The Courage of Boston’s Children

2013

VOLUME XXII

Award-winning essays on courage written by sixth-grade students participating in The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s Courage in My Life program
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Providing every child with a quality education has been one of the Mayor’s top priorities. He has been an advocate for our children, and a champion of their success, both in the classroom and beyond. By fostering opportunities for learning and growth, the Mayor has enabled young people to realize their true potential and become productive, healthy citizens.

The tireless work of Mayor Menino has surely inspired a new generation of courageous leaders. We are proud to honor Mayor Thomas M. Menino with this year’s volume of The Courage of Boston’s Children.
Against the terrible violence of the recent Marathon Monday bombings, our city has been graced by examples of extraordinary courage. In this public context, as we honor the courage of Boston's children with this collection of essays, we are all the more mindful of the virtue, and the value, of the courage exhibited by those who are learning to discover their own.

“I think courage is when you know something is hard, but you know you have to do it no matter what,” writes one sixth-grader. “Courage doesn’t happen by itself; it’s your job to make it happen,” writes another, while a third child sees how “Courage is becoming part of my character because I have practiced it repeatedly.”

This progression demonstrates both the purpose of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s teachings and the confident learning that is displayed by all children whose “Courage in My Life” essays it is our privilege to read. Students share essays on a range of challenges to overcome: violence, addiction, illness and the death of loved ones, as well as political oppression, racial profiling and bullying.

The first essay in this collection seeks to illuminate the problem of bullying with the simple recognition that there was a reason the bully was acting the way she did – she was the new kid in school and had her own insecurities – which can then allow a compassionate resolution to emerge from this insight.

As a result, this sixth-grader is able to claim, “I now feel safe again in the school environment. I hope she does too. By the way, we are now friends, which is probably not what you would have expected. I even asked her permission to share this story.” This kind of learning and development is at the heart of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum.

We are proud to share this collection of 41 essays from Greater Boston, along with 11 from our national and international programs, written by courageous children. These stories offer a resounding message of hope and resiliency against the complex backdrop of today's society.
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; 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 Thailand, Cambodia, and the United Kingdom. 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.

“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.

“How do you 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 6:55 a.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.”
In the dictionary, courage is defined as the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables someone to face danger, fear and vicissitudes with self-possession and bravery. But to me, the meaning of courage is beyond all of that. Before school started in September, I usually felt safe at school. But one day, that all changed.

My teacher announced that a new girl was going to join our class. I was so excited, but I also felt scared. I thought to myself, “Will she like me? Will she be nice?” I did not know which part of me to listen to. I went ahead and felt happy and excited. She finally came to school. The first days seemed okay.

During recess about a week later, we were playing monkey in the middle. I was one of the people in the middle. I enjoyed playing this game, even though I’m always the shortest monkey. While I was struggling to get the ball, I heard laughing coming from the side. “Look how tiny she is,” someone commented. I knew where it came from; it was the new girl. I still had not gotten used to her laughter, but I recognized it. She laughed at me a lot. I felt my temperature rising, and my face flushed, but I tried to ignore it all. I knew I was petite, but I just hated to be teased by someone because of it.

Time passed by, and still the new girl continued to tease me. I could hear her laughter, trying to make me feel bad about myself. It seemed like all of her conversations ended with a mean comment about me, usually about my size. I felt offended and lonely. At recess, I started to think about leaving the game and reading a book. After all, I do love to read. That is when I thought to myself, “Why am I getting pushed around by her?” I would always complain to my mother who told me, “Be precise and talk to your teacher about what is bothering you the most. Try to handle it yourself.” Soon, I got tired and decided to put an end to this bullying. I realized I didn’t have to put up with it. I just had to try to handle it like my mom had told me.

I finally listened to my mother. The next time the new girl started teasing me, I said, “You have no right to talk to me like that.” When that did not work, I got the guts to go talk with my teacher. I was scared, because I thought that would make the new girl tease me even more. But I still talked to her. My teacher held a girls’ meeting where we spoke to each other about how safe we felt in school. We discussed how we felt about each other and how we could work through our difficulties with the teacher’s help. When I returned home, I told my mom I had never realized how hard it would be for her to be the new girl, when all of us had known each other for so many years. I think the new girl realized I was tough, even though I was small. We finally started to get along. It was a long process and it was hard for me to go and talk with my teacher, but I followed my heart. I had to have faith and do what I believed in and stand up for myself. My teacher helped us a lot, and so did my mom. I now feel safe again in the school environment. I hope she does too. By the way, we are now friends, which is probably not what you would have expected. I even asked her permission to share this story.

We all learned a lot from this experience. I learned what my mother was trying to teach me when she didn’t tell me exactly how to solve my challenge. She was trying to help me be a leader and be a problem solver. I learned to take on my challenges and stand up for what I believed in. I think that was very bold and daring of me to do. I had to endure and face my fear. I found out that you can be brave without having a deadly disease or illness. My friend (the new girl) also learned a lesson. That was to always respect everyone, even if they are “petite.” Daily life has a lot of challenges which help me become my own advocate and show courage.
I was crying, my mom was crying. Each day was like this. I had thought today it would all be over, but today was no different. I had asked myself, again and again, *When will this go away?*

I have OCD, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. It makes your brain repeat things, and this was, and still is, my life. OCD makes you feel as if your head has turned against you, against your own mind.

After my family calmed down, we sat and asked the same questions: “When will this be over? When will Piper be okay?”

My therapist tried to help, but even she couldn’t always get rid of those thoughts in my head. I’d see one thing, just one thing, like anything about death, and suddenly my brain would start hissing in my ear, “You are going to die… but you won’t, if you just do this…”

And then I’d be repeating something over and over again to keep from dying. Part of me knew it wasn’t true, but too much of me thought it was. It could start from the smallest things, like being punched playfully by a friend and worrying my arm was broken. And with all this repeating, I’d get annoyed, furious even. This would happen day after day, ending in exhaustion or tears.

One evening when I walked out of my room, I heard the OCD-filled part of me say, “You must go back into your room and come out four times, walking across the carpet perfectly. If you don’t, you will die.” That was that. I began repeating that action. Soon my parents came over.

“What is…” my dad started to say.

“Be quiet!” I shouted, my eyes starting to tear up. “I… I can’t stop!”

I kept on repeating the action, with my parents watching helplessly. They didn’t want to interfere. The part of me that knew I would be okay was too exhausted to fight back against my OCD. Finally, I repeated it perfectly, and the urge passed. I relaxed.

To this day, I’ve been fighting my OCD. I’ve often asked my mom if it’s brave, fighting my own mind. She says yes, but I’m not always so sure. I do know one thing: people aren’t born with bravery, they have to find it first.

“PEOPLE AREN’T BORN WITH BRAVERY, THEY HAVE TO FIND IT FIRST.”
Manuel Lozada  
Ted Doolin, Teacher  
James P. Timilty Middle School

To me, courage is never giving up. Courage is helping others when they are down.

When I was 11 years old, my friend Mike needed me the most in his life and I was there. I asked Mike, “What is wrong?” He said that he couldn’t stay in his house because his mother’s ex-boyfriend was beating him when his mom wasn’t home. I encouraged Mike to go to the police. He said, “No, I can’t. I’m so scared.” When I heard his answer I was so saddened that even I began to cry. I gave him a big hug and told him that I was going to try to get him some help.

I knew that what I was going to do might cause me or my family some problems because I had no clue who this guy was. But if there is one thing my mother has taught me, it is to be brave. She always encourages me to help those that need my help, so I finally decided to go to the police on my own. I told a police officer that I had a friend named Mike who needed their help. I told the officer how scared my friend was. I asked if there was a way that they could help my friend without his parents knowing about him or me coming forward. They told me not to worry, and that they were going to help my friend Mike the best way they knew how.

Today I am so happy I got the courage to do what I did because my friend Mike is in a happy home. He thanks me every time I see him.

“Courage is never giving up. Courage is helping others when they are down.”
Celeste Riley
Kelley Curley, Teacher
William B. Rogers Middle School

Courage is being brave, facing your fears, and experiencing difficulty. Many people like me may find courage to face difficult changes, like a loss of something or someone. My courage is to live without my mother every day.

A few years before I was born, my mother got into a car accident and suffered brain trauma. She became very ill after I was born and refused to get medical help or take her medication. In 2006, my mother’s day to day functioning got even worse. One Sunday in 2006, my mother and grandmother were fighting over me outside of a public place. I was getting pulled back and forth like two women fighting over the last pair of jeans in a clothing store. I ended up with my mother who took me to my father’s house. On our way there, I asked, “Where are we going?” She asked me if I wanted to stay with my grandmother or stay with her and I said, “You, of course.” Even though I was scared of my mother and the situations she lived with, I went because it seemed right at the time.

About a year later, my mother seemed to be normal. We did normal things like shop and go places together. But after a while, she began to act the way she did before. One day, my mother, my sisters and I walked into McDonalds, and to my mother’s surprise, my grandmother came in minutes later.

The whole thing led to a big argument that was really bad. My grandmother gave my sister the keys and my grandmother’s friend led us to the car quietly and quickly. By then I was scared out of my mind. My heart was racing like jets while I was trying to stay out of sight. At that moment I had thought my grandmother or her friend was approaching the car door on my sister’s side of the car. Instead, it was my mother, tapping on the window; telling us to open the door. I was going to, but when I looked at her I saw a whole different person. I just sat back letting tears fall like raindrops and letting her screams fade away. After a while she gave up, but she was still yelling and my grandmother just took us straight home.

My mother’s sickness was hard on everyone, especially me. I am the baby of the family, so I was the one that was with my mother the most. My mother was the nicest person you could have ever met. To know that she has an illness is really surprising. Now that I’m older, I know that everything happens for a reason. I have almost adjusted to the fact that she is living in and out of shelters, instead of with me. She was my best friend, not just my mother.

I now have more courage than I did six or seven years ago to live without her. Even though years have passed, I still love and miss her. Each day I have the courage to live a normal life without my mother.

“My courage is to live without my mother every day.”
Otis Jones
Nathan Lewallen, Teacher
William McKinley Middle School

Courage is doing something that you don’t want to do. Not because someone forces you to, but because you want to for other people. I showed courage at my father’s funeral when I stood up and told everyone about my dad.

The first thing I remember is that we went to Men’s Wearhouse. There’s a ghetto store that sells suits for ten bucks that we should have gone to, but they were being real frivolous with their money. I saw lots of different suits and ties. The lady there said, “How can I help you?” It was a store that mostly white people go to and everyone was being nice. You know the smell of a new car? When you walked into the store it was like that. I felt the bow tie and some of the suits.

About two weeks after we got the suits, I saw a black car outside. I saw my mom help my grandmother down the stairs because at that time my grandmother fell on her knees and she could not walk. I heard my mom yelling at me and my five cousins to hurry up and get in the car and to stop playing PS2. My father’s sister was in jail at the time, so that’s why my cousins were staying at my grandmother’s house.

I felt my heart drop when we pulled up to the church. I smelled the dirt from the construction they had been doing. When the priest was talking, I’m not going to lie, it was boring but I sat through it. Then, it was time for my family to talk about my dad. No one wanted to stand up. Then I stood up.

