. While I was in the car I just kept staring out the window with butterflies in my stomach, and it felt like I had arrived at school in less than two seconds. I walked in, and there they were, all of the first graders. They were just standing there looking all happy, and here I was, wracking my brain, trying to figure out what to say. I walked over, with my sweatshirt over my cast, thinking that they might not notice. But of course they did. They asked, “What happened?” I lied, “Um..., I fell off my skateboard at a skateboard park.”

I didn’t mean to lie, but it just sort of slipped out. I thought it was cooler to have fallen off a skateboard than to have fallen off a slide, but then I remembered that I had to give my teacher a note about what happened, and it contained the truth! I had to decide whether to tell the truth or go on with my lie and risk that my teacher might say something out loud. I couldn’t make up my mind and there was less than five minutes before class, so I finally decided to tell the truth. I mumbled, “Hey guys, the truth is I actually fell off a slide not a skateboard.” They said, “Oh, okay.” I was so relieved. I had the courage to show up at school, admit to lying, and tell the truth about what really happened.

“I HAD THE COURAGE TO… TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.”
For me, courage means to stand up for what is right, even though you’re upset, to make others happy, even though you’re sad.

When I was in third grade, my mom was diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer. Before my parents told me any of this, I had seen a lot of books around our house about how to deal with cancer and books like, *How to Raise an Emotionally Healthy Child While a Parent is Sick*. These books were relatively new because they all still had price stickers on them. So I already knew, but I didn’t really know.

The day my parents told me had been a good day. At school, I had traded my Nutella sandwich for a slice of pizza and my fruit cup for some pudding. I received a 100 on my spelling test and I learned how to do a *tour jeté* in ballet class. It was late that night and I was ready for bed when my parents called me over to the living room. By the time I got there, I was already crying.

“Sweetie,” my mom started, “I went for a mammogram and the test came back positive. I have breast cancer.” By then she had started to cry too.

“Are you going to die?” I asked, through tears.

She said that, no, she wasn’t, and that she would explain more later because I needed to go to bed.

The next day, I didn’t want to go to school. I wanted to stay home with my mom all day. School felt awful. All I wanted to do was sit in the corner and cry. But I didn’t. I participated in class and did all of my work.

At lunch I wanted to sit alone, but I sat with my friends. They asked me why I was sad. I got scared and felt like I was going to puke. I didn’t want to tell them. I wanted to hide and get as small as possible. It took a while, but I finally found the courage to tell them.

“My mom has cancer,” I managed to whisper. Their reactions were not at all what I was expecting. They looked stunned. Then we started to eat again in an awkward silence.

By recess, they were all back to normal. I even made them laugh. They made me feel happy. I made them feel happy. It was frustrating that cancer chose my mom, but I needed to be courageous and not feel scared. Even though I wasn’t happy, I could at least have the courage to make others happy. Getting my friends to laugh and smile took a lot of courage because I felt really sad inside. In the end, being with them helped me feel strong.

“Even though I wasn’t happy, I could at least have the courage to make others happy.”
We were talking about how bad I was feeling. About how one moment I would be happy and the next I would be crying under a blanket. About how I was weak, sick, and sad. I didn’t realize that the next day it would be the start of a new me.

I was never my best at the start of fifth grade. I was crying, pouting, and falling because I was so weak. I was suffering with aches, pains, and was unable to focus. I missed school because at random times I just didn’t feel good. Everyone thought this was how I am, but my family realized this wasn’t me. On February 3rd, 2014 my mom and I were waiting for my sister to finish basketball practice. We were talking about how I should try to go gluten free. Gluten is wheat, barley, oats, rye and malt. A close family friend and cousin were both gluten free, so we agreed to do it just to see if it made me feel any better. Oddly, just like that in maybe two or three days, I was a new person. It was like magic. Although I still ate a little gluten here and there, because it wasn’t that serious.

At my next checkup I got a blood test to see if I was gluten free. If I tested high it could mean I have an intolerance to gluten, and I ended up positive, meaning I have a high chance of having celiac disease. My mom thought if I was feeling so good without gluten that she should take me to a doctor who specializes in things like this. At the beginning of March my mom took me to a doctor at Children’s Hospital named Dr. Lee. She is a GI doctor, which stands for gastroenterologist. Gastroenterologists help with digestive system or stomach problems. She said since I was feeling so good and I tested high that we should consider an endoscopy.

An endoscopy is a test to see if you have a disease called celiac. Celiac means that you can’t eat gluten. The endoscopy test is when the doctors and nurses stick this tube down your throat. There are little cameras at the end so they can see your intestines. If your intestines don’t look right it means you have celiac. In order for them to see if your intestine are ruined by gluten I had to go back on gluten for about a month! After a lot discussing my family and I decided it would be best if I got the test so I would be certain. I didn’t expect that going on gluten would be one of the worst things to happen in my life because I was so used to being happy. I was so weak. I fell. I was so unfocused that I would moan and pout about going to school because it was too hard. I felt upset and sad. Although on the good side I was eating all my favorite foods I would no longer be able to eat if I did have celiac.

The night and morning before my test I could not eat or drink for a certain amount of time because they wanted my system clear. The big day was here and I was nervous. Even though it is a small procedure it was horrifying to me. Questions were running through my head, “What if the anesthesia wears off and I wake up? What if I didn’t eat enough gluten so I have to wait another month?” What if this? What if that? Is all I could hear in my head. When we got to the hospital we waited for what seemed like forever, but was really 10 minutes. I got into the bed with curtains around me and they started asking questions like “When is my birthday?” And the distracting ones like, “What is my favorite movie? And what is my favorite song?” Next they put in my IV, which is a way to get medicine through my body. When everything was all set they gave me laughing gas, and let me tell you it works! I laughed and felt so dizzy. They next wheeled me into the room where I was going to be tested. I don’t remember much of what happened there. They gave me something to knock me out. After the test I woke up and my first question was, “Is it over?” And it was! My mom, dad, and a nurse were all there. I wouldn’t find out the results for two weeks.

Two weeks later we got a call saying the test was positive, meaning I have celiac. My first reaction was “Yes! I went through all of that for something.” Celiac is definitely frustrating. I have to go up to adults who just made something that I am unsure of and say, “What are the ingredients?” or “No thank you.” I am always explaining to people what I can’t eat. On anything I eat I have to read the ingredients. When I am at someone’s house I usually bring my own food.

To me it took courage to stay strong during the whole process of finding out what was wrong with me. It takes way more courage to constantly be careful about what I eat, than to be at a hospital getting a test done. I always have celiac; it doesn’t go away. One day there may be a pill to take before you eat gluten, but there isn’t now. I will just have to live with it, even when it’s frustrating or seems unfair, but I know it could be a lot worse.
I am just your average eleven year old girl. I don’t feel very extraordinary. I go to school, have friends, and have okay grades. But the one thing that makes me different from the rest of the kids, is what I look like.

My friends always sugarcoat the truth; they say that I am skinny and they’re fat, which is not the truth, but what I am about to tell you is. I am a certain weight which the doctors call 90% bigger than all of my classmates. People have certain reasons for being bigger, but sadly I don’t have a reason; I just am.

For me courage isn’t a temporary moment, but rather a lifestyle. I compare myself to other girls in my grade. I only see girls that barely have a slab of fat on their bodies. I’m only human for wanting to be skinny like them, but my DNA makes me bigger. I am courageous for not getting down on myself for not being skinny.

When I went to a country club a couple of years ago, I realized that I was bigger than all of my friends. I was changing with my friend Emily. She wore a pink ruffled bikini, while I wore a pineapple ruffled bikini. It was the first time that I wore a bikini so I was pretty uncomfortable with showing my stomach. We walked over to the pool and picked up two beach towels. We sat on some beach chairs while Emily’s mom and her sister helped us put sunscreen on. We waited for our sunscreen to dry so that we wouldn’t burn. Afterwards, we jumped into the pool. The pool felt very crisp against my skin, which I was happy about because it was a super-hot day. Then it happened during lunch. We got out of the pool and when I wasn’t soaked with water, I decided to get my t-shirt. When I looked over at Emily, she looked at me in a funny way. I then realized maybe I shouldn’t put the shirt on.

We both had grilled cheeses and Arnold Palmers for lunch. Charlotte, her sister, suggested that we take some pictures to post on Instagram. After we had posted the pictures, I got comments from people saying that they “could tell that I was sucking in.” I was filled with disbelief and cried myself to sleep that night. I felt like I was being crushed into tiny pieces, like when you throw metal at a piece of glass. As a joke, when we went back to school, some of my best friends called Emily and me the big and small sisters. I thought they meant that they were comparing our height, but about a week later I realized they were talking about our weight.

Courage isn’t something you just decide to try some day. It’s something that you are scared of, but you do it anyway in that moment. I am scared of many things, especially of being recognized as a heavier kid. I feel as if kids have noticed the difference of weight between classmates and me. I know they have talked about it behind my back. But I am not scared of that. I am scared that I will get down on myself for being bigger. I am starting to realize that I shouldn’t feel this way because it doesn’t matter how much you weigh. What matters is what you make of yourself. I know I am bigger than almost all the kids in my class, but as long as it doesn’t matter to me, it doesn’t matter at all.
When I was in fourth grade, I was at a friend’s house with another one of my friends, Stefano. His sister Sabella was also there. We knew there was going to be no school the next day because of a snowstorm that had already left snow on the ground, so we decided to have a snowball fight.

