THE COURAGE OF CHILDREN:
BOSTON AND BEYOND
VOLUME XXIII

2014

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

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Stacey Bakaj, Northeastern University Marketing Department

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

**Photography**
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The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond

Volume XXIII is dedicated to

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

With immense gratitude, we dedicate the 2014 volume of The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond to Northeastern University. Their generous support since 2006 in hosting The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum on campus has played an invaluable role in our organization’s remarkable growth.

Northeastern’s global vision and their commitment to our local neighborhoods continues to inspire our work in Boston and surrounding communities, across the country and around the globe.

Since being welcomed by Northeastern University, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has significantly expanded its reach and capacity. Our curriculum is taught in nearly every sixth grade ELA classroom in the Boston Public Schools, and our ninth grade pilot program continues to grow. The organization’s national and international programs feature partnerships with schools in 18 states, and nine countries. We have hosted two delegations of Pakistani educators on campus in recent years, as well as annual professional development seminars for educators featuring award-winning authors. Most recently, our curriculum materials have been updated to align with the Common Core State Standards.

We are truly grateful to our partners at Northeastern University for making this possible, and for joining us in celebrating the courage of children.
The hope of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is realized with each student’s writing of a “Courage in My Life” essay, and in presenting Volume XXIII of The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond we proudly recognize all of the 4,000 students participating in our program this year. This expanded outreach proves the value and vitality of the curriculum’s goal of guiding students to discover and identify their own courage, and becomes its own cause for celebration.

What is it that enables a child to seek and find courage? You will find in this collection a powerful variety of answers, beginning with the example of one girl’s brave decision to get help in overcoming her fear of reading. A boy shows compassion for his father’s “working his way through life’s struggles” with an uplifting but hard-won maturity, and another displays the wisdom of a child whose Asperger’s Syndrome teaches him that “Sometimes courage is just about being who you are.”

These children have the courage to cope with painful challenges and to write honestly about their struggles. The cruel bullying by their peers is a sadly persistent theme that is counterbalanced in these essays with valiant immigrant stories and moving examples of children facing illness and critical losses. One boy encounters discrimination and discovers “I’m a nice, open-minded kid with two moms who love me.” And another determines that her cerebral palsy “does not define who I am or what I can achieve.” In a statement that sums up the profound simplicity of the role of courage in a child’s life, we are told, “I believe fear is a choice. When you let it stop you in your tracks, living is put on hold.”

For each of the exemplary essays published here, there are a hundred others written with the same inspiring grace. For the teams of readers charged with choosing the essays for this book, it is a privilege to be allowed such a depth of intimacy and trust. In acknowledging all the children who participate in The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, from in and around Boston, across the country and abroad, we honor the powerful spirit of community that is created by these children whose lives, so often undermined by daunting struggles, are now also defined by the great courage they rise to time after time, one by one, together.

Alexandra Marshall is the author of six books of fiction and nonfiction. She has coordinated the annual selection of essays since the founding of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum.

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The COURAGE OF CHILDREN: BOSTON AND BEYOND

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XI
Courage in My Life

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today, nearly 100% of Boston Public Schools’ sixth-grade classrooms benefit from this curriculum, reaching more than 4,000 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.

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

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

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

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

“Who is it?” Max asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many stories ended with a shake of the head, a glance away, and the simple statement, “Max amazed me then. He was so brave. Children amaze me. I am amazed by the courage of children.”
To me, courage means that you can face your fear whenever you think it’s the right time.

I had courage because I used to struggle in reading, but I received help from my teacher and faced my fear of reading to the whole class. I used to stutter when I read, and I couldn’t sound out the words right, so I would cry. When it was my turn to read aloud to the class, I got stuck on the words and kept repeating them over and over again. My entire class laughed and clowned me.

After that incident, my heart was broken and my eyes watered up. I felt like I was a toy being broken by a two-year-old child. The kids in my class made me feel as if I was the only one having trouble reading. They treated me like I was their dog. I knew from that embarrassing experience that I couldn’t do this alone, so I needed to get help from people who cared about me. I was so scared that my mom and teacher would look at me upside down when I told them “my secret” as to why I never used to like reading. However, they supported me and made sure that I got all of the help I needed.