My stomach felt like I was going to throw up, but I did not. Then I started to talk about how whenever I acted up in school, he was always there. On my birthday I would go over to his house and he would take me to Good Times (the arcade). They opened the casket and I started to cry because it wasn’t fair that my father had to die. I started saying stuff that I don’t tell anyone and the only one I told was my dad. It was really hard for me to get up there and say something. That was a time I showed courage.

“Courage is doing something that you don’t want to do. Not because someone forces you, but because you want to for other people.”
What is courage? Courage means being brave and standing up for what you believe in. For me, courage means being able to forgive, having a different kind of family, and learning who I am.

“No, but he is my real father!” I repeated to my friend. In second grade, my dad came to pick me up at the end of my after school program. A few kids stared at him like they had never seen a white person before. “What’s wrong?” I asked, confused. “Is there something wrong with my dad?” The second I said the word “Dad,” the kids backed away. “He’s your dad?” my friend cried, confused because I am Chinese. “Of course he is!” I said, mortified at my friend’s behavior. “Why do you have a white dad? I thought you would have a Chinese dad,” she replied.

What she didn’t know was that there was a rule in China where families couldn’t have more than one child without penalty, because China was so big with a population of over 1.2 billion people. Families preferred boys because they could bring down the family’s last name, and they provided more work on the family farms. My birth mom secretly put me in front of a gate at the police station in He Fei, China when I was only one day old. She knew she was never going to see me again, but also that I would have a better life if she gave me up for adoption, which was illegal. I imagine there were tears streaming down her face as she left me, all bundled up in warm blankets. If she really wanted a boy, she could give birth again.

If I tell them the whole story, what will they think of me once they know that I am adopted? Everyone is different in his or her own way. I am going to show them that being adopted is part of who I am.

I began to speak; all eyes and heads swiveled towards me like the ripple of a wave. “Okay,” I hesitated, “I was born in China, a perfectly healthy kid, but my biological mom did not keep me. Luckily, my adoptive mom came, wanting a child of her own. She and my dad are my real parents because they are raising me, they love me with all their hearts, and they will never give me away. I am unique in some ways, but I am also like you.”

I am courageous because I stood up for myself and convinced my friend that I wasn’t much different from her. I am also courageous in forgiving my birth parents for giving me up just because of China’s one child policy. I love my birth mom because she is my mom. However, I also think that she didn’t make the right decision because I am her daughter. I don’t know anything about her, and I have questions like: Where is she? What does she look like? Does she think about me? How many other brothers and sisters would I have if she hadn’t given me away? Who am I if my biological mom didn’t even feel like keeping me? Unwanted!

In some ways, my life is a mystery and it takes courage to live a happy life without knowing who gave birth to me. I am courageous because I manage to stay happy, appreciate my life even though I have this information stuck in my brain, and accept that I wouldn’t be who I am if I were not adopted.

“Courage means being able to forgive, having a different kind of family, and learning who I am.”
Courage is doing something, even though you’re afraid of what others might think. I need to have this kind of courage a lot, because I have two brothers, Anjan and Sachin, who have autism. Autism makes them act differently than most people in public.

It was our April vacation in Florida, and every day I had fun, except when my mom offered to take us to the beach. I dreaded this time because I would be embarrassed about what others would think of my brothers. The second time we went to the beach, my mom knew there was something bothering me. She wanted to help. My sadness was bringing down the whole family’s vacation.

During this trip, I would stay as far away from my brothers as possible, but then I realized that this was getting too hard. I always wanted to go back to our rental house. Their behavior became too embarrassing for me. They were being loud and drawing attention to us, and they weren’t aware of their surroundings, so they would bump into people and, worst of all, say “hi” to strangers. I never knew what they were going to do next. Finally, I asked my mom if we could go home. She said, “But we just got here.” I suddenly felt guilty about this. I didn’t want to make my family go back to the house just because I felt uncomfortable. “Never mind,” I said, and then I started tearing up. I was so mad at myself. I was ruining my vacation and my family’s with my embarrassment.

“Maya, calm down,” my mother said. “Do you really think these people are paying that much attention to us? They’re probably focusing on their own trip to the beach. It really doesn’t matter what they think, anyways.”

I looked over at my brothers who were playing in the ocean. I knew that they had no idea that they were embarrassing me, and they were trying their best to fit in and play with me. The other people around us weren’t looking at us and didn’t care at all what we were doing. My brother came to me, pulled my hand towards the ocean, and said, “My My” (which is what he calls me). I love them so much. They were having fun at the beach, and that was what I should’ve been doing too.

The rest of the time at the beach I had fun playing with my brothers. I didn’t even glance at the other people. I just focused on my family. During this experience I was courageous, because I did something even though I was afraid of what others would think. I learned that it doesn’t matter what those people think because you love, and want to have fun with, your family.

“I WAS COURAGEOUS, BECAUSE I DID SOMETHING EVEN THOUGH I WAS AFRAID OF WHAT OTHERS WOULD THINK.”
To me, courage is overcoming a fear or problem even though you are scared. Mark Twain once said, “Courage is resistance of fear, mastery of fear, not the absence of fear.” What I think he is trying to say is that you are resisting fear, trying to master your fear, but courage is not being fearless, but being scared and in control of your fear. I believe this because I have been scared at times, but overcame that fear.

This story is not about me, it is about my mother. She is an alcoholic. I remember her going inside liquor stores. I didn’t know why she drank; I was too young to know.

I remember my mom telling me that I was going to stay at my aunt’s house. At first I was super excited that I was going, but then I found out the reason. The reason was that my mother realized that she was an alcoholic and needed help. My mother was going to get help at a hospital. My brother and father came to my cousins’ house. Then we went to another aunt’s house. Then I went home to visit my mom. She had decorated bags and boxes that she gave us.

When my mom came home she went to meetings or commitments for AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). She went to them a lot at first, but now she just goes on Mondays and Wednesdays. At first I didn’t know why she went, or that she was getting better. She did this for me and my brother. I respect her more now because of what a fight she has with alcoholism.

She had to choose between two roads. She chose the right one for herself and her family. She had a very hard time on this road and still has a long ways to go. She is a new person now and also my hero.

Courage is when you are afraid but choose the right road because in your heart you know the right thing to do. When people try to stop you, just think to yourself that you have the power to prevail. Having courage is like flying. When you have it you feel like you are on top of the world. You can always do what is right as long as you have courage and hope when you are afraid.

“You can always do what is right as long as you have courage and hope when you are afraid.”
Al-Madinah Xhemalallari
Ayesha Osmany, Teacher
Alhuda Academy

C-O-U-R-A-G-E! This word can have many different meanings and many different stories, but to me, courage means rising to expectations that are difficult to meet. In 2010, my baby sister Sara was born. I was very happy and excited to become an older sister, but what I didn’t know was that I was going to be more than a sister.

Three months after my sister’s birth, my mother went back to work. My dad would take care of my sister until I came home from school, and then he would leave for work as well. After he left, I had to take care of my sister. I was the one changing her diapers and feeding her, while my friends were playing outside and having fun. Even after my mom came home, I would still have to take care of my sister because my mom would be in excruciating pain. My mother has had about three different surgeries on her feet due to an excessive amount of standing, and is still struggling today.

I knew my mother was proud of me, but I couldn’t understand why I was the one taking care of my sister and playing the role of mother. I missed extracurricular activities, sleepovers and parties because I was too busy changing my sister’s diapers. My friends would always get mad at me because I wouldn’t have time to play with them, but I could never tell them why. I was too scared they would make fun of me.

Then one day, my mother told me the story about how my sister might not have been here with us today. When my mom was pregnant, the doctor told her that the baby had Down syndrome and would not have long to live after she was born. My mom and dad were devastated. Then, after going through some more tests, my mom found out it was all a mistake and that my sister would be okay. I then realized that my mother had struggled a lot with both my sister and me, and this was the least I could do for her.

I also realized that my mother could have enrolled my sister in a daycare, but she didn’t because she expected me to do a good job taking care of her. Even though my mother’s expectations were difficult to meet, I was able to conquer them.

Now my mother is on disability and she stays at home with my sister, Sara. I have come to realize that even though some of my childhood was spent taking care of my sister, it makes me happy and gives me a sense of achievement that some of the first things Sara learned were taught to her by me, her big sis.

“Courage means rising to expectations that are difficult to meet.”
People have various ideas about courage and what it means to them. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands at moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at a time of challenge and controversy.” This quote means that hard times can bring out the best in some people because they behave honorably and find courage. Sometimes a person must overcome problems that are too big to ever imagine happening. This story is about my view of courage, and the support I give to my dad each day. I help him with every minute of his life because of the cancer, diabetes, eye dryness, muscle pain, shortness of breath and graft-versus-host disease that he has.

One year, my dad went to Hajj, a pilgrimage Muslims must perform on a specific month, and came back healthy. The next week, my dad started shivering and my family and I covered him with blankets. He kept shivering, so we took him to Mass General Hospital. The doctors examined my dad and then came to the waiting room where we were sitting. They told us he had leukemia. My sister and I sat with a nurse and she described what was going on with my dad. Leukemia is a disease in which the bone marrow and other blood-forming organs produce an increased number of immature or abnormal leukocytes. The doctors then gave him a bone marrow transplant which acted perfectly against his leukemia. The leukemia was gone.

My dad started getting cramps and shortness of breath. When these problems got worse and worse, my family and I took him to the hospital. The doctors said the side effect of the bone marrow transplant is graft-versus-host disease. My father is now fighting this disease and I am at his side. I walk with him to help him stand, get him what he needs, and keep him company. He now goes to doctors that specialize in pain, cancer and shortness of breath. One time, he went to the hospital for five days because of pneumonia, shortness of breath in the lungs. I go with him on days when I have no school and help him to keep track of his medicine; he has over 30 bottles and other products. Not only does my dad show tremendous courage dealing with his health concerns, but I show courage by not being afraid, leading the family when he is at the hospital and helping him a lot.

This time of my life helped me to decide what I want to be when I grow up: a doctor. I want to be a doctor because there are many other people with medical problems, and many who have a family member who is chronically ill. I want to get an opportunity to help them and show them not to be afraid. Times like this are really hard for people in foreign countries with not enough support like America has for sick people. So I want to be an out of boundary doctor, going to different countries and helping people there, with American medicine and information. This means I will need to know many different languages. My father’s battle for his health has given me the courage to pursue these goals.

“My father’s battle for his health has given me the courage to pursue my goals.”
Erin McIsaac
Jacquelyn Wesner, Teacher
Saint Columbkille Partnership School

Courage is a quality of being brave and strong. You need to have perseverance, be accepting and not be afraid to ask for help. It’s never wrong to ask for help. Always remember that.

For the past two years, I have been teased and harassed, to the point of being bullied, both verbally and physically. This really hurt, and I felt really badly about myself. I felt alone, and I was too scared to tell anyone, so I kept it a secret… until my friends found out.

My friends found out that I was doing bad things to myself. Four of my friends, to be exact, found out and they kept it a secret for about two months. But then things got worse. My friends were scared for me, and they wanted to help me. They went to our guidance counselor and talked about their concerns. After this, I was able to get help. I was still scared, and I was afraid that everyone would be gossiping about me.