I whipped a snowball at Stefano, but he ducked and it hit Sabella, who was behind him. She was mad and started to chase me. I ran down a hill and she pushed me. Momentum carried me and I landed on my collarbone, breaking it like a chicken wing.

Pain set in, although I wasn’t crying. I had to be brave and get some help. The pain was ridiculous. I managed to get up and go to the house and tell Mrs. Donovan what had happened. Mrs. Donovan has seven kids, so she was very calm and suggested we call my mom. My mom arrived to take me to the hospital. She could tell I was in horrible pain.

Eventually, after a long wait in the ER, I got an x-ray. I was nervous about the results, but courage got me through it. The results came back: my collarbone was broken in two places. Recovery would be two to three months long. The doctor said no sports or physical activities. I was bummed out, but courage once again helped me.

Courage is bravery that comes when you least expect it. I used it, but some people don’t. I am healed now, with the exception of a small bump on my shoulder that will be there to remind me of my courage that day.
It was a dull, rainy day. All you could hear were the drops of rain banging against our car. My family and I were in our Honda, sitting silently as we heard other cars splashing into puddles. Just by the mood you could tell everyone was sad.

Shortly after, we arrived at the church for my grandpa's funeral. As we entered, the room’s sadness hit us. You could see tears rolling down many faces, and one of those faces was mine. I could smell that church smell: old, sterile, and a hint of flowers. I heard solemn chatter of friends and family. I felt the smoothness of the chairs. As I sat through the funeral, with my grandpa lying a few inches away, I gulped down my cries.

When the funeral was over, it was time to walk my grandpa out of the church. My big brother tapped me and whispered, asking me if I wanted to help carry my grandpa out. I thought to myself, I’d like to help, but I feel all these different types of emotions: sad, scared, and worried. But, I replied to my brother whispering back, “Yes.”

Everyone who was helping stood, and we walked slowly towards the casket where my grandpa lay peacefully. I took a deep breath and trembled as I tried to grab the handle that was attached to the casket. As we were walking down the aisle, I firmly gripped the cold metal handle and felt brave.

I hid all of my emotions thinking of my fearless grandpa. I swallowed my fears because I wanted to show everyone that I was the most caring and courageous granddaughter my grandpa ever had.

I showed courage while all eyes were focused on me as I carried him. He inspired me one more time that day. My grandpa was the most fearless one in our family. I was always fearless around him and he inspired me to do things out of my comfort zone. I miss him dearly.
Emperis Matthews-Quarles
David Russell, Teacher
McKinley South End Academy

Do you know what courage is? To me, courage is dealing with tough times and making them good ones. What I’m going to talk to you about is my seven years away from my family, away from my mom, away from home.

It happened so suddenly. And I remember so little. I was four years old when it happened. I didn’t understand why my mom kept going into her room to take pills. All I knew was that it wasn’t good for her. I kept asking her, “Mommy, why do you take those pills?” And she never answered me. This hurt me very much because I trusted her.

One day, a cop caught my mom with the pills. The cop kept asking her to come with him. She refused to let him take me away. At that time, I was scared to let go, too.

The other thing I remember is when we were at the hospital. That’s when they really tried to take me away. My mom refused so many times that they had to pry me away. Finally, instead of her having to let me go, I jerked my hand away and said, “Don’t worry mommy, I’m a soldier!” I know it sounds hard to believe, but she told me this herself.

I had spent many years crying about this, and the more I cried, the more I wanted my mom to hold me tight and be there saying, “It is OK.” I have also gone to more than five foster homes (one involves abuse from the parents and their relatives), two adoptive homes, and three group homes.

In August, I was reintroduced with my mom after seven years. I felt victorious! My mom is clean, which means she does not take drugs anymore. I’m very proud of her. She said, “Emperis, you’re the strongest kid I have ever seen.” I took pride in what she said to me.

It was hard for me because it had happened at such a young age. I’m still in DCF custody. My mother is still trying to get the permission for me to live with her. What I think happened with my mom was just a very, very, very, bad choice. And what is happening now is a miracle. What I learned is that you should always think before you act. What my mom learned is that you should always do the right thing even if it’s hard. My mother and I have shown multiple forms of courage. Like we love to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“My mother and I have shown multiple forms of courage.”
I knew it was going to be a hard year. My grandmother died in late August and I was devastated. I had a hard time getting over the loss. Between her funeral and going to her apartment for the next couple of weeks to go through all her things, I could not help but cry. I would wear her jewelry to school always trying to keep her near to me. On October 12th 2013, Columbus Day, my life changed forever. I watched through the door as my father verbally and physically hurt my mother. After he went back in his room and my mom ran to the bathroom, I snuck out of my room and knocked on the bathroom door to ask if she was ok. She replied with a simple, “Did you see what just happened?” I nodded. She opened the bathroom door and yelled at my dad’s door, “Frida saw what you did to me, Tim!” He screamed back, “I don’t care!” That pushed me over the edge. That pushed my mom over the edge. I couldn’t take it because that hurt too much. In a way, I shut down.

My mother called 911 hoping to at least file a report of domestic violence, but they sent three police cars and five police officers. Four officers were in my living room, and one was in the bedroom. Before the police could come up my stairs, my dad came into my room, pointed his finger at me and said, “Your words are going to put me in jail. You know that, right?” When the police officer came into my room, I was in a mode of non-stop crying. I could not believe that this was happening to my family. My dad was arrested on a charge of domestic violence and was sent to a holding cell. We had to file a restraining order against him… my father. I have only seen him once in a span of one year and four months. It’s been hard, but my mom and I are making it through.

Courage to me is my mom and I, because we are able to live through this experience with some counseling. Courage to me is my mom not screaming or hitting back and being brave through it all. She was able to be brave enough to put through a call to 911 and still be a great mom the day after. That is the definition of courage to me.

“Courage to me is my mom and I.”
When you think of courage, you might think of superheroes and saving others, but courage can also mean having the bravery to save yourself, like my aunt, Dominique, and her family. In 1975, at the age of five, she escaped her home country, Laos, after the Vietnam War. Her family risked their lives crossing the Mekong River going to Thailand, traveled to a refugee camp in the Philippines and eventually made it to America.

After the Vietnam War was over for America, many people who supported the American Occupation of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were treated poorly by the new governments who took over. My aunt’s father, Mahn Phanthachith, worked for the American Embassy, but that job was taken away from him and he was forced to work slave labor. When his boss wanted to give him money, the pay he received was poor. Their family eventually had to sell all of their furniture to feed their kids. My aunt’s father decided he had to go to America for a better life, so he arranged for a man to take the rest of his family to Thailand. That night they packed up their few belongings and boarded a small canoe.

“Quiet,” their mother said, “they mustn’t know we’re here.” Their uncle had pneumonia and couldn’t stop coughing. The man taking them across the river had threatened to shoot him. As they peered over the canoe, they saw blood in the water and the floating dead bodies of people who had tried to escape. Suddenly, a body moved. Everyone held their breaths. It was a skinny man trying to swim across the river. “Please let me cross with you,” the man said. So, they brought him on the boat and kept going, hoping they would reach Thailand soon.

Fortunately, they made it across the river safely. Meanwhile, in Laos, their father was waiting for the money he gained by selling their house. Word got out about his escape, and his own friend, who was a police officer, talked to him and explained that he had to arrest him. Before his friend could do this, he went to the bathroom, snuck out of a window, and made his way to his family in Thailand. After about nine months, they were moved to a new camp in the Philippines. As you can imagine, life in a refugee camp was dreadful, but finally, after eight months, they were sponsored by the Lutheran Church in Chicago. This is how they ended up in America.

They arrived in Chicago in 1980 with no money except the support of the Lutheran Church. They rented a house through the church, but they had to make more money and go further. Mahn worked as a carpenter and on the weekends, with his family, he would rebuild abandoned houses. Eventually, they gained enough money to buy their first home in America. Also in America, they gave birth to their fifth child. Things were really turning around for them and their future looked great.

Now, the year is 2015 and her family is whole and happy. My aunt Donna said, “If we did not decide to move to America thirty-nine years ago, we would not have the life we do today. I would not have my grandchildren. I want my kids to know what they went through so that they know how lucky they are. Imagine all of the people who didn’t make it out. My family is truly blessed.”

Even today, an American flag flies in front of their parents’ home as a constant reminder of the support Americans offered them, and the opportunity they were given to live a great life as free Americans.
Courage can be defined in many different ways. In the dictionary, courage is defined as “The ability to conquer fear or despair.” People show courage every day. A first grader can show courage by practicing to read for the first time in front of the class. In my life, I showed courage in a slightly different way.

One of my most memorable courage moments is when I participated in a protest in Egypt. The story didn’t start that summer. It actually started over 40 years ago. For many years, a president named Mohamed Hosni Mubruark ruled Egypt cruelly. The government tricked people, leaving them poor, while people in the government used the money to stay in power and live in luxury. He and his army killed many people. Even though many people did not feel the government was fair, they were afraid to speak their mind. Finally, they started speaking up on social media. So many people were complaining that they decided to organize a physical protest. During the protest, people chanted phrases like, “Ya Mubruark, ya Mubruark, It-Tayara Fi Intisarak!” which means “Oh Mubruark, oh Mubruark, the airplane is waiting for you!” (In Arabic, this rhymes in a poetic way.)

My family and I saw these protest images on our satellite television channel in the U.S. I was amazed at how many people there were, old and young from many different towns, jobs, and religions. They were peaceful protestors and looked hopeful. Finally, they were brave enough to speak out against an unjust government. I was proud of them.