Finally, one day in school I thought to myself, “I’m going to be able to read correctly one day!” My heart felt so full because I finally stood up to my fear of reading and had the courage to challenge myself. From that day on, I got a book every night and read until I was tired.

Courage means that no matter what your struggles are, you can face them knowing that one day you will reach your goal.
I was about five or six years old and I had a terrible day at my school. I was being so bad. I got on my bus and was heading home, but I didn’t want to go into my house because my mom was mad at me. She was mad at me because I was doing bad things at school. My mom said, “Go get in the house,” and when I didn’t go inside she called the cops. The cops picked me up and brought me to a foster home. That was really hard for me because I love my mom very much. I didn’t like that foster home because they were mean and I was still only five or six years old, so I really didn’t understand. I was just a kid.

I ran away and my foster parents called the cops. Again, the cops came and took me away. They put me in another foster home. The new foster home was nice, and I stayed there for a little while, but I was still mad. I also really missed my family, so I kept running away. The police caught me again, but this time they brought me to the Italian Home for Children.

I was scared of the Italian Home. I was quiet because I was frightened. I heard people screaming. I didn’t know what was happening, so I just stayed quiet. I had to stay in the Italian Home for three or four years. I had to have courage because I was alone and scared. My dad was in jail for a long time for something he didn’t do. He wanted to come home, and I wanted to come home, too.

Finally, they found the right person and my dad got out. It was a hard time. When he came home I was still living in the Italian Home. He visited me there and he worked really hard to bring me home. I had to work hard, too. I had to have courage to do what was right, so I would be allowed to live with my dad.

I had faith in him to get me out and bring me home. He was working his way through life’s struggles. He believed he could bring me home after what he had been through. When he finally got custody I came home. We both had to be courageous to make it through that time. I am proud of him.

"WE BOTH HAD TO BE COURAGEOUS TO MAKE IT THROUGH THAT TIME. I AM PROUD OF HIM."
Since the dawn of time, courage has been present in many different ways. Big or small, courage is misperceived by many. A person doesn’t have to rescue people or save lives to be courageous. Sometimes courage is just about being who you are.

Hi, my name is Zach and I have Asperger’s Syndrome. I have had Asperger’s since I was born. It’s not considered a disease, sickness, or virus. It’s a neurological trait that I just happen to have. Asperger’s Syndrome makes life harder for me mentally. From experiencing extreme emotions like being really happy, then suddenly feeling down, it’s hard to manage. My Asperger’s makes reading people’s emotions and feelings hard to do, which in turn makes understanding people difficult. I also cannot always control when I say mean things and it takes courage to go back, explain, and apologize about what happened. The hardest times were early in my childhood because I experienced emotional tantrums every day, with timeout after timeout (which we found out did not help.) This shaped me into the person that I am today. I know that I act and feel differently than other kids due to my Asperger’s, and I’m here to tell everyone why I think it takes courage to handle how hard it can be.

As a somewhat weird kid, I express who I am in my own way, and this is courageous. People have criticized me and mocked me, but I still stay true to myself and to my friends. I show courage every day by refusing to be just average with grades, looks, style and preferences. For example, with my light blue ski pants I look different and I stand out—and I like it. When most kids are walking, I am running with my friends.

Courage is being oneself against all odds. This is how I face my Asperger’s even though it makes me different every day. It is difficult to raise my hand in class because I want to convey my thoughts as I think them. Teachers want me to wait my turn, and sometimes that is hard. I am learning and growing in that area. Being myself is not necessarily the most popular or coolest thing, but in the real world it’s the best thing.

From my experience, courage is not about being amazing, a savior, or a hero. It can be just pushing through when things get rough, or dealing with a trait you can’t control, such as Asperger’s. For me, courage is always being me—different, in a world where everything is the same. Courage is many things, but it is always living life to the fullest.

“Courage is being oneself against all odds.”
In my point of view, courage is not about fictional characters like Iron Man, Batman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman and Superman. It’s about people like police officers, firefighters, teachers, presidents or, for instance, your parents. In this story, I, the narrator, discover that I have a gay mom.