It wasn’t easy at all, but this experience taught me that it is okay to ask for help. I learned to talk to someone when I feel bad, I take better care of myself, and I even ignore what people say, which is really hard to do.

It took a lot of courage for my friends to tell. They risked our friendship, but really helped save my life! Even though I was mad at them at first and I thought we’d never be friends again, I eventually thanked them. I’ve never seen anyone braver.

“It’s never wrong to ask for help.
Always remember that.”
Jessica Lomasney  
Jacquelyn Wesner, Teacher  
Saint Columbkille Partnership School

To me, courage is meeting danger without fear. Courage is having the ability to know right from wrong and to stand up for what you believe in, even in the face of great adversity. In my situation, I had to risk something: my friendship.

Over the past few years, my friend was being bullied. People were making fun of her hair, weight and acne. No one really knew about the bullying going on until recently. She finally told me and a few other friends. She also told us to never tell anyone, or else she would do something seriously bad to herself.

Then, it got a lot worse. We learned that she was hurting herself seriously. She would “punish” herself for not looking or being perfect. We decided to go to our guidance counselor to get help before it got worse. We knew that she would eventually find out, but we thought it was the right thing to do. My friend finally was able to get the help she needed.

It took courage to get help for her. We knew that if we didn’t tell, her situation could get worse. We also knew that if we did tell, it could lead to a good solution. We personally talked to people who were being mean and told them to stop. That took courage too, because we didn’t know how they would react. Today our friend is doing much better and is almost completely recovered. She forgave us for telling and actually thanked us for saving her life. Courage can make a huge difference. I risked losing a friend, but by being courageous, I helped her. And now we are closer than ever.

“I risked losing a friend, but by being courageous, I helped her.”
Makel Lopes  
Donkor Minors, Teacher  
Maurice J. Tobin School

Courage is a strong thing. It’s a wonderful thing and it creates good community. Courage is the bravery and power you possess to go against something hard, painful, or embarrassing that could have a lot of risk. You have to command the courage to do those things that are the right things to do.

I have had courage many times. The first time I showed courage was when I fell off the monkey bars when I was 8 years old and I was driven to the hospital and retained for a cat scan. I was nervous and scared. I begged my god-mom to sit next to me. I held her hand and got the scan over with.

I don’t like remembering just bad times and memories. I will share a good time when I proceeded with courage. I was riding my bike to the store and I met an unwealthy guy asking for money. Everybody said no whether they had it or not. I felt bad, so I gave him my last two dollars because I wouldn’t want to be in his shoes.

If no one in the world was courageous, the community wouldn’t be a community and no one would achieve accomplishments.

“Courage is a strong thing. It creates good community.”
Brandon Butler  
Laura Williams, Teacher  
Mildred Avenue K-8 School

Courage is being strong all the time. Courage is finishing something even though you may not like it. It is making brave decisions most of the time. Courage is staying focused in bad times, and proving that you can get through difficult situations.

In my life there are courageous acts every day. I see people display courage in my community all the time. Someone who displays courage is the Black Male. This may sound shocking to you, but read on. Being a black male in America is being courageous. The reason I say that is because black males often get stereotyped for things other black men do. For example, there is so much killing and mugging going on in our neighborhoods, and these terrible acts often reflect negatively on all black people. Some innocent black people get frustrated and revengeful because of how they are treated. When I say it takes courage for a black male to simply walk down the street, I mean it takes courage to walk away when you are looked at funny, discriminated against or dehumanized.

Another group in my community that displays courage is kids. So many kids in my community experience bad things in their lives. Sometimes the only solution is to run away. Running away from a bad situation may appear harsh, but it is nothing compared to what they have to experience in their homes. I am not talking about people in another town, but about kids right here in my neighborhood. I know kids who are in homes where crack, cocaine, alcohol and marijuana are part of the family routine. In addition, parents abuse these kids after being wasted at bars. Sometimes these kids have to get the courage to cry out for help, or to run away from the situation.

Courage comes in different forms, but sometimes the only way is to stand up and be brave. It means ignoring the negatives and having the courage to choose a positive way of life, even if it means giving up your pride and your family. I have seen many courageous acts in my lifetime, including the courage of my black brothers, and the courage of innocent kids.

“Courage comes in many forms, but sometimes the only way is to stand up and be brave.”
I have noticed courage in different situations. As a Syrian, I think the courage of people in my country is impressive.

In Syria, there has been a war going on for over a year. There are protesters fighting for their rights. Their president/dictator has been ruling Syria in a savage way for about twelve years. Before him his father ruled in the same way. They both have been unfair and have killed thousands of Syrians who reject their presidency. The president has harmed many people, and has stolen their money.

Despite all of this, the protesters are getting stronger. They have formed an army called the Free Army. They are making progress in overtaking the government and saving the lives of innocent people. Most importantly, the people are not letting the government put them back under their control and shame them like they have in the past.

The Syrians in the countryside are being shelled constantly, and have the extreme bravery to report it to the news channels. They also help journalists cross the border to the city safely. So far they haven’t been provided the help they need from other countries, and they only have limited weapons. I find the strongest courage in the Syrian people. They are able to cast their fears aside and let their courage take over, in order to change their lives for the better, and give future generations a more peaceful and free way of life. Many people don’t see the importance of courage. But in the case of war, I find that courage, along with strength, is the beginning of a situation that will lead to a better future for humanity. It is also a reason for all people to be treated equally, with no difference between a leader and his citizens. When the people have courage, others don’t take advantage of them. For example, if all of the Syrians had courage from the beginning, they wouldn’t have ended up with a dictator’s son. But unfortunately only Hama and Aleppo demonstrated.

Courage is very powerful. What keeps it powerful is when the sources of courage unite and become one powerful source that fights for the right thing in the right way. Not by fighting with force, but rather by expressing ideas and thoughts, and treating each other’s ideas with respect.

I am happy and proud that I come from a place where the people can take care of themselves. The Syrian people don’t let the lies that are being thrown at them brainwash them into thinking that they deserve to be treated without dignity and stripped of their rights.

"As a Syrian, I think the courage of people in my country is impressive."
Joanna Ning  
Thu-Hang Tran, Teacher  
Josiah Quincy Upper School

Courage means when you show bravery during difficult situations. I showed courage when I learned that I had alopecia and will have to live with the condition for the rest of my life. Many people may not have heard of this condition before. Alopecia is a rare medical condition which creates hair loss on the head, scalp or body. And it happened to me. I lost my hair on my head.

As I grew up, I became more sensitive about the condition. As a girl, I also felt different and scared of how my hair could be, how different I would be from other girls, and how alopecia would affect who I am. I got up almost every night and couldn’t sleep because I wasn’t used to sleeping without my hair. The struggle was hard and I was scared.

I tried so many times to prevent the hair loss. I tried putting a liquid with alcohol on my head, but it didn’t work. The next time, I changed my doctor and she told me to take shots with medicine inside on my scalp to re-grow the hair on my head. I went to see her and took 15 painful shots that day. With every shot, it became more and more painful.

I got teased by people because they knew I was losing hair and soon would not have any hair on my head. Can you imagine growing to be a pre-teenager, and struggling with a condition of pain and even embarrassment? I always felt hurt by the people who teased me. They didn’t understand that I did not choose to have alopecia.

It took courage to learn that alopecia may affect my outer appearance, but it does not affect who I am inside. The mean words of people made me cry in the past, but now I explain to them what alopecia is and how I live with the condition. I take on the courage to let other people know about alopecia, and to know the true Joanna.

“I take on the courage to let other people know the true Joanna.”
When I think about courage, I don’t think of fictional characters or superheroes or anything like that. I think about my grandfather, who has faced a lot of hardships in his life.

My grandfather has issues with his heart and his lungs. He can’t walk for a long time without having to sit down, so he has a scooter-type vehicle to move around. He also has to have an oxygen tank at all times. My grandfather has also had a stroke.

My grandmother has taken care of my grandfather and stuck with him through everything that has happened. They had to move to a place called Lindon Ponds in Hingham because my grandfather needs to have medical assistance available all the time.

It astounds me that my grandfather is so happy, even with all that he has been through. I feel my grandfather is the face of courage.

“I FEEL MY GRANDFATHER IS THE FACE OF COURAGE.”
Have you ever been through peer pressure? I have.

It was an exciting Friday morning. I had come to school and brought my little sister to her kindergarten classroom. When I was leaving to go to my classroom two of my friends passed by me and said, “Oh, Dazayia, we are about to skip school. Wanna come?” I wanted to, but I had a bad tingly feeling. My stomach didn’t feel right. I thought for a moment. “No!” I said. “It’s a bad idea, and I don’t want to get in trouble. Plus something bad could happen.” My two friends looked at each other and agreed. I never knew that just one decision could make you a leader.

I would have been a follower if I left. My point is just because you think something may be fun to do, that doesn’t mean it is good or okay. I had the courage to say no to peer pressure and be a leader by not skipping school.

“I HAD THE COURAGE TO SAY NO TO PEER PRESSURE AND BE A LEADER.”
I was five years old and I was excited to start my first day in kindergarten. I was so looking forward to all the new things I would learn, and all the friends I would make! I remember how happy I was when my parents walked me into my new classroom and it was full of kids. I never would have imagined this would be my worst year in school.

It was early September 2005 and the air was frigid and the wind felt like a sharp knife cutting cuts on my body. The beginning of the year was not so bad. I made a good friend, Varnel, and we were inseparable like brothers, and we still are. He told me to be careful, and to watch my back because some kids were known troublemakers. He knew this because he was a social butterfly and knew more people than I did. I quickly learned he was telling the truth.

SMACK! Something hit me behind the head and when I turned around, it was those raggedy tough kids that Varnel warned me about. I whispered, “Sorry,” in a meek voice and started to walk away. One of the boys, who I later found out was the leader, grabbed my shoulder and pulled me back with the same amount of gravity that a black hole has. I instantly felt a black cloud come over my head and it began to rain. I threw my backpack on one of them, and the speed of a tiger came out and I started to outpace them. Sadly, one of them was like a lion stalking his prey and caught me with a swift jump. He slid into full force, but as silent as a snake, he grabbed my shirt and said, “If you run away one more time, you are really going to get it.” Then he pushed me to the ground and walked away.

These six boys intimidated me every day. Every day I would notice one or more of them giving me a dirty look, wishing they could hurt me. I hid every day so they couldn’t find me. One day, they found me in the playground and the leader said, “Come over here, punk.” The only thing I could think of was, “If you run away you are going to get it. Run away you are going to get it. Run away you are going to get it…” I couldn’t think or control my body. I sprinted away as fast as possible. Varnel tried to help me, but one of the bully kids got him and he was about to beat him up, so I came back to help. They gave us both black eyes and warned us not to tell anyone, including our parents.

I was getting tired of the way they threatened me, and I always told myself I was going to stand up to them, but I never did. I was outnumbered and I was, after all, only five years old. These kids were not only bigger and taller but older as well. Some were in grade school and just the sheer number against me scared the living daylights out of me! One day they followed me and one of the boys shouted out, “You bast***!” That made me furious and immediately I stopped in my tracks. The anger I felt at that moment took over my entire body. I wanted to hurt them badly. I told myself I will not fight back because that would make me the same as them: another bully!