The whole world was watching and many people were proud of them. They peacefully insisted that Mubruark step down, and he did. For the first time in history, Egyptians had a democratic presidential election. Things looked like they were improving. Egypt was rebuilding itself. However, the rebuilding process wasn’t going so well. Lines for gasoline were kilometers long. Crime was increasing. People were getting impatient for real improvements.

While visiting family in Egypt that summer, I saw that people had reached the end of their patience. Once again, many groups of protestors marched all over Egypt. They wanted to change their new president named Mohamed Morsi. I watched them out of my grandfather’s balcony in Alexandria; I heard them everywhere. I even saw them on television being sprayed with tear gas. I wanted to get out of the apartment and join the protestors. I felt like they were right, and I wanted to help them improve, and improve Egypt. At this time, only my father would leave the apartment because he was worried for our safety. The news was always full of stories about how protestors and police fought, leaving protestors injured.

The protests were getting so big that the police couldn’t control them. Kids in the street would sell Egyptian flags, and I saw entire families (including babies) attending the protests. Finally, my dad allowed us to join. The streets were so full that we could barely walk. I could tell my mom was afraid we would get lost in the crowd. There were so many sounds – musical instruments, famous Egyptian songs broadcast over car stereos and speakers, and people yelling happily and laughing. People had their faces painted in the Egyptian flag, or dressed in its colors. People waved flags of different shapes and sizes. The protest felt like a party.

The people in Egypt showed courage in protesting. I showed a lot of courage by putting my trust in God and participating in the protest, not knowing what could happen. Now whenever people gather and talk about politics, they fight about who was right and who was wrong. I think people still don’t exactly know what happened. I think the courage of the Egyptian people was amazing. It amazes me that they united together and worked together to do what they thought was right. Singers made songs about uniting together again. Now, whenever I think of courage, I think of the Egyptian flag.
Some people might say that courage is fighting a lion or camping out in the woods at night. My way of seeing courage is to do something that is difficult, and you may not want to do it, but you do it because it is for the best. This was the case for me when I got invited to “Advanced Work Class,” known as AWC. AWC is a special program for kids who are more advanced in their learning abilities. If you do well on the Terranova, a formal assessment, you will be invited into the program.

When I got to AWC, I quickly learned that homework was a big deal. There were nights when we had several math worksheets along with a five paragraph essay for ELA, or a letter for social studies. Homework on nights like that took two, maybe three hours to finish. I wasn’t able to spend as much time with my family or have any extra time to myself.

As the years passed, the homework got more difficult. There were more essays and more math worksheets. There was one instance where we weighed my binder and the result was two pounds of class work! That’s how much work I had. I was starting to get depressed. All this work was not good for me. I was worried about how much homework there was. I felt like I was going to fail. My confidence was dwindling, along with all of the high expectations.

Although I was afraid that I was going to fail, I found the courage to stay. My teacher, Mr. Clark, had a huge role in my success in school. He gave me strategies to use in and out of the classroom and suggested I use a recorder to keep me organized. This helped me a lot. Without him, I wouldn’t have had the courage to continue. I knew that I wouldn’t have gotten into AWC if I couldn’t do it, so I kept working and eventually the amount of homework decreased. My grades improved, and by the end of the year I had mostly A’s on my report card.

Today I am more courageous than I was in fourth or fifth grade, because I know that if I feel like I am not doing well, I can look back at the prior essays I did in AWC and be inspired that I did all that work and my efforts paid off. Now I am more confident in my academic abilities. If I could succeed in AWC, I can succeed anywhere.

“Although I was afraid that I was going to fail, I found the courage to stay.”
Courage is something that takes lots of guts and faith, especially if you think there is no hope when you are in a bad situation. Many children with cancer look at life as a ray of sunshine. Children with cancer find the courage to stay happy even when a doctor gives them bad news. They try to live their life to the fullest. Children with cancer look forward to living a normal life, and sometimes it’s just taken away. I feel empathy for those children knowing that life will be short for them. They are brave enough to somehow place a smile on their faces and be able to laugh while they can. Only they know how it feels to have the pain and frustration they experience. They show so much courage.

Children with cancer go through radiation treatment. They lose their hair, while watching their loved ones worry about them. At every turn, they face problems that can’t be solved. They go through life not knowing the feeling of what it is to play jump rope, football, basketball and to just be a kid. Their childhood is gone.

Courage is something that takes guts and faith, and children with cancer have more courage than anyone I know. Day after day, night after night they have the courage to fight this terrible disease. We can all learn a lot about being courageous from children with cancer.

“We can all learn a lot about being courageous from children with cancer.”
“Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Carlos Herrera to the stage.” It was time. I couldn’t back down now. My legs were twitching, and I could feel my throat getting clogged. I took one deep breath, and went onstage.

I’ve always been emotional when it comes to the school year ending. I once even cried on the last day of school in third grade. Being with a group of people for nine months, then not seeing them for three months can be hard on someone. Well, it was hard on me at least. While everyone else is looking forward to vacation, I’m sad that the school year is over.

On the day we wrote graduation speeches, the instructions said to “Pour your heart out,” and that’s exactly what I did. I found out that my speech was chosen when I asked the ELA teacher. All I said was, “Oh, ok,” but a lot was going on in my head. Now don’t get me wrong, I was happy, but I had to speak in front of hundreds of people! I was so nervous! I even tried to look up on Google how to relieve stress for public speaking, but it didn’t work. I was on my own.

Graduation Day came quickly, and I was still very nervous. I considered letting someone else read my speech for me. I thought very hard, but then I asked myself “Do you wanna back out? Do you wanna be a wimp?” and I decided to read it. The awards part of graduation was finished and it was time for my speech. “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Carlos Herrera to the stage.” I walked up to the stage, with my speech in hand, and started reading. You could hear how nervous I was through my voice. I was stuttering a lot. I loosened up as I got more into the speech. When I finished, I got a standing ovation from the crowd. I felt proud of myself. If I hadn’t read it, look at what I could’ve missed out on!

To me, courage means taking the chances that life gives you and seizing them. It’s overcoming your fears, even if you have the heaviest burden on your shoulders. I’m sure that many people have faced bigger challenges, and showed more courage than I did, but trust me, going out and giving a speech in front of about 800 people takes courage, and a lot of it.

“TO ME, COURAGE MEANS TAKING THE CHANCES THAT LIFE GIVES YOU AND SEIZING THEM.”
Courage is facing your fear while living through tough times. When I was eight years old I was placed in foster care. I was absolutely terrified of what was happening to me. The Department of Social Services came to our home and took my siblings and me away from my mom. First, we were taken to the DCF office. We waited while they searched for a foster home for my siblings and me to live in. Finally, we got to our foster homes, but unfortunately, we were placed in different homes.

When I walked into my first foster home, it looked really nice and clean. My room was also nice, but I didn’t feel comfortable. I was feeling bad for my sisters and what they were going through. I just wished that everything would go back to normal and that I wasn’t in the system.

I have lived in four different foster homes. Two of the foster homes didn’t work out for me, so I asked my social worker if I could move. My third foster mother retired. I lived with my last foster mother for eleven months. She knew my grandfather, so I liked that. It was going well, but I really wanted to be with my dad.

During this time, I was only able to see my sisters and mom when we had our weekly visits, and my dad on weekends and during vacations. This was really hard for me.

Last month, though, I got to move in with my father! It has been awesome. I am really happy to be back with him.

Also, I have been in therapy for five months now. I express my emotions with my therapist and this helps me feel more comfortable inside. I don’t focus on the challenges in my life all the time. I push myself to be successful in school and outside of school. This is courage!
Courage means conquering fear because you are doing stuff you have never done before. It’s like your first day of school when you are little and you are leaving your family for the first time, and you might be sad but at the end of the day you can’t wait to go back again. My story of courage is finding the strength I need to do things on my own and to help my dad by being responsible for my siblings. While other sixth graders go home to play video games, do homework or use the computer, I am taking care of my family.

“Gaby, watch you sister and brother while I cook dinner and clean the house.”

“Ugh! Okay dad,” I say, even though I’d rather play on my tablet.

Then it all starts: “Gaby! Gaby!!!... Get me a cookie... Get me a banana... wha wha wha...”

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” I say to my one-year-old sister, Luvena, when she is crying. “Okay, okay, I’ll get you a cookie,” I say to my four-year-old brother, Isaiah. Back and forth, all afternoon, I help her, I play with him, I make her a bottle, I get a snack for him, I get a toy for him, I rock her and I change diapers! I’m exhausted!

My dad needs me to watch over my siblings every day. He needs to take care of the house, clean and get dinner ready for us. I need to help out to be responsible. My dad teaches me to take responsibility for my own life. There is a lot that has to get done and I need to be able to do it myself. He will say to me, “Later on, you need to be able to do stuff on your own because I can’t be there all the time.” He is teaching me to do things I might not want to do, but have to do, so I can face problems and be ready for opportunities.

Each day I get to play with my baby sister and teach her how to talk and behave. I will tell her “use nice words,” “no hitting,” and “be nice.” I also tell my younger brother to behave and use nice words. They always want to play with me and ask me to do everything, and even though it is exhausting, it makes me feel happy. I never met my older brothers, so when I got my younger siblings I felt happy that I could have a brother and sister in my life.

I am thankful to my dad because I have a great life. For a while, it was hard because my mom and dad separated and I was not always able to see my mom. I did not understand at that time, but now I know that he was doing that for a good reason. Every day my dad makes sure I am ready for school and that I have what I need. He says, “Be good at school. Call me when you get there. I love you.” He teaches me to be responsible and shows me he loves me because he wants to be a great dad. I help him to show him that he is a great dad. I love him.