My family and I live in Boston, Massachusetts, and I go to the Salemwood School in Malden. My extended family lives in the Midwest and we don’t agree on all subjects, like diversity, and two people who are the same gender getting married. I have two moms. My family doesn’t believe in being married to a person of the same gender. It is hard sometimes to think I’m the only kid in the school that has two moms.

My biological mom and I have to deal with lots of problems with our family but the worst problem is that my mom is in love with a woman, and my family will not accept it. It’s hard to say that I have a gay mother to them because they are not open-minded like me and my moms. My mom would be screamed at by her brother and sister if we told them the truth. I want my family to know and have them accept it, but I can’t because of the Chinese tradition. The Chinese tradition is really unfair because it says something that I don’t like, which is that you need to find a Chinese male or female (depending on your gender) to get married to.

I go to school and attend a group to solve and talk about my problems and fears. Some of my teachers know about my family, but some don’t. In my group I met a kid who has two moms like me. “Finally,” I thought. “I’m not alone after all.”

I don’t care if you are a different color or nationality than me. I don’t care if you’re gay, straight, bisexual, have a sickness, or a problem. If you are nice, you can be a good friend. I’m a nice, open-minded kid with two moms who love me. I love my wonderful life and I wouldn’t let anyone mess with us. I am proud to be who I am, with the lifestyle I have.

Did you ever hear the saying, “No two snowflakes are alike?” That is the same for people. No two people are the same; everyone is different with their nationality and lifestyle, like my mom and my other mom and people everywhere. Everyone has differences in their lives.

“I AM PROUD TO BE WHO I AM, WITH THE LIFESTYLE I HAVE.”
To me, courage is when you have the willingness to do something that you don’t want to do. Anais Nin said, “Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.” What I think she’s saying is if you have the courage to do something, you have a better future than if you don’t have courage. That relates to my thinking or understanding of courage because it is basically saying to be brave is to have the willingness to do something.

My story of courage starts at lunch. All of my friends and I go to the same table every day and eat together. At lunch we are always talking, but this conversation had some tension. One of my friends was talking and then another said, “That’s retarded.” Everyone but me started laughing. They thought it was funny to say that. In my mind, I wasn’t sure what to do. I didn’t know why they were laughing. I had to make a choice: do nothing or say something.

Then I said, “Hey, don’t say that word. I mean it!” Everyone just looked at me like it was a joke. I told them why they shouldn’t say it. I told them it’s not a descriptive adjective. I told them about my little sister. I also told them what it really means. My little sister’s name is Sophia. She is seven-years-old and has Down Syndrome, a type of disability. Everyone at my table was shocked. They were shocked because I told them what it really meant.

Now that I think of it, I made a change. Nobody says “retard” anymore. Some of my friends even point out to me some kids who say it. Now that they know what it means, they don’t use it that way anymore. It’s no longer a descriptive adjective to me, or to them! If I didn’t have the courage to say what I said, they would still use the world incorrectly. I wouldn’t be able to stand that.

To me, courage means having the willingness to do something. It means to be brave. It took courage for me to tell my friends not to say “retard.” What I did made a change in my friends.
Although we might not see it, everyone has courage. Courage is standing up for who you love and care for, and never giving up on them. I am one of those people who could not figure out if they had courage. It took me a while to figure out that I have shown courage many times. My little brother has autism and many people don’t know this. I do not talk about it much because I don’t want people to make fun of my brother or me.

I used to be embarrassed of him because he would act very weird. For example, sometimes he talks to strangers or yells loudly, which brings a lot of attention to me. When he did that, I felt like going to my room and staying there. People often laughed or said, “He’s hilarious,” not knowing that he has autism. It made me feel so embarrassed to even be next to him, but another side of me felt bad because he was not doing it on purpose, he was just trying to make friends!

One day in September, my brother came to the student led conference. I knew it would be a nightmare, but my parents would be upset if I said that. I walked into the class and my brother was grabbing Expo markers and drawing all over the place. My dad told me to watch him while he talked to my teacher. I was very embarrassed. My friends looked at him like he was crazy. At that point I either had to leave my brother and act like I did not know him, or stay with him and calm him down. So I did what a sister should do, I stayed next to my brother and calmed him down. I decided I could care less about what people thought of me.