I shouted with all my might, “LEAVE ME ALONE! Why are you doing this to me?” The bully replied, “Because you are different and we can!” Different how? was the big question in my head. I did not see it, or understand it. It was years later, when I got older, that I understood what they meant. I was completely different from them, physically and culturally, and people fear what they do not know.

Luckily for me, a teacher eventually witnessed the boys’ actions and came to my rescue. The boys were sent to the Principal’s Office, and I was taken to the Nurse’s Office.

Because of this incident, I learned to never hide my fears and to never back down from any obstacle, because if you do, you will live in the shadows, always afraid. Being afraid will prevent you from reaching your true potential and you will regret many things. If you think you do not have the courage to stand up to bullies, or anything else, you are wrong. If I could, a shy little child who never spoke up, I think you can too. Everyone has a voice and the opportunity to use it, even when you don’t realize it. You show courage every day, by believing in what you do, by not letting anyone change you, and by sticking to your convictions. If you feel afraid, in danger or alone, remember you can always escape the shadow by being you and defending your beliefs and values.
Leonardo Johnson
Joanna Principe-Zesk, Teacher
William B. Rogers Middle School

Since I was five months old I have had a noticeable scar on my head. When I was a baby I fell off the bed. I don’t remember it since I was so young. My family tells me that I rolled off the bed and hit my head. I kept on throwing up. My mom and dad took me to the hospital and it turned out that I had a head injury due to the fall. The doctors told my parents I had a blood clot and would need surgery. Because of that surgery, I have a large U-shaped scar on the side of my head.

Kids would make fun of me because of the scar. I would go to school and kids I didn’t even know would bully me about it. They called me names like rainbow boy, scar head and U-Conn. They also made jokes saying that my scar is an upside down “U” and if I eat Skittles my scar will turn into a rainbow. I used to get into a lot of fights at school because of these comments. My dad helped me though. He said that one day I was going to college and that if I kept on listening to other people and fighting I wouldn’t have that opportunity.

Now I am a sixth grader. I try my hardest to not pay attention to the comments so I can succeed. Although some kids still say things to me about my scar, I try to drown them in kindness instead of getting into a fight. I have shown courage by living with this scar on my head for 12 years. I have accepted my scar and feel that nothing can bring me down.

“I have shown courage by living with this scar on my head for 12 years. I have accepted my scar and feel that nothing can bring me down.”
JAZMINE ROSARIO
MELANIE ALLEN, TEACHER
Rafael Hernández K-8 School

Gossip can be really hurtful. People probably have thoughts of suicide. People are scared to wake up every morning and see the person who is bullying them. I know, because I was one of them.

When I was little, I had a bully. Let’s call her Margaret. I didn’t know how to defend myself, and I got bullied a lot. I always thought that I could solve the problem by myself. I used to wake up every morning scared and not wanting to go to school. Every time I would see Margaret, I would avoid her. Every day, I would ask myself, “When will this problem just go away?”

I just wanted to live my life and not be bullied. Every time I would do a simple thing, I always got judged. I felt like an outcast every time I would try to play with my friends and my bully came over. I would always have thoughts in my head, but I was scared to say them out loud. Margaret was smaller than me, so I was embarrassed that people wouldn’t take me seriously. They would think I was just a puppet and Margaret pulled my strings.

One day, I was in my room and I was thinking that the next day I had to stand up for myself. I started thinking of ideas of what to say. The next day, I was ready for Margaret to come to me. When she did, I told her what I had on my mind. “I really don’t want to deal with you anymore, so please leave me alone.” After I told her, it became an argument. To avoid any physical problems, I just walked away.

Two years later, Margaret and I talk once in a while. We aren’t best friends, but we are kind of friends. When you see a person getting bullied, you shouldn’t be a bystander. You should be an upstander and help the victim so they can live life again and be confident about themselves.

“When you see a person getting bullied, you shouldn’t be a bystander. You should be an upstander.”
Courage is shown in many different ways. It could mean facing a bully or going out in a hurricane. To me, courage is making others happy no matter what happens to you. It’s being nice to everyone even if they’re mean to you, or just being optimistic. I don’t mean making a bully happy by letting them beat you up every day, I mean giving someone a compliment even if they just insulted you. Only someone who can be true to themselves but still make others happy has true courage in my view.

My brother Mark showed courage a few years ago and still does today. When he was about 24, he was heading to a party on a crisp fall night. He didn’t have a car, so he was going to take the train. There were no signs directing people where to go, and to make it worse, Mark hadn’t been to this station before so he was confused. He walked back and forth trying to find some source of direction to get him to the right train. By accident, he stepped on a teenager’s foot and politely said, “Sorry, excuse me.” Mark started to walk away, thinking it was over, but the teenager had five friends. They pinned him to the wall while the other one, who was obviously the leader, went to work on punching him. They punched Mark everywhere on his face and chest. Stunned, Mark was beaten and pushed around while the teenagers were laughing at his distress. Dragging him to the stairs, they pushed him down and walked away. As Mark tumbled down the stairs, everything went black. He lay there at the bottom of the stairs, unconscious after being jumped by six violent teenagers. Finally, a witness saw him and called the police and Mark was rushed to the hospital. My parents got a call from the hospital and immediately showed up. When I saw his beaten and bruised body from a picture in my mom’s phone, I could have died. Mark’s face was all black and blue. His pretty blue eyes were encircled by dark rings. Dry blood was dividing his face into messy columns. Dark bruises were scattered around his face. When he came back to our house, he smiled at me bruises and all. That single smile made me happy. Once he could walk better, he seemed normal, aside from his bruised face. Mark still made jokes and made everyone happy every day, even though it should have been the other way around. He acted the same to everyone and didn’t want any pity. When he’s home, he smiles at me and takes me places or will play a game with me. Mark makes everyone happy because that’s his personality, despite the horrible things that have happened to him. Whatever happens, he pushes his way through to being himself.

Why is this a story of courage? Well, do you think you could get badly beaten up, so bad that your skull bleeds, yet stay positive and happy? I know I would never be able to do that. How about the humiliation? Would you be humiliated if people younger than you almost killed you? Mark didn’t seem to be. Mark makes everyone happy although he could have died. That’s true courage. Courage can be expressed in many ways, and Mark certainly showed courage in a strong way.

“To ME, COURAGE IS MAKING OTHERS HAPPY NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU.”
Dakare Swan
Celeste Henry-Williams, Teacher
James P. Timilty Middle School

I think that courage means facing your fear even when you don’t want to. It means stepping out of your comfort zone and doing something you never imagined doing.

I showed courage when my mom had my baby brother. I was really nervous when he was born. I knew I had to set an example for him. It was my first time having to do this because my other brothers and sisters are only about one year younger than me. I realized that I was ready at this age to make a positive impact on my brother’s life. Before, I thought I was too young to make a difference. My brother looked just like me. I wanted to cry, but at that moment I knew what type of big brother I was going to be. I wasn’t going to be an average or a good big brother. I was going to be a great big brother! I’m not only doing this for myself, but for all my siblings who look up to me.

I stepped out of my comfort zone and did the right thing. As the older brother, none of my younger siblings are going to be looking for a job. They are going to have careers, and great ones! My baby brother is now 18 months old. He gets on my nerves, but I know he looks up to me. My brother comes in my room all the time, but instead of pushing him out, I love him and take care of him. We even play video games together. I won’t let any of my siblings join in with the pack, like people doing drugs and violence. I’m not going to let them throw their lives away. Since I really love them, I know I will be the best older brother I can be. I pray to God to make me a better older brother every day.

I know with courage I will become the best older brother I can be.
Courage, to me, means facing your fears and being brave through troublesome times. My fear was telling my parents what happened in Maine. It was scary to think about how they would react, but I told them eventually. However, I did not really want it to end the way it did; they were crying and so was I.

Those were the worst four years of my life. I can remember feeling trapped and so hopeless. I mean, I was only six when it started and it continued until I was nine. Sometimes when I remember what happened, I cry about it. I was molested by my great-uncle, except he was not great at all! It was when I was ten that I finally told someone. It just felt like too much to hold in, since I knew exactly what happened to me. My best friend, Olivia, and I were walking around at the park. I don’t know how, but I told her everything. A part of me was regretting that I told her because I did not know if she was trustworthy, but the other part was extremely happy that I got it off my chest. Olivia was right there beside me, telling me to talk to someone about it. Finally, I did. We went to her house to tell her parents, and I guess they called my parents because there they were, all talking on the steps, and there was my mom, crying. I went to hug her because I hate when people cry. Usually, I start crying, too. She said to me, “You are a brave little girl, and I am glad you told me and Dad.” That made me feel proud! I didn’t go to school the next day, since that night was so crazy and emotional. I just needed a day off. I thought I showed a lot of courage, and in the next chapter to this, I felt a little bit more confident every step of the way.

After the chaos, my parents found me a therapist. Her name was Amy and she helped me to get my mind off of what happened. Everybody knows I would not completely forget about it and never think of it again, but she taught me ways to keep going with life. Now I do not think about it as much anymore. My family and friends support me, and they help me when I’m upset about this incident. I am not kidding when I say, “I could not ask for anything better!”

Not too long ago, I got a bracelet from my mom as a gift for going through all of that with courage. It is a charm bracelet with only one charm, a shark fin. It means protection and courage. I felt so protected and courageous, but even now, I know that a bracelet cannot give me courage. I need to believe in myself and my family.

This was a time I showed courage. I will never forget this part of my life, but I can keep moving on. I hope others can as well. Thanks Mom, Dad, Kayla and friends!

“Courage, to me, means facing your fears and being brave through troublesome times.”
My family and I immigrated to the United States on October 17th, 2012. We left behind the comfort of our own home, our car, my father’s business, our culture and our way of life. I did not want to leave our relatives and friends because I knew I was going to miss them. Now that was courageous!

My family consists of my step-father, mother, sister and baby brother. We were all hesitant about taking such a big step in relocating. My father had just bought our first family car, which we were so enjoying. We left the comfort of our own home to come share a home with seven other family members whom we were meeting for the first time. We had to share our space, and we all had to be in one bedroom. My dad had his own business and he left it and is now searching very hard to find a job. We miss home badly, but we are determined to make the best of our present situation.

My mom has been so supportive in our settling down and adapting to our new way of life. She has cooked meals we are accustomed to and she ensures that each of us is as comfortable as we can be. She takes us on the train, helps us to make friends and wants us to have fun. We keep in touch with our relatives in Jamaica and are adjusting to our new environment.

Before leaving Jamaica, lots of people were skeptical about our plans. My father reassured us that it would work out, and it would be for a better life. My mother’s main concern was keeping the family together, and that Daddy would be able to provide for our family.

There have been moments since being here when we all wanted to go back. I hated having to go to a new school, but I have been making the best of it. My mom insists that I work really hard and she ensures I do all of my homework. As a family, we try to be courageous in making this our new home. It is almost like a cultural shock. Getting adapted to the United States and this culture will take time, but we are up for the challenge. And guess what? We all love the SNOW!!