My courage was passed down from my dad, who showed me how to take responsibility for my life. Many people can show courage, but it is really special to learn how to be courageous from someone you love. My dad showed me how to do things I have never done before, and I am ready for challenges and opportunities in life without being afraid.
The courage that I think should be more common in the world is not necessarily the one that gives you the ability to jump off a moving train, or complete another dangerous task. Instead, it’s one that lets you do the simple things in life, such as standing up to a bully, or waking up with a smile every day, no matter what hardships you’ll face. Courage is letting nothing get in the way of success.

When I was eight years old, my doctor diagnosed me with Lyme disease. But that wasn’t the worst part. It later caused me to have Bell’s Palsy, a temporary paralysis of half your face. I had to sleep with one eye open, which caused inflammation and dryness, and I had to wear an eye patch. When I was back in my parents’ homeland over the summer, I had to go to an Algerian hospital and have wires stuck all over my body. All in all, I couldn’t move half my face for two and a half months. It was horrible. I would throw up many times a day, and took huge plastic pills that I would sometimes choke on. I was embarrassed to go out of the house because, when I did, people would give me weird glances and questioning looks that would make me sometimes want to disappear.

I didn’t have the will to wake up in the morning and live a normal life. But one day when I was thinking about how unfortunate I was, it struck me, “Why do I care how people think of me?” I hated staying home. Even if I looked different, I shouldn’t be ashamed of it. Every day, I would wake up feeling normal and even went to places. People still looked at me differently, but instead of me feeling embarrassed and hiding in the shadows, I would smile at them (even if it was with half my face) and keep walking. A few weeks later, I didn’t even notice the looks anymore. Four years later, I’m still glad that I had the courage to move on, because if I hadn’t, that would have been one boring summer.

“Amina Naidjate
Hamzah Henshaw, Teacher
Al-Noor Academy

The courage that I think should be more common in the world is not necessarily the one that gives you the ability to jump off a moving train, or complete another dangerous task. Instead, it’s one that lets you do the simple things in life, such as standing up to a bully, or waking up with a smile every day, no matter what hardships you’ll face. Courage is letting nothing get in the way of success.

When I was eight years old, my doctor diagnosed me with Lyme disease. But that wasn’t the worst part. It later caused me to have Bell’s Palsy, a temporary paralysis of half your face. I had to sleep with one eye open, which caused inflammation and dryness, and I had to wear an eye patch. When I was back in my parents’ homeland over the summer, I had to go to an Algerian hospital and have wires stuck all over my body. All in all, I couldn’t move half my face for two and a half months. It was horrible. I would throw up many times a day, and took huge plastic pills that I would sometimes choke on. I was embarrassed to go out of the house because, when I did, people would give me weird glances and questioning looks that would make me sometimes want to disappear.

I didn’t have the will to wake up in the morning and live a normal life. But one day when I was thinking about how unfortunate I was, it struck me, “Why do I care how people think of me?” I hated staying home. Even if I looked different, I shouldn’t be ashamed of it. Every day, I would wake up feeling normal and even went to places. People still looked at me differently, but instead of me feeling embarrassed and hiding in the shadows, I would smile at them (even if it was with half my face) and keep walking. A few weeks later, I didn’t even notice the looks anymore. Four years later, I’m still glad that I had the courage to move on, because if I hadn’t, that would have been one boring summer.

“A COURAGE IS LETTING NOTHING GET IN THE WAY OF SUCCESS.”
Christopher Whyte
Monica Linari and Erica Prince, Teachers
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School

Do you know what it feels like to lose someone before you’re born? Well, I do. I lost my dad before I was born. This is why, to me, courage means facing what you have gone through and learning to accept what you can’t change.

I remember that when I was about five I was not aware my dad had died. I thought he was just not always around. One day I was in school and my teacher said, “Father’s Day is coming up and we need to make cards to give to your dads.”

After school that day I told my mom I was making a card for my dad, and that’s when she said that he was gone. I asked her what she meant by “gone.” Then she told me my dad had died before I was born. I was shocked. I felt like I had been stabbed in the back. I started to cry like a baby. After a few days I talked to my sister. She told me that she and I had the same father, but that my younger and older brothers had a different father, so they did not have to go through what I was going through.

I was very nervous going into school the next day. I knew I had to tell my teacher that I did not want to make a card. When I finally told her she had a weird look on her face and asked me, “Why?” I told her my dad had passed away. She talked to me about it and told me that I did not have to make a card.

After that happened, my brother’s father started treating me like a son. And to this day he still does, which makes me feel good, because it is like I have a stepdad.

Every day I deal with all that has gone on in my life, and I try not to let it get to me. But when it does, I remember all the good stories I have heard about my dad, and I choose to make the most of the relationships I have with the people I do have in my life.

“To me, courage means facing what you have gone through and learning to accept what you can’t change.”
Courage can be many things, but from my personal perspective, it means to never give up, especially when you’re close to the end of it.

I had a horrible experience in life because my mother and I were going through both poverty and depression, but we continue making it through. My mom didn’t want to be the type to live with her mom forever, so she took responsibility. We ended up moving out of my grandmother’s house and went to my aunt’s house. Her house made apartment searching easier because of the area, but my mom noticed that homes were way too expensive and that she needed Section 8.

My dad was away for a while, so my mom and I handled everything. She worked, but her job was being unfair and she left. We were going through even more poverty, and my mom couldn’t finish her last few classes at Bunker Hill. A little later, we were assigned to the Days Inn Hotel, which wasn’t a very good shelter, but we went through with it because it provided us what we needed. Just recently, after four years, my mom received a Section 8 voucher, and she searches everyday for a home. I always know right when I come home to go straight to my grandma’s to cook food because we have no stove, just a microwave. That’s one of the reasons why I can’t always finish my homework.

We are still trying to get out of the hotel with mice and roaches. I noticed my mom and I showed great courage by being determined. We are almost finished getting everything done to make everything better, and be a happy normal family.

“I noticed my mom and I showed great courage by being determined.”
My heart pounds! My muscles tighten! I feel it coming! Oh no, not now! Not here! What will I do? Everyone will see it! Will they all laugh at me? Shame! Will I be teased again? Anger! I have no control over it! Sadness! Maybe if I hit something, cough loudly or yell to someone it might pass unnoticed. This is what it’s like to live with Tourette Syndrome. I show courage every day battling Tourette’s. Courage is facing your fears, even when you’re afraid.

This will be the first time I share this truth about myself to someone other than my family. Tourette Syndrome is when you make involuntary movements and sounds that are called tics. I was born with it. I have to face the fact that these embarrassing tics can come at any time and any place. I am at war with my own body, but I don’t let Tourette’s keep me down. I fight hard to hold back my tics. I lose most of the time, but I never give up trying to win. Even though it’s difficult to read when my eyes are darting all around or my hands shake the book, I keep reading until I’m finished. My Tourette’s is making it hard for me to write this essay. Tics are like hiccups. I can’t stop them from happening, no matter how hard I try. It’s difficult to stay focused and listen in class while fighting the urge to scream or jump up. I try to keep my worst tics under control and not disturb the class or embarrass myself in public. Holding back Tourette’s is like trying to stop scratching an itch, all while keeping calm and paying attention in class. The itch gets greater and greater, until I feel like I’m going to explode. This is the struggle I have inside myself every day, from when I get up in the morning until I go to sleep at night. It can be very exhausting and depressing, but I don’t let that or fear of embarrassment stop me from doing anything I want. I can’t control my tics, but I can control my life.

If you have a disability, you must believe in yourself. You can still be awesome! It is much harder for me to concentrate in class and read than most people. Tourette’s is a dark cloud hanging over my head. I get muscle pains and sore throats, but I don’t let Tourette’s take over my life. I am still able to get good grades in school and play sports. I use coping strategies that help me focus, read longer and stay quieter. It’s not easy, but I am able to function with my Tourette’s. Disabilities don’t make you less of a person. They can actually make you stronger!

In conclusion, it is very hard to live with Tourette’s when its strong arms have me in a stranglehold. I fight with it every day and never give up. I wish all people could see me beyond my tics. I am much more than my Tourette’s, so I can’t let it define who I am. I hope that after reading my story, people will have more compassion for others who have disabilities, like me. You can’t always see how brave people are on the outside; sometimes it takes greater courage to fight a battle on the inside.

“I AM MUCH MORE THAN MY TOURETTE’S, SO I CAN’T LET IT DEFINE WHO I AM.”
There are many definitions of courage. My dad sent me a quote from Bethany Hamilton, “Soul Surfer.” She says, “Courage does not mean you don’t get afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you.” I asked my dad if I could share a little bit of his story because I believe he is a courageous person. Let me tell you a little bit about my dad. He is 37 years old, and he works for Angels Recovery. He is their Alumni Director and he lives in Florida. My dad was adopted when he was a baby. His parents are white and he is black, so people were confused about who his parents were.

As he grew up, his father was a pastor and he moved around a lot. Because of all the changes, my dad became a rebellious kid. He made some bad decisions during his teenage years. These choices led to drugs and alcohol. Later in life he became addicted to them. For a long time he tried to stop by himself, but these addictions are very hard to conquer.

About two years ago he made the courageous decision to move to Florida and enter rehab. The program was intense and difficult. He went to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) meetings. He had group sessions and a counselor. It was scary for him to go to rehab because it is a very difficult process. But he stayed with the program and has been sober for two years.

Part of his courage shows in the job he has now, because now he shares his story on a regular basis with other addicts. He encourages others to fight and have courage in themselves to battle their addictions. Every day my dad chooses to stay sober with the courage he has. I’m very proud of my dad and admire him for his courage. His counselor told me not to follow his footsteps, but to listen to what he says now because he is a changed person. I want to be courageous like him. How’s your courage?
Courage Beyond Boston

A special supplement featuring essays from our national and international partners

The essays featured in this section were written by students participating in our national and international programs. They represent the true universal nature of courage, and support our strong conviction that all people have the capacity to be courageous.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s Global Initiative

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum began working with international partners in 2007 in response to a growing need for an accessible, proven literacy and character development curriculum. To date, “The Max” has worked with schools and communities in countries such as Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Cambodia, China and Thailand. This list continues to grow, as our organization forms partnerships with schools and learning communities across the globe to engage students in the reading and writing process, while empowering them to discover, recognize and celebrate the courage in their lives.

This year, we are honored to partner with Learning Pathways, The Cambridge School for Cambodia, and students from Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. We are grateful to each of these partners for their compassionate work with teachers and students in Pakistan, India, Cambodia and Lebanon, and for sharing in the vision of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum.

We welcome any organization wishing to work with The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum. Recognizing that the stories of courage from children across the globe enrich the educational experience for all students, we seek to share our materials and offer educational opportunities for children outside of Boston.

Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum proudly hosts the Courage in My Life National Essay Contest, open to students in grades 5-8 in the United States. This program engages students in the reading and writing process, while encouraging young people to write about personal experiences with courage.

We are proud to share inspiring essays written by courageous students from across the United States in the 24th volume of The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond, including our national essay contest winner and honorable mention candidates, and students from our national partner schools who have participated in the full curriculum. This year’s collection features essays written by students from: Birmingham, AL; St. Louis, MO; Washington, D.C.; Indianapolis, IN; Ringgold, GA; Armuchee, GA; Mechanicsburg, PA; Memphis, TN; Phoenix, AZ; and Cleveland, OH.

All schools that participate in our national program are given access to teaching guides and online resources. We encourage participating schools to deepen their experience by exploring and implementing our sixth grade curriculum, and continue to offer support and guidance to make this possible.

For more information about The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum and our programs, please visit our website: www.maxcourage.org
I think of courage as being medicine to cure the disease of being fearful.

When I was about ten or eleven years old, the apartment I was living in caught on fire. That day was the most terrifying day of my life. My two sisters and I were asleep, while our mother was gone. At around four o’clock in the morning, there was a big explosion from a gas leak in our neighbor’s apartment. The explosion woke my two sisters, but not me, because I am a sound sleeper. My sisters didn’t know what caused the big explosion, so my older sister, Ashley, went to go open the door and saw there was a fire. She didn’t panic, but my oldest sister, Shon, did. She was just thinking about how she was going to save her sisters.

The first thing she did was try to wake me up. She tried and tried, but I didn’t wake up. She ended up dragging me from my bed. As soon as I woke up, I saw a firefighter bust our window and ask if we needed help. I was so lost because I didn’t know what was going on. A few seconds later, I saw a flame by the window. I went to go open the door, but all I saw were flames everywhere. I started to panic and thought I was going to die. I was crying and shaking. Shon grabbed me, trying to calm me down, but she was panicking more than I was. Ashley opened the door again and saw our neighbor who yelled, “Wait! I have to go get my children!” Before we knew it, the breezeway collapsed. The fire started to spread to our door, so my sister closed it.

My older sister told us to calm down and follow her to the window in my mother’s room. My mother’s room was at the back of the apartment. Ashley tried to open the window with all her strength, but it would not open. She kept trying and trying, but it didn’t open. She tried to bust it open with one of my mother’s heels. It didn’t work, so she started to cry. She was at the tip of giving up. She was so frightened that we were all going to die, but she didn’t give up. She said, “I have faith I can do this, I have faith I am going to save my sisters.”

For the hundredth time, she tried to open the window. She heard a crack. Finally, the window opened and she pulled it all the way up. She thanked God, and jumped from the window. She told me to jump and that she was going to catch me, but I was too frightened. I was hesitating, but then finally jumped out of the window too. She caught me. Then Shon jumped out of the window.

We were so happy and grateful to be alive. My brave, strong, and determined sister, with her courage and faith in God, saved us.

“I THINK OF COURAGE AS BEING MEDICINE TO CURE THE DISEASE OF BEING FEARFUL.”
For me, courage is facing something that you are scared of and putting something at risk in order to succeed.

We, the students of Pakistan, are going through problems that can only be faced by courage. The 16th of December 2014 was a ‘black day’ for Pakistan. Terrorists attacked a school in Peshawar, Pakistan and killed over 140 children. Many more were injured. Since that day, schools in Pakistan are being attacked almost every single day. Terrorists have threatened us by saying that all those who believe in education are going to be killed. After the attack in Peshawar, we had a two week holiday.

On the 12th of January, my first day at school after that incident, I walked to school and saw a big board saying, “In case of any emergency, call the army on the given number.” Reading those boards made me feel really scared. I thought that maybe this was the day I would perish. I used to sit in class and think about where I will hide if those devils would come. Every day before going to school, I used to give my mother a tight hug, for I didn’t know whether I would see my mother again or not.

But we didn’t stop going to school. We still go to school no matter what they say to us. Actually, we, the students of Pakistan, have the courage to defeat these terrorists. Not only us, but the teachers have the courage to come to school and continue teaching, having the knowledge that anytime, anywhere they can be cheated of their life. And above all, parents have the courage to send us to school every day, knowing that they may not see us again. For me, Pakistan is the example of courage. And we will continue to rise for our rights, and continue to show the real meaning of courage.

“We will continue to rise for our rights, and continue to show the real meaning of courage.”
There are several types of courage in the world. Courage, in my words, is a trait that requires fear. Without fear, a person cannot be courageous. I needed courage to overcome one of my worst fears: being the new kid in school. After being in one school for six years, I couldn’t imagine myself in a new place. Before I knew it, it was my first day at Phoenix Country Day School.

It wasn’t that the first day was bad, because it wasn’t. It just felt so … uncomfortable, in a way I can’t explain. My locker partner, who was very patient with me, gave me that confidence to continue through the day in the new school, even though the back of my brain kept saying, “Alert, alert! Unfamiliar territory!”

By lunch, I still didn’t have the courage to accept that this was my school. I kept pushing on, trying to seem bright and content, but I still had no idea what was making me so depressed. The day had nothing against me; rather my brain probably had something against the day.

On the inside, I really didn’t want to go back to school the next day. It was a moment right before bed that had the immediate impact on me.

Now let me say something: although my parents are the people I look to for general advice, it is my brother I look up to as my role model. I began to tear up and finally let out all of the fear, fear that stood as a barrier between my courage and happiness in school. I didn’t know, at the time, that courage was the only thing I needed. The person who gave me that courage was my very own brother.

“Hello, Benjamin,” he said as he walked into the room with a smug look on his face. I tried to cover any trace of tears.

I replied, “Oh hey, Oliver, I was about to say good night.”

“Yeah, okay. I just wanted to talk to you about your first day of school. I know how you feel. Isn’t it really uncomfortable?”

“You can say that again,” I chuckled, trying to sound happy.

“Well, if you want that feeling to go away, you need to be brave. Be patient, friendly, and focus on school. Wait a couple days, and soon you’ll feel right at home. You’ll be fine, I promise.”

I was kind of speechless, so all I could say was, “Wow, thanks Oliver, that will really help. Goodnight!”

That conversation changed everything. I thought about what my brother had said for a long while and came to the conclusion that the courage to be patient and wait for things to unfold was what I needed. For the next several months I followed that principle, and, exactly as my dear brother predicted, I fell into place at Phoenix Country Day like I had been there since kindergarten.

“The person who gave me that courage was my very own brother.”
Whenever I see that old lady, I feel a certain fascination. Clad in white saree, grey hair, normal height and features, she is a symbol of simplicity. Every day I see her doing household works, keeping herself busy. She is never seen gossiping. She is seen teaching girls of the neighborhood. Doors of her house are open for all. Her house is simple with limited furniture, but it is very neat.

One day I approached her hesitantly. She was watering plants. I asked her if she would allow me to talk to her. She smiled and sat by my side. I asked her about her family. She told me that all the children and people around her are family members. I was shocked at her answer. Realizing my curiosity, she went down memory lane and started narrating her story. She was the only daughter of her parents. One day turned into the doomsday of her life when she lost her parents in an accident. She was left all alone in her world. No one was willing to take care of her, and she was left in an orphanage. There, she studied and lived a lonely life. When she was young, she was married to a man. She entered this new life with new hopes. In the course of time she was blessed with a girl child. The next time she became pregnant, her husband forced her to find out the sex of the baby. But she refused. Again, she had a girl. The birth of another girl made her husband angry. Life was becoming hell for her. Neither she nor her daughters were treated like human beings. One day, she decided to leave her husband’s house. She came to a neighboring village with her daughters. She opened a small school in her small house and started teaching children. Her only goal was to help make them independent. Her hard work became fruitful when her daughters got good positions in society. Both her daughters were hard working and intelligent. One became a doctor and the other, a professor. They got well settled and happily married. They asked their mother to leave this house and live with them. But she refused and said it is her “Karam Bharmi.” She cannot leave this place. She has to continue her mission, educating girls and helping them become independent.