“AS A FAMILY, WE TRY TO BE COURAGEOUS IN MAKING THIS OUR NEW HOME.”
I remember when I needed courage meeting my friend Mary. We both attended the Dr. William Henderson Inclusion School. Mary has special needs and cannot speak. She uses a device to communicate. I was nervous around Mary and was unsure how to interact with her. I was in the same class as Mary from second grade until fifth grade and I was so impressed with the progress Mary made and the challenges that she overcame. Mary is the true example of why inclusion in schools is so important. Not only does she learn from her friends, but she teaches us that despite your disability, we all have abilities.

Mary has a one to one paraprofessional; her name is Jane. Ms. Jane is my neighbor. She introduced me to Mary, and told me what Mary liked. Mary loves to clap and listen to music. It is a way of communicating and comforts her.

Over the years, our mothers became friends. As our families got closer, I was able to spend more time with Mary. Mary does things that I have never even tried. She goes horseback riding, windsurfing and has gone to overnight camp for a whole week. Meeting Mary has made a huge difference in my life. Whenever I feel like I can’t do something, I think of Mary. She may not be able to speak, but she has given me so much courage to always try my hardest and to try new things.

Courage is when you have fear and you push through it. I showed courage because I had fear when I first met Mary. She was different than anyone I had ever met before. I was unfamiliar with her and after spending time with her, I learned that it wasn’t so scary after all. She may not be able to talk, but seeing her smile and hearing her laugh makes me know she isn’t nervous or scared either. Everyone should have a courageous friend like Mary!

“Courage is when you have fear and you push through it.”
To me, courage is the ability to do something that you are uncertain about or that is painful and difficult, without being overcome by fear. “Ew, what happened to your toes? Why are they like that?” This is what I usually hear when I am at gymnastics.

When my mom was pregnant with my twin sister, Sydney, and me, we fought a rare disease found only in identical twins. The doctors said that we would not make it, and if we did we would be mentally and physically challenged. My mom went through multiple surgeries to save us. She did everything she could. My older sister Olivia had to let go of my mother for a while and stay with our grandparents. Knowing that means the world to me.

When my sister and I were born we were perfectly fine, with only a couple of issues. Sydney was born with asthma and some other lung concerns. The one thing that I was born with was three toes with amniotic banding on one foot, and three toes with no nails on the other. I guess you would say that this is on the smaller end of the spectrum. I am still alive, and yes I am happy, but to me it is pretty embarrassing. The day I chose to write about is special to me because it took the most courage: the day I started gymnastics.

This was not like dance or soccer because during those sports you can wear shoes or something on your feet. During gymnastics everyone can see my feet, and everyone asks about them. What I say is “I was born with them.” They don’t really usually respond with much, they just look at me like they are in shock. To tell you the truth, sometimes it really bothers me and sometimes it doesn’t. The time it most bothered me was when a girl added in, “Ew,” when asking me what happened. But still nothing stops me. I just keep smiling and stay focused.

I would like to give you information about amniotic banding. Sydney and I were diagnosed with Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome which affects the placenta. Our sacs that we were in had a lot of needles go through the membranes. All the needles poked holes in the sac and amniotic strands broke loose and wrapped around my toes like dental floss. My mom has ultrasound pictures, so I know I originally had ten toes.

My toes make me a little self-conscious, but it could have been much worse. I have learned to just ignore the comments and keep going. To me, my toes do not even hurt. Most people think that if they touch them that they hurt. I don’t even realize that they are there half of the time. They don’t bother me because I can do anything my friends can do, whether it is pointing your toes or doing a flip. My toes just push me ever harder. I want to prove to people that have any doubts in me, and to all the doctors who said Sydney and I would not survive, that with a little courage you can do anything.

“I WANT TO PROVE TO PEOPLE THAT HAVE ANY DOUBTS IN ME...THAT WITH A LITTLE COURAGE YOU CAN DO ANYTHING.”
What is courage? Courage is being able to face your fears. I remember when I had to be brave and face my fears. It was a hot summer day and I decided I would go watch my brothers at football practice. When we arrived, I saw a lot of different kids with helmets and other equipment.

We walked onto the field and went up to the coach to talk to him. My mom spoke with the coach while my brother and I watched the other kids practice. Then she called me over to speak with the coach. He introduced himself to me by saying, “My name is Coach Gary.” He asked me how old I was and if I played football. I told him that I was twelve years old and that I sometimes play football at a field near my house. He told me I would be perfect for his team because I was built like a running back. He also told me that I was big, so I would probably make a good linebacker.

I felt happy and scared. My heart started pounding because I really wanted to play but I was afraid to get tackled. I gave him a little smile and politely told him, “No thank you,” and we left.

When I got home around 11:00, my uncle came over for a visit. He walked in my room and said, “We have to talk.” By the look on his face I knew that he wanted to talk with me about me not wanting to play football. He told me that I should play football because it will give me something active to do after school. He also explained that when he was younger, he too was afraid to play football. Finally, he shared with me that he overcame his fear by believing in himself.

The next day I went back to the field to talk with the coach. I told him why I didn’t want to play football. He told me he understood and wanted to know what changed my mind. I shared with him the conversation I had with my uncle. I explained to him that I was ready to face my fears because of my uncle’s encouragement. He told me to suit up and said, “Let’s play some football.” That’s how I became a running back for the Bengals, and that’s how I had the courage to face my fears and play football.
Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.” This means when you feel like you can’t go any further, you should try to keep going. To me, courage is when you stay strong in spite of any challenges you face.

On a Saturday afternoon in January 2013, I headed to the Oak Square YMCA with my mom and brother for a swim meet. After I warmed up with my teammates and checked which events I would be competing in, I waited to be called up to the block. I was extremely nervous as I clapped and cheered for my team. In no time, my name was called for the 200 medley Relay.

My heart was thumping in my chest as I anticipated how the race would turn out. I was confident that our team would do well even though we were facing some of the fastest swimmers. I nervously stepped up onto the block and dove in. SPLASH! As soon as I was in the water, I began to swim as fast as I could. “You’re doing great,” I told myself. My legs were kicking rapidly, and my arms pulled me forward. As the other swimmers began to pass me, I continued to swim at top speed, but I still couldn’t keep up with them. A voice in my head was repeating, “You’re almost there. You can do it.” Somehow, I found the courage to keep going and I was able to make it to the end of the race. As the rest of my team swam, I cheered them on, and hoped that they would keep going like I did. Even though my team finished fourth out of four teams, I thought we did great and was proud because we tried our best. We were disappointed that we didn’t place higher, but my team and I stayed strong.

During the next race I competed in, I tried my best even though all the other swimmers passed by me easily. In my head I kept repeating, “You can do it! Just keep going!” As I raced through the water, I got very tired but I still did not give up. No matter how hard I tried, and how fast I swam, I couldn’t beat the other swimmers. When I reached the end, I saw that the others had already finished. I was last again.

I became more determined to beat the other competitors. I tried swimming even harder in my third race. As I swam through the pool confidently, I was sure I would win this race. Then, I noticed the other swimmers on their second lap while I was still on my first. Using all of my strength, I kept going. “Sixth place again?!” I wondered as I climbed out of the pool. I thought to myself, “You’re never going to win. Just give up. It will make everything much easier.” But another part of me said, “Just keep trying. You still have one event left. You have to make it count.” I was torn and I didn’t know what to do. Should I give up or keep trying my best? I decided to keep going.

My last event was the hardest one. “Remember, this is 100 yards of freestyle, not just 50,” my coach reminded me as I stepped up onto the block. Right after I jumped into the water, things began to go wrong. My goggles filled up with water and I couldn’t see. I kept swimming my hardest and trying my best even though my vision was gone. I didn’t see the other swimmers passing me, but I knew that they were. After I swam all four laps, I was exhausted. When I took off my goggles, I noticed that I had come in sixth place again.

It took a lot of courage for me to keep going even when I was facing difficult challenges. I realized that it doesn’t matter whether you win or lose, all that matters is that you do your best. During my races, I swam as hard as I could. Now, my idea of courage is when you never give up and persevere even when facing failure.
The virtue of courage means to take positive risks. I love taking positive risks because it shows the type of person you can be. For example, in math class my teacher asked me a question having to do with multiplication. I took the risk of trying to answer the question, even though I was unsure of the answer. I didn’t give up and I kept trying. Courage is becoming part of my character because I have practiced it repeatedly.

One time I showed courage was when I persevered through a lesson in math class and Ms. Gentile asked a question having to do with multiplication. I didn’t know what to say; numbers were swirling in my head. Finally, not having an answer that I felt confident with, I blurted out a number. “No, try again,” Ms. Gentile said in a soft voice. The class started snapping to show me that they had confidence in me and knew I could do it. I quietly guessed another answer. “Try doing it out on your paper, don’t guess,” replied Ms. Gentile. I did my math work, adding up the numbers I got when I multiplied each column. When the answer came to me, I wondered if it would be right. I said my final answer. “Good. Way to stick with it!” Ms. Gentile cheered. I could see the snaps of the kids around me, and I felt proud of myself. I showed courage because even though I didn’t know the answer I still tried until the answer was correct.

The story that I shared reveals that I try to show courage even though I might feel embarrassed. I kept trying even though my answer was wrong a lot of times. From this experience, I learned that when you keep trying you can get better at things and achieve more.

In the future I plan to take more positive risks and to push myself like my teachers do in order to strengthen my ability to be courageous. I will continue to work hard, focus on the lessons my teachers are teaching, and answer questions, even if I’m not sure. These examples will strengthen my character because I will know how to deal with different situations. I am glad that the virtue of courage is becoming part of my character because it’s making me better in my subjects.
Courage is something that makes you a stronger person emotionally. The first time that you do something with courage, your self-esteem goes up, and you have more confidence. When I was seven, I was a scared little boy. I was afraid of a lot of things. But then I had to face one of my fears.

It was really early in the morning. I took a shower, brushed my teeth, and I ate breakfast. I remember it was Cinnamon Toast Crunch, one of the best cereals. I lived on a bad street. There were a lot of gangs and alleys, so it was hard to go outside. My grandmother told me I had to go by myself to school. When she told me that, I felt like my eyes would pop out of my head. I asked my mom, “Can you take me to school?”

Then she said, “I would if I could, but I’m sick.” I had to be a big boy.

I wondered in my head, “Will someone kill me?” My mind was racing and I couldn’t stop thinking about being killed. I couldn’t believe this. I thought, “Why me?” I felt nervous and sad, but I looked around and I saw it was bright and hot outside. I heard nothing. I smelled the fresh air and cologne I had put on to give me confidence. It was a present my grandmother got me for my birthday and the bottle was in the shape of a bear. Then I felt really good getting on the bus. Now I do it daily.

I learned to face my fears and not be scared of them.

“Courage is something that makes you a stronger person emotionally.”
Courage is doing something even if you’re afraid. It’s when you don’t let fear stand in your way. Courage is getting up and doing it all over again in hopes of succeeding.