I salute this lady. She is the real destiny maker who makes her life worthwhile by taking an initiative with her hard work and dedication.
Len Wein once said, “A true friend is someone who is there for you when he’d rather be anywhere else.” I think courage is not being brave for yourself, but being brave for others, like standing up to a bully for your friend, or helping them through hard times. In my life, I have not had many courageous moments that have involved myself, but I can think of an experience when I showed courage for someone very close to my heart. My courage and will to protect was shown through my dog Chance.

I was given Chance because my father passed and I was depressed. My mother thought it would be good therapy for my sister and me. It was a really sorrowful time, but Chance made that time not so bad. In fact, he was the best thing since sliced bread. My mom also gave Chance to us because she felt we were responsible enough to take care of him. We all took care of him and adored him.

Chance was like a brother to me. He was a big part of my heart for five years. I will never forget how soft and energetic he was. I will never forget how he knew when I was sad, and when I cried he would always lick my tears away. I will never forget how he used to sleep in my bed with me, or how he looked when he did something bad.

On November 12, 2014, I showed courage towards him. We were playing outside and he suddenly had a seizure. He lay there on the ground and started whining. I got on my knees and told him to stop and then he stopped. He stopped breathing and I started crying. He was dead. Later that day, we buried him in our backyard. My mom told me to stay in the house while my stepdad and aunt buried him. I told her I needed to go out there, and I did. It felt good to say my last words to him because I was the one who saw him pass.

For some people, courage means being brave for glory. Others may think of courage as standing up for a cause that will help others. I think courage is being brave for others. My dog Chance made me show courage on November 12, 2014. I was there because he needed me and I did not want him to be alone. Just like Chance was there for me during times of sadness, happiness, and loneliness, I returned the favor by being there for him when he was in pain and hurting. I have pulled through so far without him, but it hurts to not be with him. If you ever get a dog, love him with all of your heart. He won’t always be here.
Courage is living persistently and confidently every day, no matter how difficult the situation or condition. It’s going on for the heck of it, believing in yourself, and never, ever, giving up.

Courage is taking responsible risks. Double, no, triple exclamation marks next to ‘responsible’—special emphasis! Courage is not jumping from a 25-story building singing “I believe I can fly.” That’s called taking stupid, impulsive risks, and courage is very different from that.

For me, courage by taking responsible risks happens a lot in school and in my learning. To take healthy risks in learning can help an individual to grow as an intelligent, intellectual person.

I am an introvert in many aspects, and I don’t like speaking or presenting whenever there is a crowd. There are a few people, especially teachers, I can trust, but a whole classroom? A whole auditorium full of people? I’m kind of scared that my friends and others will make judgments or laugh at me.

However, I don’t let my personality stop me from actively learning. My courage pushes me to raise my hand to ask questions, clarify things, and contribute my thoughts and opinions in discussions. I volunteer to solve questions on the board and explain concepts to the class in Algebra, even though math isn’t one of my best subjects, and I’m afraid of getting things wrong and making a fool out of myself. Even though talking and sharing aren’t my favorite things, I take responsible risks in my learning to participate eagerly. I think this courage has helped me develop more academically, and let me get closer to conquering my fears.

Everyone is courageous in his or her own way. Leukemia was hard for Max, but he was able to find courage and light in his days, and lived a truly beautiful life. I am courageous because I take sensible risks, raise my voice for my beliefs, and never lose hope. Always remind yourself that there is courage inside of you, and that putting it to practice on a regular basis will make you a better person, and life more meaningful and exciting.
Courage, to me, is taking agony and sorrow and smiling even when you’re feeling down or bitter. That’s what courage really means to me. The following story is about my life and how my great-granny taught me courage. She was determined to do what she had to do to get what she needed.

My great-granny mumbled, “I don’t feel good. Leave me alone, Jalila.”

I nagged, “I’m going to tell my Granny Lucinda on you.” Granny Lucinda was her daughter.

It turns out my great-granny really was sick. She had cancer again. She had cancer before I was born. The type of cancer was breast cancer. After a few doctor’s appointments they informed her, “Your cancer marker is going really high.” Her cancer was spreading. She had to have chemotherapy.

“Well,” my great-granny declared, “I am not staying in the hospital!”

Later she told me, “Don’t worry, I’m okay.”

At home, I went to my great-granny’s room and asked her how she was. She responded, “I am okay.” She has been saying that for the last three months.

On Wednesday, December 10, 2014 she went to the emergency room and the doctors informed us, “The cancer has spread through her respiratory system and she has pneumonia.” From the hospital phone my great-granny called my granny and told her to deliver a message to me, “Don’t worry, be happy, because I am going to a better place.”

My great-granny died at the hospital on Sunday, December 14, 2014 at 5:04 a.m. We got the call from the hospital a few minutes after she died. That night, I cried a lot but I kept recalling what she told me, “Don’t worry, be happy,” and I stopped crying. I couldn’t cry and I didn’t want anybody at school to know that she died because I was sad.

Our family waited a whole week and had the funeral the following Sunday. The following Monday we had the burial. It was hard for me because my great-granny and I were really close. She took time out from resting to spend it with family and teach us a lesson of wisdom and respect. I wrote this story to show how she taught me about courage.

“My great-granny died at the hospital on Sunday, December 14, 2014 at 5:04 a.m. We got the call from the hospital a few minutes after she died. That night, I cried a lot but I kept recalling what she told me, “Don’t worry, be happy,” and I stopped crying. I couldn’t cry and I didn’t want anybody at school to know that she died because I was sad.

Our family waited a whole week and had the funeral the following Sunday. The following Monday we had the burial. It was hard for me because my great-granny and I were really close. She took time out from resting to spend it with family and teach us a lesson of wisdom and respect. I wrote this story to show how she taught me about courage.

“Courage, to me, is taking agony and sorrow and smiling even when you’re feeling down or bitter.”
I am thirteen-years-old and I study in grade eight in The Cambridge School located in Torl village, Kauk Rovieng commune, Cheung Prey district, Kampong Cham Province.

To me, “courage” means facing all obstacles, and to always keep trying with our strong will. It means to always confidently face difficulties and help people when they are in dangerous situations.

I have neighbors living near my house. They are a couple, and the husband always drinks and gambles. Most of the time, he does nothing to help his pregnant wife with housework. His wife is a good woman. She is hard working and does all the housework with patience. Her husband always goes out to meet his friends, drinking and gambling. Every time he comes home, he is drunk and always finds faults with his pregnant wife, scolding and yelling at her. Recently he got angry with his wife for not cooking the rice in time for him to eat. He started fighting with his wife badly. Nobody came to help her. When I saw that horrible scene, it made me feel like I was in the middle of a fire, seeing how this cruel man behaved towards his wife. I wanted the man to stop beating his wife, so I went straight to him and asked him, “Why do you beat her like that? It’s not the first time that you beat her. She is pregnant. It can cause her to miscarry the baby inside, and she could die.” The husband shouted at me angrily, “Stay away from my family’s affairs or you will be killed!” I thought to myself for a few minutes. If I don’t help her this time, she and her baby will probably have a big problem. I found a good way to deal with this drunk man by continuing to persuade him many times to stop. I kept trying to explain to him again and again that he has a good wife. “She does all the housework, cooks rice for you every day, and is patient enough. You should encourage her instead of beating her. It is against the law. I come here not to get involved with your family, I just want you to stop beating your pregnant wife like this.” The drunk man started to calm down and was quiet for a moment. He started to talk to me with a soft voice, admitting his fault. He said to me, “You are a good boy, caring about others and helping them.”

Now he understands that drinking makes him crazy. Gambling and beating his wife are wrong and are violations against humanity, especially women. He will stop all these cruel acts on his wife from now on. A few days later, his wife came to me and thanked me so much for helping her.

I have shown courage by helping my neighbor.

“To me, ‘courage’ means facing all obstacles.”

Kong Sokmeas
The Cambridge School for Cambodia
Translated by Sok Chamroeurn, Program Officer
The World Assistance for Cambodia
Audrey Baxter  
Margaret Ehlinger, Teacher  
Charles A. Mooney School in Cleveland, Ohio  
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

It was just a regular day for my dad. He got dressed, ate, and went to work. He was working his night shift when he went to get more papers to deliver and left his car door open a crack. These guys came by, driving super fast and hit the door. They got mad at my dad for having the door open and started yelling and cursing. They hit him so hard that it broke his jaw. They also had a gun and threatened to shoot my dad.

A woman came out of the group to tell them not to shoot, that he didn’t do anything. The group finally left, but my dad was still lying on the ground. He was lucky that he could get his phone. He called my mom to tell her what happened. She called an ambulance and told them where he was, and went to meet him there. The EMT was asking him questions, “Is anything broken? How did it break? How long have you been here?”

They took him to the hospital. My dad was in a lot of pain. They checked his jaw and said it was broken. He also had lots of bruises.

Later, they caught the group that hurt my dad and put them in jail. The woman did not go to jail because she helped my dad. Without her, my dad could have died. The woman showed courage by standing up for my dad.

My dad really showed courage by getting through it and not letting it bother him too much. He never forgot what happened, but even if we talk about the story, he doesn’t get upset. The best thing is that he’s alive and getting better.

“My dad really showed courage by getting through it.”
According to me, being courageous and fearless is hard and hectic in my country, Lebanon. But I always overcome my fears and worries, because I will not leave my country and I want to grow with my friends peacefully.

I will narrate my tragic story that I suffered through the whole academic year. My family and I live in the mountains in Beiruit and I got to Heritage College with my mom who is a special educator at the school. My school is located on Airport Road. This road is so unsafe because there are dangerous, suicidal car explosions.