I showed courage, and still do, in coping with my diabetes. When I found out I had diabetes it was a normal day. My dad was going to take my little sister, Olivia, my best friend, Makayla, and me to the Children’s Museum after I had a check-up at the doctor’s office. However, the doctors noticed something unusual about my blood sugar and rushed me to the hospital. By the end of my week-long stay in the children’s ward, I had been diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, a metabolic disorder in which not enough insulin is produced by the pancreas. This results in an inability to control the level of sugar in the blood. It is fatal unless treated.

Before I eat, I have to wait either fifteen or thirty minutes, depending on my blood sugar. Sometimes, I just curl up on the couch and cry because I’m so hungry and I think waiting is unfair, but I have to suck it up. Not just for me, but for my friends and family, so they don’t become worried about me.

I get angry when people say, “I feel so bad for you!” Why should they feel bad for me if I don’t feel bad for myself? It’s not life threatening because I manage it, and I only make small changes to my schedule because of it.

Sometimes, when my blood sugar’s too low, I get shaky and dizzy so I have to eat fast-acting sugar to get it back up to normal. When my blood sugar’s way higher than my target of 120, I sometimes take insulin through a shot to get my blood sugar lower. I also take something called Lantus through a shot to keep my blood sugar regulated throughout the night. I can still dance and play sports, I just have to check my blood sugar before I get really active. I can eat anything I want. Some people think I have to be on a diet and can’t eat certain foods…not true! I just have to take insulin when I have food or drinks that have over nine carbohydrates.

I see my diabetes as just another part of my life and I don’t let it hold me back.

My actions were, and are, courageous. If I had seen my diabetes as a big problem, I might have worried myself too much and held myself back from certain activities, even if I loved them. My courage helps me see my condition as only a new addition to my life that needs to be taken seriously, nothing more.

I have learned that I am a very strong person. I don’t let anything stand in the way of my dreams and living my life.

“Courage is doing something even if you’re afraid.”
Courage is a power you get when you are brave and face or overcome your fears. It might be hard to use or keep, but you will have courage at some point. It is a superpower. Some people might think my story of courage is a small thing, but I was very proud of myself for facing my fear.

It was my sister Ann’s birthday. My family came over and everyone was having a good time. My mom and grandma were cooking delicious food. After dinner and cake it was time to open presents. I remember clearly that Ann was on a very big chair. Mom gave her a present and Ann ripped the wrapping paper off in a flash! She opened the box and her eyes got wide. It was a very cute doggy hat! Ann had really wanted it since she saw it at the mall, and now she had it. She was very excited.

The next day was Christmas Eve. It was snowing and Ann and my younger sister went outside to play. I don’t really enjoy playing in the snow because it’s very cold, so I stayed inside. Ann grabbed her new hat to wear, but Mom said she would get it dirty. Since Ann was in a hurry to go outside, I had to put the hat back in her room. That’s when it happened. I took the cap off the soda bottle I was holding, and spilled it on my sister’s puppy hat! In my head I was yelling, “OMG! What am I going to do?!” I took the bottle, slammed it on the table, and started to clean the floor and hat. I tried not to panic and threw the hat in the washing machine. Then I told myself it was all better.

An hour later I checked the hat and it looked like I put a family of birds in the dryer. Then I started to freak out. “I am going to die! You hear me? Die!” I yelled. I took the hat and put it in a trash bag. I was afraid to tell Ann, but I didn’t want to lie. I took a deep breath and said, “I can do it, I can do it.” I told her every single detail right to the end. My mom made me buy a new hat for Ann, and that was fine. I am very proud of myself for having the courage to tell Ann the truth!

“Courage is a power you get when you are brave and face or overcome your fears.”
For me, courage is a tool that shows your bravery in hard situations. Especially for six year old Morgan in the first grade.

Everyone is born with something that they have to carry with them for the rest of their lives. For me, it is being deaf in my left ear. I have trouble hearing people and I am really embarrassed to tell people. Often if I can’t hear someone I give them a smile or just go along with doing what they’re doing. But unfortunately that doesn’t always work.

When I was in first grade we were cleaning up the math blocks and my teacher asked a couple of kids to clean them up. I thought she asked me, so I went over to the table where they were and started to clean up. All the kids were yelling at me because I didn’t know that I wasn’t supposed to do that. I was so confused and upset. I had no idea what I had done wrong. Then my teacher pulled me aside to talk to me about how I wasn’t supposed to help clean up. I went home crying. My mom told me the only way to get over it was to let the people know what was going on, and tell them I am deaf in my left ear. I was only in first grade, so I had no idea how the kids would react. I also didn’t know how to tell them. So the next day at school I told my teacher that I wanted to tell the kids what had happened, and she was okay with it. My heart was beating so fast. I had butterflies in my stomach, but I used my courage to help me pull through to tell everyone. When I told them, they took it better than I expected. Everyone was so nice about it. I was really afraid for nothing.

I really learned a lot from this experience. I learned that I couldn’t hide in my shadow forever; I have to tell the world about my difficulty. Courage will be right by your side to help you through it. The next time you have a difficult situation, don’t be afraid. I have told lots of people about my difficulty and they were really nice about it. Courage doesn’t happen by itself; it’s your job to make it happen.

“Courage doesn’t happen by itself; it’s your job to make it happen.”
To me, courage is when I have the strength to stand up to anyone who doubts me. I showed that I had courage when I knew right from wrong. When my heart starts to beat really fast and my stomach hurts, I say that is when my stomach sends a message to my brain that something is wrong.

When I was ten years old, I was walking home when I saw five of my friends. They asked if I could come outside. “Let me go home first,” I replied. They said that we had something to do. We started to walk, and I was wondering where we were going. We stopped three blocks away from where I live. I asked, “What are we doing here?” One of my friends said that we were going to steal a bike from this yard. I was in the yard, looking for the bike, when all of a sudden my heart started to beat really fast and my stomach was hurting. I had the courage to realize this was wrong and I went home.

The next day my friends said, “Let’s go and do it again.” I said that I would not. I never spoke to them again.

Courage kept me out of trouble. I hope it always will.

“Courage kept me out of trouble.
I hope it always will.”
Antael Rosa
Kathleen Colfer, Teacher
Bellesini Academy

John F. Kennedy said, “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men.” To me, this means I should not wish for everything to be easy and for things always to go my way. I should be a stronger man and face challenges because everything in life won’t be easy.

One time I was courageous was when I had to make the wise decision to not smoke or steal. First, my friends told me to smoke and I refused to do it because I knew it would’ve been awful for my health. It wasn’t right. I knew it would’ve been awful for my health because my parents have told me that it was bad and I have seen commercials about the effects of smoking. Then, other kids dared me to smoke and I still refused. They also dared me to steal. If I stole there would have been a likely chance of getting caught. I would have gotten into severe trouble with the police. I also knew my parents would be disappointed in me and I could get grounded for a really long time. Finally, I left and they called me names like “coward” or “little girl,” but I ignored them.

This experience taught me that life isn’t easy. I also learned to face peer pressure and do the right things. This experience can help me in the future because I know to always make wise, not foolish, decisions. This will make me a stronger man.

“This experience can help me in the future because I know to always make wise, not foolish, decisions. This will make me a stronger man.”
A teacher once told me that I have to talk about my problems in order to get help. To me, courage means doing something that someone never thought he or she could do, including talking about problems. When I was little, my father passed away. A time when I had courage was when I talked to a teacher about my crying scenes.

It was a regular school day. After activities, my mom came upstairs to pick me up, which was unusual. Before I acquired my belongings she took me to the conference room. There I saw two of my teachers. I thought I was in trouble. I was so nervous as I stepped into the room slowly. My mom held my hand and gently took me to sit down. The chair I sat in was warm and comfy, but I could not help but feel worried. Ms. Prenner softly asked me if I was okay. Uncertainly, I whispered, “Yes.” Both of my teachers, Ms. Prenner and Ms. Poindexter, started speaking about my emotional scenes in Art and Math class. Next, they asked me why I was crying, and I knew the reasons why. One of them was hard to say. In their calmest tones, they asked me some more questions. I told them that the first reason I cried was because I had stomachaches. I became more and more dismal. Suddenly, out of the blue, I blurted out the main reason why I cried in class. “Sometimes during the day I think about my father. When this happens, I cannot stop myself from crying.”

My mom quickly walked over to comfort me. She wrapped her arms around me and I calmed down. It took me a while, but I started to feel better. The two teachers told me that they were always there to talk. Ms. Prenner told me that a similar situation happened to her. We all talked about solutions to my dilemma. We came up with the idea that I could keep a journal and write my personal thoughts in it. That idea really helped.

I learned that even though I may have issues, there will always be people to support me. Speaking up can really make a difference. If there is someone reading this essay and going through a difficult time, be courageous and talk about what is going on in your life.
Hector Juarbe  
Gregory Johnson, Teacher  
McKinley South End Academy

Courage is being brave and not giving up when you are in a tough time.

My dad’s name is Hector Sr. He used to drink, people thought he was a bad guy, and he had some disabilities. They took me away from him and I went to a group home. I asked my social worker, “Can you give my dad’s number to my foster mom?” She said yes. My foster mom called my dad to set up a visit.

I wanted to visit him on his birthday, so he wouldn’t have to be alone. The reason why my dad didn’t celebrate his birthday was because my mom died around his birthday time. I never gave up on him because I know things were hard on him. I called my dad and I asked him, “Can we go celebrate your birthday at Wendy’s?” and he said, “Okay.” He asked me, “How are you doing?” I said, “Good.” He asked, “Have you talked to your sister, how is she, do you get to visit her?” I said to him, “I slept over my grandmother’s and I went to the movies with my brother and sister. We went to Wendy’s and had a good visit.”

I was nervous to see him again but it felt good. I miss my dad because I don’t get to see him as much as I want to. They said I can’t go back with him because of his problems. I still don’t give up on him, and I know we are still a family. He loves me, and I love him too.

“Courage is being brave and not giving up when you are in a tough time.”
To me, courage is being yourself, doing the right thing, and looking at what will be good for you. You should not just think about what will make someone else happy. It's important not to care too much about what other people think about you. Care about who you really are. When someone pulls you down, try to stand up for what is right. Courage is never giving up.

One time that I showed courage was when I was in 5th grade. It was a bright, sunny day and our class went out to recess, but there was one kid who was always left behind. He was lonely at the playground and a group of kids always bullied him. The worst thing of all was that those kids were my “friends.” He did not tell his parents because he thought that the bullies would hurt him more. One day when the kid got really upset, he told the bullies, “If you hurt me or say something bad about me, I will tell the teacher.”

The bullies responded, “Tell the teacher and you will see what will happen to you and your family.”

The kid looked upset, with a frown on his face. A weird shiver ran all through my body. I just couldn’t take it. I had to decide whether to lose a couple of friends, or to help a good kid feel safe in his own school. I decided to help the kid that was being bullied.

When the bullies found out that I had overthrown them, they were making fun of me saying, “Oh, there is the boy that defends little girls!” and “Oh, here comes the snitcher!”

Even though on some days the bullies made me want to stay home from school, I decided not to let other kids disrespect who I really am. What really kept me going was that I knew that I had made a good kid feel comfortable. The boy that was being bullied showed me a quote that said:

“TO ME, COURAGE IS BEING YOURSELF, DOING THE RIGHT THING, AND LOOKING AT WHAT WILL BE GOOD FOR YOU.”

Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.
The word courage has many meanings. To me, it means to be brave, to have faith in yourself, and to not quit on yourself. The person that I think is courageous is my dad. My father has had diabetes for a long time. On December 18, 2011 my dad was going to have gastric bypass surgery. However, he decided not to have the surgery because he had confidence that he could lose the weight without the surgery. He thought that he should try a different method than surgery at first. My dad joined a gym with a co-worker and they go together four days a week. Instead of surgery, the gym helped him lose weight. At first, it was hard for him to get used to going to the gym, but now he is used to the cycle.

My father also has to take two pills of insulin every day. When he started going to the gym he was at 317 pounds, but now he weighs 270. He goes to the gym even when we are on vacations. One time we were in Missouri for my brother’s graduation from Army basic training. We found out there was a gym at the hotel and we went together. My dad is courageous because he never quit on himself when things got hard. My family and I also have courage because we have supported him and loved him through the tough times. Never quit on yourself even when you feel like life is getting harder.

“My dad is courageous because he never quit on himself when things got hard.”
Have you ever wanted to scream, to yell and to let go of the pain? That is how I felt every day when I had depression and had to be away from my family. I had to stay at the hospital for two weeks. I think courage is when you know something is hard, but you know you have to do it no matter what.

Like all people, I have shown courage in my life. I showed courage in my life when I went to the hospital. Before I went to the hospital I never felt happy. I felt like a dark cloud was hanging over my head. I told my parents that I never felt happy; my mom told me that she would keep an eye on it. I had no idea what it would lead to.

The depression wasn’t getting better; it was getting worse. Every day I was miserable. I wanted to run and bang my head against the wall. When I thought about doing this, my mom, my dad and my brother told me how much they loved me. I wanted to be bad in school, to let go of the frustration, but then I realized no matter how hard I have it, someone always has it worse.

The hardest part was learning that I was going to have to go to the hospital. One day I told my mom that it was worse than ever, and she rushed me off to Children’s Hospital. After a long wait, the nurse told me that I would be in the hospital for a few weeks. When my mother came in she was crying. My dad came in about ten minutes later (my brother was with a neighbor). The next day, I left Children’s Hospital at noon to pack for the hospital that I would be staying at. When I went to that hospital I braced myself for what came next.

When I got out of the hospital, I felt replenished and ready to face what came next. Everyone at the hospital was very supportive and kind, and I learned that the hardest things to do in life are the most rewarding, so you have to try no matter what. That is how I showed courage in my life.

“I think courage is when you know something is hard, but you know you have to do it no matter what.”
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 accessible, proven literacy and character development curriculum. To date, “The Max” has worked with schools and communities in Thailand, Cambodia, the United Kingdom, Mozambique, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Japan and Pakistan. This list continues to grow, as our organization seeks to partner 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.

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 look to share our materials and offer educational opportunities for children outside of Boston.

Courage in My Community

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum proudly hosts “Courage in My Community,” a nation-wide 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 feature inspiring stories of courage written by students from across the United States in the 22nd volume of The Courage of Boston’s Children. This year’s collection includes essays written by students from: Memphis, Tennessee; Aliso Viejo, California; Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa; Atlanta, Georgia; Franklin, Ohio; Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania and Ringgold, Georgia.

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
Julency Myrtil  
Syri Kohn, Teacher  
Courage in My Community  
National Essay Contest Winner  
Cordova Middle School in Cordova, Tennessee

For the first few years of my life, I lived in a country that is underprivileged by the unstable government. I was often exposed to violence and death on a regular basis. Some days as I lay asleep in my bed, I would hear gunshots and gangs rumbling through the streets.

I had the courage to emigrate from my home country to the United States in order to have a better education and more opportunities. When I came to the United States, I was assigned to English as a Second Language (ESL) class, because I did not know English. Luckily for me, my father taught me English and encourages me to not give up learning. Without him, I would not be who I am today: a smart and intelligent young lady.

My mother abandoned my sister and me when I was 8 years old. My father raised my sister and me and basically had to learn how to be a mother. He provided food, shelter, transportation, and all the essential items needed to survive. Throughout the years, my dad has faced some obstacles while taking care of two girls by himself. Even though he went through all these difficulties, he never gave up. That’s why my dad is my hero.

“My dad is my hero.”
I understand the word the “courage.” It means struggling to solve problems and speaking out what I have in my thoughts.

I am 15 and I live in the Kauk Rovieng school village. When I was 6 years old I went to study in the 1st grade in the Kauk Rovieng primary school until I was in the 3rd grade. At that time my father became seriously sick so my mother decided to stop me from going to school for a while so I could take care of him and my sick 75-year-old grandmother. My brothers and mother had to travel away from our home to find jobs in order to get money to support the family.

A few months later, my father agreed to let me go to school again. I was very happy to go back to study again. I woke up very early at 4:00AM to pick the morning glory, water lily, kanchhet (it is a plant that grows on the water like morning glory) to sell in the village. Then I came back home to cook the rice porridge for my parents. After school I went to find palm flowers that have fallen from the palm tree (for use as cooking wood). Besides that villagers hired me to look after their cows. They gave me 300 riels or 75 cents a day. I saved the money for buying rice. My mother sent money home (30000 riels or $7.50 a month) for paying for my father’s medicines to cure his ailment. I sometimes skipped school because I went to help villagers to harvest rice and they gave me 3500 riels or $0.88 a day because I was not adult yet.

My father’s disease was getting worse day by day and he started to have very pale skin and his stomach became bigger and bigger. I was very shocked to see his condition and so I walked with him to the commune hospital doctor who diagnosed him and told him that he had liver disease. His liver was greatly enlarged. Doctors gave him some medicines to take at home. Later he died.

After my father died my mother asked me to stop study for a while again to look after my grandmother and little brother and sister. I went fishing in fields and caught the small fish and snails for cooking. I also looked for cooking wood. I put the wood on my head to sell in the village. Because of poverty my mother asked me to stop studying for one year when I was in the 6th grade.

Later on I thought to myself that there was nothing better than knowledge. I am strongly determined to continue my studies until I finish high school. They bought me notebooks, pens, pencils. I was very happy all the time when I thought that I have the chance to go back to school again. When I was in the 7th grade my close classmates gave me some old school uniforms and they always encourage me to continue studying. These made me study harder and harder until I finished 7th grade. Now I am in the 8th grade. I am strongly determined to continue my studies until I finish high school. My dream is to be a good teacher in our society.

“My dream in the future is to be a good teacher in our society.”
Courage is a curious thing. It is what most people say separates the cowards from the brave. It is the topic of many books, movies and discussions. If we know so much about it, what is courage? My idea of courage is putting on a brave face and going through with something even if you are scared to death about it. Courage comes when you need it most, but least expect it. Having courage is what gets things done in this world. When you have courage, you don’t feel it or see it. You need courage to do the simplest things, like lighting a match for the first time, or trying out a new lasagna recipe. Courage is in everyone, like it or not.

My father and I got into a car accident one day. We were driving down the road to meet a friend, when a Fed Ex van forgot to stop at a stop sign. My dad slammed the brakes, and the two vehicles collided. Parts flew everywhere. My dad pulled over, and we got out. The Fed Ex driver got out of her van, too. It took a lot of courage for me to forgive her, because her mistake could have cost us our lives. All of my hatred was building up towards her, but when she opened the van door, it all melted away. The look on her face was of pure shock and anguish. I felt so bad for her, imagining what she would have to say to her supervisor, and thinking that she might get fired. I put myself in her shoes, and knew that I couldn’t stay mad at her. Nobody was hurt, and I got to my friend’s house. Everything turned out alright. These types of accidents happen every day; it is nothing to stay mad over. If I had stayed mad at the Fed Ex driver, I wouldn’t have been able to move on with my life.

Courage makes the world go round. It’s in you when you try something crazy and new, like bungee jumping, but it is even in you when you do something like try out for the school play, or enter a writing contest. Courage drives us all. It is probably the thing we as humans need to thrive in the world. You have courage. Don’t be afraid to use it.
Quai Horton
Andria Nelson, Teacher
Courage in My Community
National Essay Contest Runner-Up
McCombs Middle School in Des Moines, Iowa

In the dictionary courage is defined as bravery, mental ability to meet danger without fear, and fearlessness. This is how I used courage for half my kid life. When I was a little kid, I had to raise five kids while my dad was in prison and my mom couldn’t do it. She struggled to keep my brothers and sisters and me fed and healthy for 10 years while my dad was in prison.

My first brother always wanted to be by my side every time and everywhere I went. This was the first sibling I had to take care of for 3 years until my sister was born on May 23, 2005. My sister always wanted to move a lot. My third sibling was born on March 10, 2007. She was born with spina bifida. She has club feet and a hole in her back from birth. I took care of her the most and I’m still doing it today in 2013. My baby brother was born on May 21, 2011 but died on May 15, 2012, six days shy of his birthday. I took good care of him and I only got to know him for one year. My other baby brother was born on November 14, 2011. He is one of the funniest babies in my family and I’m scared to lose another baby brother. I’m in eighth grade and continue to care for my family. I still cook for them and other stuff. I always want to know how their days are. If they are dealing with bullies, I tell them to stick up for themselves and for others that need help.

When I turn eighteen I want to join the military so that my cousin and I can keep each other safe. One day, when my brother joins the military, my cousin and I will keep him safe until he knows how to keep my cousin and me safe. This is how I use courage for myself, for my family members and for my friends.

“I USE COURAGE FOR MYSELF, FOR MY FAMILY MEMBERS AND FOR MY FRIENDS.”
Courage can be tough to have. It comes naturally to some, but not to everybody. I have a friend who I prefer not to name, so let’s just say his name is John. John has had it tough the past few years. He has been put in hard, scary and sad situations that he has somehow powered through. We all can learn a lesson from him.

John has a mom and a dad, but they aren’t the parents he deserves. The fact of the matter is no one deserves parents like these. John’s dad is an alcoholic and seems to rather have a drink than spend time with his family. John’s mother is currently serving a ten year term in Tennessee. When she gets done there then she’ll go on trial in Georgia. John isn’t the only one suffering from this, he also has a younger sister (who I’ll mention later on).

John tried to look at his parents as if nothing was wrong with them, but it became so bad that he was forced to face the truth. Sometimes after football practice John would call his mom, only to be ignored. He knew he couldn’t call his dad because he was trying to shake off a hangover. There would be days that my mom or dad would take him home then. John would explain the depressing situation on the short ride to his house.

The odds are stacked against John, but you can’t tell him that. He firmly believes that there is someone out there who has it worse than him. John always tries and succeeds in finding the brightest side to any situation. He has high hopes just like any kid our age should. John now lives with his uncle, and does whatever he can to make his ten-year-old sister happy. John is a one of a kind kid, and never gets down on himself.

John has more courage in his right arm than I do in my whole body! He overcomes things that adults couldn’t get over. He makes the tough decisions, after thinking it through, with no regret. We can all learn something from him: No matter how hard it gets, it has to get better sometime. If you ever meet John, the pleasure will be all yours.

“John has more courage in his right arm than I do in my whole body!”
“Courage.” It means to try hard in struggling with all obstacles and always keep trying.