It was springtime and I was in school, listening attentively to my English teacher. Unexpectedly, I heard a gigantic explosion. The whole school shook quickly, the glass fell down on the floor, as well as the light, the projector, and the computer. The students shouted loudly, and I saw my teacher falling down on the floor. Some of my friends fainted from fear, and some were injured. I shouted, “Help, help.” My friend was bleeding from her head. I wanted to save her. I hid under the table, covering my head with my hands as the teacher taught me. After a couple of minutes, another car explosion boomed. It was louder than the first and heavier. A nurse entered the class checking on every student and healing us gently.

It has been an unforgettable academic year.
Did you know that most deaf people have hearing children? I am one of those children. Most people have no clue how hard it is for kids like me to grow up this way. Every day is a struggle for anyone closely involved in the deaf community. Think about it. If you were deaf, you wouldn’t be able to listen to your kid laugh, try to speak, or play a musical instrument.

I was lucky; I am the youngest of three. I have an older sister and a brother. With these older siblings, I was able to learn sign language fairly quickly. But there was one downside: we were all raised in the deaf community and the only person who could really speak English was my sister. When my brother was placed in public school, he had to learn English quickly. With my brother learning English, it forced me to pick it up as well. I was able to learn fast, but my brother wasn’t. Due to his speech problems, he was just like a deaf child. He only knew American Sign Language. He and I both were in speech classes, but because of my early exposure, I got out quickly.

Growing up, my dad had a dead-end job. We were living paycheck to paycheck. Then we moved down south to be with my father’s family. Looking back, that was the best thing that could have happened to me. The move allowed me to be with my aunt and uncle, who I now consider my second parents. They took in my whole family and supported us through thick and thin. If we had never moved, life for me would be a whole lot different.

Like most children of deaf adults, I could have easily been angry or resentful toward my parents while growing up. A percentage of people with deaf parents run away before the age of 16. I could have easily been like these kids, but I decided not to with the help of our aunt and uncle. I could have blamed my parents for starving me of a childhood, but in reality, they didn’t. They gave me the best childhood a person could ask for. I overcame a lot, and it made me a better person. It made me understand people in a way that few people ever experience. It gave me a feeling of satisfaction. I am not like other kids, nor will I ever be. I had my shot at showing my true courage, and I made the best of it. My question for you is, have you missed your shot?

“I HAD MY SHOT AT SHOWING MY TRUE COURAGE, AND I MADE THE BEST OF IT.”
In our country, child labor still exists. It is quite normal to see children employed as maids and errand boys in rich people’s homes. The neighborhood where I lived was full of such people, and every day I would see a little girl who worked next door being bullied by her employers. She would work all day, from morning till night, and yet they mistreated her, beat her up and abused her. I felt very helpless, and each day I thought of ways I could help her in this situation.

One day, as I was riding my bike in the street, I heard faint screams coming from the house where the little girl worked. I dropped my bike, and as I walked up to the house, the screams grew louder. I stepped inside and before my eyes I saw a huge hallway with two doors on the left and two doors on the right. It had an opening at the end that led to a large room with black and white striped walls. A man, who was hitting the little girl, stood right in the center of the room. The little girl looked at me, and that was when I knew I had to help her. The man did not notice me standing there, so before he could hit her, I ran to her and wrapped my arms around her head and stood as a wall between them. The man was very cruel and did not care that I was standing there. He just hit me to get me out of the way. My white shirt had streaks of red all over it. I fell to the ground and saw that the man was heading towards the girl, so I gathered up the last bit of strength inside me, got up to my feet, and punched the man in the stomach. As he fell to the ground, I took the girl by her hand and ran outside to the nearest hospital.

In my scuffle, I didn’t realize that I got badly wounded. After the doctor gave me some stitches and gave the little girl some medicine, I told her she could come and live with me. I never regretted anything that day but the fact that I didn’t punch that man harder. That’s when I realized what my father said when I asked him “Dad! Is it possible to find courage when you are scared?” He replied, “That is the only time you can.”
Is courage standing up for what you believe in, no matter how insignificant many say it is, and being proud to do so?

I firmly believe that courage is exactly that. When I was in fifth grade, at age ten, we began a human rights unit. I decided to do woman’s rights for the reason any newly dual-language girl would. It was the only topic in English. However, with journal entry after journal entry, and book after book, I discovered that the topic of women’s political rights not only intrigued me, but also infuriated me. I read official reports on voting and payment of women throughout the years, and where they stand now. The sheer injustice of it shocked me. This shock provided a spark, and my mind made it into a full-fledged fire.

I decided that I had to do something. I was going to muster up all my courage and fight. Immediately, I began what I know now as “The Great Book Race.” With my grandmother, I went to a bookstore in search of a ten-year-old appropriate, informative book on women’s rights. Well, as it turns out, those aren’t very common in Indiana bookstores or libraries.

Not one to give up, I decided to take action right away. I pulled out my lined paper and mechanical pencil and began to write down questions for an interview. That night, with my heart in my throat, I called Terry O’Neil from the National Organization of Women. As the rhythmic beeping of the call echoed in my ear, my mind seemed to say, “Please don’t answer.”

“Hello?” said a woman’s voice, seemingly in a hurry.

“Uhm. Hello.” I responded, lacking confidence.

“You called?” she questioned.

Suddenly I realized that both of us wanted the same thing for women, and that there was no reason to be afraid. I explained my intentions of interviewing her, and conversing about women’s legal rights. At first she laughed. A ten-year-old? Surely it would be a silly waste of time. She said she needed to go to a meeting. I took a deep breath and told her that I needed to talk to her now. I was brave and put my heart into what I wanted to say. Once I had finished, she decided to let me interview her. I did, and at the end she commented that I should write a letter to the mayor. But I had more in mind than that.

With my newfound courage, I sat at my desk, pen in hand. I carefully began my letter.

“Dear President Obama,”

Once I started writing, it was very hard to stop, as I had so much enthusiasm and now professional statistics and opinions to back myself up. That night, I addressed the envelope and courageously sent it to the White House. Looking back, I feel that it took a lot of courage to interview the head of such an important cause and, as a ten-year-old, to write a letter to the President.

I believe that is it the bold, little things that you do that make courage, not one big masterpiece. Every brush stroke is needed in a painting to make it a remembered work of art. We all have courage, but we are just finding it one brush stroke at a time.

“I BELIEVE THAT IT IS THE BOLD, LITTLE THINGS THAT YOU DO THAT MAKE COURAGE.”
I showed courage when I first started running track in the winter of 2008, in second grade. I was one of the slowest athletes on the team. I did not have good technique as it relates to form and running posture. I would quit sometimes because I was tired and thought I couldn’t do it. But I came back in the summer of 2008 stronger and better. When I came back for the outdoor season, everyone remembered me and how inexperienced and slow I was. But no one knew that I had become stronger and faster. I remember people saying that I was the slowest on the team. I would always say I was not the slowest, but no one believed me.

In the summer of 2010, I competed in the races and got 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place at competitions. I was proving myself to my parents, teammates, and coaches. Everyone gave me respect, but everyone still thought they were faster than me. Track meets started to wrap up and AAU and Junior Olympics Championships started to come along. People were anxious about whether or not they would be able to go to the Junior Olympics. At one practice before regionals came around, my coach had a run off to see who was going to represent the DC Speed Track Club in the 4x100 and 4x400 relays. We got on the starting line. My coach said, “On your mark, get set... go!” We were racing down the track, running the 100 meters while our parents, coaches, and other athletes were screaming. We all finished at the same time, so we had to do it again. No one could tell who got first, second, third and fourth place. We got to the starting line and my coach said, “On your mark, get set... go!” I got a good start. As I ran down the track and I reached the finish line, a big smile came across my face. I, Jahmes Hamilton, the slowest on the team, got second out of six runners. I was so close to first.

Everyone doubted my ability, but in the end, I came out strong. I feel as though courage is a big part of my life because if I didn’t show courage, I wouldn’t be able to tell this story. I probably wouldn’t have gotten better and wouldn’t have been able to compete in the Junior Olympics that year.

“Everyone doubted my ability, but in the end, I came out strong.”
The word courage has a powerful meaning. Courage means bravery and compassion. When these two words combine, they form ‘courage.’

I have experienced courage in my life. Some months ago, I was making mistakes one after the other, which were unbearable for my schoolteachers and parents.

I had gotten into bad company of some unknown boys whom I met in a Snooker Club. They made me their friend and with them, I started doing strange things. I used to bunk from study hours, make excuses at home and spend time with them.

I needed money for them, and I used to borrow from my friends sometimes. I would mostly stay out, and my routine changed.

I was thinking that nobody was noticing me, as my parents were out of the house for their jobs, and my sister was busy with her studies. On the other hand, our school head, Sir Saimon Robin, was observing some changes. He tried to investigate me, but I remained quiet.

I thought he didn’t know about my activities, but I was wrong. After investigating me, he inquired about my activities from my class fellows and students who lived in my area.

Now he knew a lot of things, and I don’t know how this happened. After three days, he asked me the same thing, which was, “Are you going through some problem?” I said no, but he replied, saying that he was observing some changes. I said I didn’t know what he was talking about, “What changes?”

He called my sister, and inquired about my routine at home and reported some changes in my behavior to her.

When she met me, she shared the conversation that took place between them, but I successfully deceived her.

I felt I was in the clear, enjoying myself, and thinking that I was smarter than everybody else.

A few days went by and I was caught at school doing some unethical things which I had recently learned from my new friends. Unluckily, my teacher took me to our school head, Sir Saimon Robin, who had already been observing me.

He took me to an empty room and asked me to sit and in a friendly way. He then started counting all my activities with time. I was ashamed and surprised to hear that, and he made me realize that I had been in bad company. He further told me that he had a lot of expectations for me.

I pretended to be an innocent boy, because he always used to encourage me. I was one of the excellent students of my class throughout my studies. At night, I thought about his concern and expectations. The next day I showed courage to speak the truth.

Eh! It was hard for me to accept my mistakes, but I decided to accept my faults. I could not do it for many days. On the other hand, my other new friends started complaining about me, and I was annoyed with them. My mind was set, and I wanted to get rid of them now.

At last, the day came when I gave up, decided to talk to Sir Saimon, accepting all the things, and apologized. I went to him and said sorry. In return, he hugged me and counseled me. I was very proud of myself. I am quite changed now just because of “my courage to speak the truth.”

There might be many students like me who do not show courage to speak the truth, and remain confused and in tension. They should show courage to speak the truth, if they want to live a free and happy life.
I sit there at my desk in school, with fear mounting. Unknown expectations, emotions, and thoughts race through my head like a racecar on a racetrack. In fact, these feelings happen to me all the time, feeling like a nervous wreck. Anxiety is my diagnosis. How do I trudge through these hard times when I just want to yell and let out a river of tears? I use courage. Courage to calm myself down when I feel very anxious. Courage to rewrite my thoughts to take the happy path. That’s how I define my personal courage. Courage is used to make you stronger in life. Courage is what I live on day-to-day.

For over one and a half years, I have suffered from anxiety and depression. Trying to go a day without the anxious feeling of getting a lump in my throat, a headache, a dizzy spell, or stomachache was hard for me. How do I fight these feelings and worries and sadness that keep occupying my brain, leaving no room for any good feelings? That’s a hard question. I went to a caring psychologist for quite a while. It didn’t seem to work. I felt hopeless that I would ever get back to the happy self that I was two years ago.

It had been several weeks since I started middle school. It was an ordinary day. I was feeling like I was going to be sick, which was part of my anxiety. There were social and schoolwork thoughts that I kept drowning in. In math class, someone said something hurtful to me. Let me just tell you, I take nothing as a joke. “Why do you have a mustache?” he asked. Oh no! I have a mustache? Just then, my anxiety level hit the ceiling fan. I felt like crying. When we were in study hall, a classmate asked, “Why are you carrying around that weird little squishy bun?” Feeling like a total weirdo, I did not respond, but I am sure my face turned as red as a fire truck. That bun was my stress ball, for anxiety.

Finally, it was the end of the day and I came rushing out of school, crying to my mom about my sadness at school. Boy, did that feel good! That night we had a long talk about my situation and how to deal with this pressure. I felt so much better talking and getting all my emotions out! That took a lot of courage!

For the next several weeks, as suggested by my psychologist, I worked up the courage to start conversations with people. I also learned some tips to keep me calm and strong. My biggest support was my family. They cleared the dusty path to a rainbow of happiness. I found that spark that I knew I had in me! Today, I feel a lot happier and more stress-free than I did even a couple weeks ago. I had the courage to talk about my feelings and put my worries aside, and the courage to write about it!

“Courage is what I live on day-to-day.”
One of the most courageous scenes in the world right now is the war in Syria. In Syria, you can see extremely violent people killing innocent people, stealing their money, and making them homeless.

In Syria, you can see how an eight-year-old child takes care of his younger sister and brother because the war killed his parents. In Syria, even animals are killed, dying from hunger. In Syria, people don’t know when a bomb is going to fall on their houses and kill them.

It’s a humanitarian crime, and all the world should cooperate to stop this war that is not discriminating between innocent and guilty people.

“All the world should cooperate to stop this war.”
Leung Sreytouch
The Cambridge School for Cambodia
Translated by Sok Chamroeurn, Program Officer
The World Assistance for Cambodia

My name is Leung Sreytouch. I am fourteen years old and live in Torl village, Kauk Roving commune, Cheung prey district, Kampong Cham province.

Nowadays I live with my mother and my elder brother. My father passed away when I was three years old. He died ten years ago in the rice field when he was plowing the soil. After his death, my mother had to be responsible for everything alone in order to look after me and my brother. My mother is a farmer growing rice and vegetables, and does extra jobs, helping villagers with their work. She has to work very hard every day in order to make money to support our family, especially to send me and my elder brother to school. She sometimes gets sick, but still goes to work in the rice field.

Besides going to school, my brother and I always help her with her work. I cook rice, wash clothes and clean the house before and after school. My brother always helps my mother in the rice field. When we have free time, my mother always tells me how to behave as a good person in the society. My mother has some problems with her health. She has had pain in her heel since my father’s death. Now she is getting weak, not strong like she was before, but she sill works on the farm.

My elder brother studies in grade 10 at Phdao Chum high school and I am in grade eight of The Cambridge School. This is the result of my mother. She has made great efforts to keep me going to school. I feel so badly for her. I pray to Buddha every day to help my mother recover from her illness soon.

My mother really has a lot of courage in her life to look after me and my brother. All her hard work has helped me to grow in strength and push me to study harder. I love my mother very much.

“My mother really has a lot of courage in her life.”
Kaytlyn Williams
Cheryl Reece, Teacher
Armuchee Middle School in Armuchee, Georgia
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

Everyone needs courage in their lives. Courage is different for every person. To me, courage is being brave, having the ability to stand up for yourself, and being a leader, not a follower. My family and I have a lot of courage. My whole family had to be very courageous throughout my mother’s pregnancy with me and after she gave birth. I had to have the courage when I began school.

My mom became pregnant at sixteen, and had me at the age of seventeen. Since my mother was so young, people thought they could tell her what to do with me. Some suggested adoption or abortion, but she knew deep down in her heart that keeping me was what she would do. Throughout this whole process, my mom was treated differently, especially when she started to show. People looked at her with disgust. I can’t imagine how, but my mom stayed strong during this time. She stayed in school until I was born, despite the mean comments and nasty looks.

After giving birth to me, and marrying my father, people still judged her. People still judge her to this day. She is the most courageous person I know. Anyone else would have let the bullies dictate their lives, but not my mom. She always tells me to “kill ‘em with kindness,” and I should actually listen because it has worked for her.

I didn’t fully understand how truly courageous my mom was until I started school. Every year we would have Christmas parties, and everyone’s parents would come to them. These days in particular would make me uncomfortable about my parents, and their ages. I could tell that my parents were treated differently. Most of my friends’ parents had wrinkles and specks of grey hair, while my parents were in their twenties and looked it, too. My friends were shocked to find out that my mom was twenty-seven. Their parents were

in their late thirties! I wasn’t invited to many birthday parties because some parents didn’t “approve” of mine. People would always mistake my mom and me for sisters. At this point in my life, it became very clear that I needed to be very courageous.

Ever since that time, I decided to be courageous. I haven’t let mean people and nasty comments hurt me. My mother’s life has taught me so much. She has taught me to be courageous, no matter what, and that’s what I want to teach my kids. She had to be courageous her whole life, when she was pregnant with me, after having me, and even now. I am so thankful for her, and lucky to have a mom awesome enough to teach me to be courageous.

“My mother has taught me to be courageous, no matter what.”
“You have just one more chance to prove that you can do it.” The words of my instructor echoed and re-echoed in my ears as I got into the plane. Fear was a natural thing, I had heard. I had a common fear, which a lot of others had: I was afraid of heights. I had been afraid of even looking down from a high building.

This fear has been with me for as long as I can remember. It was to overcome my crippling fear of heights that I decided to join the parachute school. I had gone through a rigorous routine to prepare myself for the big moment. Then at the signal to jump, I had shivered and trembled and started screaming in fear. The instructor had taken me by the hand and led me back into the plane. I was the only one that day who had taken off in the plane and landed, instead of jumping out with a parachute. As my companions met me at the base, they smirked. I could see that even my good friends were uncomfortable in my presence. I was a failure.

Then my instructor took me aside. He explained that it was not uncommon to be afraid. The real courage was in facing and overcoming the fear. I nodded and began to engage in self-talk. In the plane I was still doing this. I kept thinking how I was going to go home and face my parents if I did not get my wings. Then I tried to shut out the fear by imagining myself showing them my wings. The time for the next jump drew near.

The instructor placed his arm on my shoulder to reassure me that I could do it. I nodded and swallowed. My mouth felt dry as I felt the fear rising within me. I began mumbling affirmations again, and then it was my turn. “Jump!” I heard the command and hesitated. “Jump!” shouted the instructor again. I thought no further and took the plunge – exactly as I had been drilled. “Bravo!” I heard my instructor’s voice in my ear. I fell swiftly and then looked up just in time to see the parachute canopy open above me. Then I looked down.

As I looked at the beautiful Pakistan countryside below me, tears sprang into my eyes, tears of pure joy. I had won. As I floated, I remembered all my drills again and began to control my gliding. When I landed, my comrades were upon me, laughing and shouting. I could see that they were as happy as I was that I had overcome the greatest enemy of man – fear.

Later, my instructor landed and gave me a large grin. “I knew you could do it,” he said as he slapped my back. I mumbled my thanks and then we ran to the truck. “When do we do it again, sir?” I asked the instructor. His reply was drowned in the shouting of my comrades.

“I HAD OVERCOME THE GREATEST ENEMY OF MAN — FEAR.”