I am 14 years old and I study in 8th grade in the Kauk Rovieng lower secondary school. I have 3 siblings: 2 sisters and 1 brother, and I am the second daughter in the family. My parents are both rice farmers.

When I was 5, I saw my brother and sisters went to school and I was very happy and wanted to go to school like them too, but my parents could not afford to buy a uniform, note books, pens and pencils. Because I really wanted to go to school and wanted to study, one day I went to school with my brother and sisters without letting my parent know. I also tried to make a little money by myself, pulling up the water lily, a vegetable for cooking found in ponds, to sell in the village everyday to get a very small amount of money to buy uniforms, school bag, note books, pens and pencils. Then I went to study in the 1st grade in the Tol primary school.

Every morning before going to school I had to do cleaning, like clearing the cow’s dung under the house. At school I tried hard to study and listen to the teachers. After school finished at 11:00 AM, I came back home to take the cows to the field to eat grass. Then I rested at home until 1 PM when I took the cows to drink water in the ponds. I took them back home in the evening. Every evening I helped my parents by carrying water from the well to put in the jars. On the school holidays and Sundays I went to help the villagers to harvest their rice to get a little money for buying books. Because I have been trying hard to study, I succeeded in getting from the 1st grade to the 6th grade. I entered the 7th grade in The Kauk Rovieng lower secondary in the school year of 2010-2011 and now I am in grade 8.

Facing poverty my mother insists that I quit studying to go to work in the garment factory to earn money to support the family, but I always object to her ideas because I fear that I will lose my opportunity to study. I don’t want to quit school. Most of the time when mother asks me to go anywhere that could affect my studies, I will oppose those ideas. I don’t want to go away to find a job to do instead of working in the village helping farmers to harvest rice and picking cucumbers to get a little money so that I still can go to school.

Just the same, I would like to thank my parents for raising me from when I was a baby until I am grown up. They work very hard to make money for me and my brother and sister. And also I would sincerely like to thank all my teachers for their efforts to teach me and explain things to me. Because of that, I have good grades every month. When I grow up I want to become a good teacher.

“Courage. It means to always keep trying.”
Talia Beach  
Peggy Verkest, Teacher  
Courage in My Community  
National Essay Contest Runner-Up  
Van Damme Academy in Aliso Viejo, California

“I believe that anyone can conquer fears by doing the things he fears to do,” Eleanor Roosevelt said. Courage means standing up for others and also for yourself. It’s a time to be brave and daring. Doing the right thing from your soul is always the right decision. Conquering your fears helps you gain courage.

An example of a brave deed within my life was when my sister and I were playing with a ball. We were next to a beautiful blue community pool which was not occupied. My sister accidentally kicked the red ball we were playing with over the wall and into the community pool. My sister felt terrible and tried to ascend the wall to fetch the ball but wasn’t able to. Since she couldn’t go over the wall, she suggested I should go over the wall and get it. I was scared to death. Eventually, I climbed to the top of the eight foot wall but was too scared to go down the other side. My sister was comforting me and saying, “You can do it! Have trust and confidence in yourself!” Her talk helped me because it gave me faith, and so I stepped down onto a black railing halfway through and then jumped to the ground. I felt so proud of myself and so did my sister by saying excitedly, “I knew you could do it!” I wasn’t afraid to go back over the wall because I had done so already. My sister and I then resumed playing with the ball after I got it carefully. This act of physical courage I will remember forever.

Although I was frightened, I conquered my fears and climbed the wall and strongly hoped to succeed at the task. Faith in myself, and from my sister, was all I needed. When the task was completed, I definitely felt courageous and that I was able to do anything I set my mind to. I am very proud of overcoming my fears, which is an honor to me.

Courage always has a way to find you when you really need it. It is your “soul companion” and always sticks with you. If you have faith in yourself, you will always win and be brave. Courage is a wonderful thing that powers you along.”
To me, courage means being brave. For example, when some people get bullied and get tired of being bullied, they stand up for themselves. Some people love showing courage for other people. Most people have to stand up for themselves. If you get bullied in school, be brave and confident for your very own self or tell an adult. Use courage to help you be brave when you have to take a stand.

Through my own experiences in life, I have been able to define the true meaning of courage. Courage is to have the ability to know right from wrong and to stand up for what you believe in, even in the face of great adversity. In my lifetime I have rarely been called upon to display courage, but I clearly remember a specific situation. I was at one of my friend’s birthday parties. There were about 30 people at the party, along with loud music and dancing.

What I thought was going to be a great night turned out to be the night my courage would be tested. I was talking to some of my friends because they were acting funny. I asked them why they were acting funny. They said they had beaten up someone. I said, “Why did you guys do that?” They just had stupid looks on their faces. I looked for the boy they claimed to have beaten up and asked him if he was alright. He said, “Yeah.” I gave the boy a piece of cake and sent him home.

I went to talk to my friends in private. Because of what they did, they got sent home too, with no piece of cake. That’s a situation in which I had to have courage. My friends that had bullied the boy were not my friends anymore. I found a different group of friends to hang out with including the boy I had stood up for.

So you see, everyone has to have courage once in a while. Sometimes quiet people have to have courage too. Hopefully, courage can change your life in the future. Courage sometimes speaks for people because they are too shy to speak otherwise. So don’t be afraid to speak up for yourself.

“Through my own experiences in life, I have been able to define the true meaning of courage.”
Courage is a word that means different things and has endless possibilities. Courage gives someone the strength to stand up for what they believe in and to stay with it when no one else believes. It ends wars and creates heroes that save whole nations. Courage can give someone the strength to get through anything. Courage is what gave me the strength to get through the situation that was thrown at me suddenly, and it is also what allowed me to believe in miracles.

It was a normal day. I got up, went to school, and sat through classes. The only difference was that my mom was late to pick me up from school, and I was stuck sitting there waiting for her. I was not worried (she had been late many times before), but I was somewhat tense because she was later than usual. After sitting for what seemed like forever, her car pulled up with her and my dad inside. It was odd that my dad was in the car because it was not his day off. When I got in the car I could feel the tension, something was not right. I got up the courage to ask what was wrong, and I heard the words I never want to hear again. “Your brother has been placed in the intensive care unit of the hospital; he overdosed on pills and aspirated his vomit. His brain has been starved of oxygen, leaving him with no brain activity and in dire need of life support.”

My mom booked a flight for us, and we flew to the hospital to be with my brother. We thought that we were going to say our last goodbyes to him. My brother was in the intensive care unit for a little over two weeks and during that time I heard scary things about how he was doing. I can clearly remember a conversation between my father and me, where he said that the doctors thought there was little chance that Brock would make it. I am so proud of the courage that my brother demonstrated while he was in the hospital. He fought to recover his strength and defied the odds, even when all of them were stacked against him. I will never forget the courage that everyone in the waiting room showed. They kept up a strong vigil and prayed for him every single moment that they could. The courage demonstrated in that hospital is the exact same courage that saves lives.

Today my brother is fully recovered, aside from a few lasting effects including loss of hearing and constant pain in his left shoulder. My brother used to be an atheist but he recently dedicated his life to the Lord and through that dedication he was able to beat his long afflicting addiction. He was able to realize his limit and when the temptation grew too great, he decided to remove it completely and that shows immense courage. I hope to one day possess the courage that he does. I learned that courage comes in many different forms and it comes out of many different situations. Courage is something everyone should use, and no one should forget.

“Courage allowed me to believe in miracles.”
To me, courage is the ability to do something that frightens you. When I first hear the word courage, it makes me think about the lion in *The Wizard of Oz*. The lion wanted to go to the wizard for courage, but he had it all along. He had to discover it. As e.e. cummings has said, “It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.”

Everybody uses courage every day, even as we get up out of bed in the mornings. Every teacher uses courage by coming in to teach their students. Muhammad Ali used it every time he stepped in the ring to face another boxer. Without courage, you will never succeed or conquer anything in life.

I have lots of courage myself. As an athlete, I have to. During one game, my team, the College Park Rams, had to face the undefeated East Point Bulldogs. We were coming into this game with a record of 2-2. The other team’s players were much larger in size than my teammates and a lot of the people on my team were terrified of them. As the captain of my team, I had to make sure that my teammates had enough courage to play this game. I told them, “We are about to play one of the toughest teams in our league. We are going to have to play hard-nosed football and we can’t back down now.” Then I started the chant, “WHAT’S THE FIRST SOUND THEY GONNA HEAR CLICK CLATT, WHAT’S THE LAST SOUND THEY GONNA HEAR CLICK CLATT. WHAT-CLICK-WHAT-CLATT WHAT-WOOOOOOOOOO.” I helped my team work up the courage to play, and we went out to the field feeling ready.

The final score ended up being disappointing. It was 33 to 14, but we did put up a good fight. I threw two touchdowns and gained 100 yards, but I couldn’t have done it without the help of my line and my wide receivers. I was so proud of them because spectators projected the score to be at least 70 to 0. We surely proved them wrong. Courage is what got us through that game.

In conclusion, I really feel that it is unproductive to have both courage and fear inside of you. The courage inside of you should always outshine the fear inside of you, and the fear should never show. As Mr. Nelson Mandela said, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

“The courage inside of you should always outshine the fear inside of you.”
Every human being has some type of courage to live life. It can be a parent, child, female or male. Courage to me is not giving up on things that you love and want; however, this may be different from one person to another.

I am a student who plays basketball and I feel as though I experience a lot of courage while being on the court. I have to have courage to play a game that may result in uncertainty or pain. I have to have determination within myself to take a jump shot to score points for my team. In the effort of doing this, I must attempt to make the basket. I have to risk getting bumped into, fouled, or even knocked down. If I am fouled I must attempt again to apply this same courage to throw a free-throw shot to get our points.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is a person I look up to. He displayed courage every time he stood in public, making speeches around the southern part of the country. He had the fear of being locked up, shot at or even killed for his efforts to stop racism, but he continued because he had a purpose.

Another person I admire for their courage is President Barack Obama. The first time President Barack Obama ran for the presidency in 2008, he had to face the difficulty of being the first African American president. He had to face people throughout the world who may like or dislike the color of his skin, people with different views, and those people who had other reasons to dislike him. Barack Obama was determined to become the president. He had to have courage to overcome all the negativity that he experienced and those people who disapproved of his vision to move forward.

During President Barack Obama’s second term, he still has to display bravery. He knows that the first four years were hard and challenging but he has much more to do. He had to trust his staff to represent him and to work hard to encourage the public to vote for him for another four years as the president.

As you can see, courage is the ability to face your goals in life. I began the sixth grade here at Compton-Drew with the courage to be a good student, but I ran into some difficulties that I had to overcome: my grades! I did not begin the school year with the motivation that was needed to be a good student. I had to encourage myself to do better. I am now proud of the student I have become and my parents are proud of me, too. I had to decide which course of action that I wanted. To be a student making letter grades that will hurt my growth as I continue to go to school, or make the letter grades to help my growth as I continue go to school. I don’t want to say that courage is something easy to do—because it isn’t—but if you have the willingness to be better at whatever you want in life, keep the courage.

“Courage is not giving up on things that you love and want.”