Courage is standing up for someone you love and care for. That is what I did. I did this because my brother is my only sibling and I am not going to act like I do not know him because he has autism. I will always be there for him!
Farrah Haytham  
Sherin Nayfeh, Teacher  
Alhuda Academy

I still remember the night. It was the scariest night of my life. I was in kindergarten and I woke up to the sound of my mother’s scream and the cries of my younger sister.

To me, courage means staying strong even through the times life throws the most difficult obstacles at you. To me, the night when my six-month-old brother died was when I showed the most courage. I felt like life had thrown the highest hurdle I had ever faced. I felt like it was an impossible hurdle to pass, that there was no way over, under or around it.

It was the most horrifying time of the eleven years I have lived. No one knew it was coming. It was the least expected thing that could happen. It just came out of nowhere. I couldn’t bear to see my mom scream and cry. It just wasn’t a thing a kindergartener wanted to see. There I was, thinking that adults could do anything, go through anything, and be fearless at the same time. But seeing her like that was hard. My brother had died.

So I did it. I had courage. I stood up and I jumped over the hurdle. I pushed the past away. I remember my brother, but I didn’t let his death stop me. I imagined his face and I realized that if he were alive right now he would want me to cheer up my mom. He wouldn’t want me to sit around and stop living my life because of this one obstacle. I got up and I did it with courage. And on that cold Saturday night I reassured my mom it would be okay. So now, when she tells me, “But he was mine,” I say to her, “Not anymore, he’s God’s now.” I did it. My mom hugged me and told me I was right. I was courageous. And I wasn’t the only one with courage, I had given my mom courage, too.

Maybe I had jumped the hurdle, but as the oldest, I still remember my brother every night. And even though the topic is not always mentioned in my house, I know we all will remember him always. I received three more siblings after my brother passed away, and I’m grateful for that.

“To me, courage means staying strong even through the times life throws the most difficult obstacles at you.”
My life revolves around courage. I’m not saying that I have more backbone than anyone else, but it’s true that my life is the way it is now because of courage. This courage isn’t all mine though, it’s also the courage of others. Most people around me have an amazing story to tell, but the one story I want to tell is my mother’s. This is the story of how she escaped to India from Tibet. What would drive my mother to do such a dangerous thing? The 1959 Chinese Invasion.

Tibet was a rectitudinous country populated by Buddhists, but since it rarely contacted the world outside, China easily took over the smaller country. Once the news reached the capital, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was quickly escorted to India, but it was too late for everyone else. Under China’s rule, the military roamed the streets 24/7, religion was forbidden, and it seemed that things wouldn’t change. Many began to think about following His Holiness to India.

My mother grew up watching elders mask their fear. Many old traditions weren’t taught to her because they were associated with Buddhism. When I asked her about her childhood, my mother answered, “Ever since I was little, I continuously wondered why my mother would pray for justice and to meet His Holiness. She also continuously told me I was born in a terrible time.”

After a while, the Chinese government became more lenient, and my grandmother told my mother of how life was before the invasion. Soon, my mother wanted to learn Buddhism and meet His Holiness. However, teaching Buddhism was still forbidden. Then, while visiting Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, she heard of Buddhist schools in India and began to plan a way to get to these schools. My grandparents tried to prevent this trip, but in the end they gave my mother their blessings to go.

My mother and a couple of others hid on a cargo truck that was heading to the Tibet-Nepal border. On the way to the border there were three guarded bridges. At each bridge the Chinese would ransack the cargo, so instead of going across the first bridge, the group swam under it, across the river of ice, in the dark. Unfortunately, someone fell victim to hypothermia.

Everyone else once again hid on the truck. The second bridge was guarded more heavily, so the group hiked around the bridge in the surrounding mountains. At the final bridge, while they were hiding in the shadows, they heard, “Tentou!”

My mother was captured, tortured, and forced to promise that she would never try to escape again. After her belongings were taken from her, she was told to go home. This didn’t happen, though. Instead, with some of the others, she planned the next escape route. This new plan involved a guide, no bridges, hiking high mountains in the dark and one icy river with a powerful current.

When I asked my mom to describe the second escape, she answered, “By the end of the journey, survivors were covered with burrs, scrapes, and bruises, and clothes were covered in holes.” Once she reached Nepal, my mom hitchhiked to Kathmandu. After a month of recovering from infection, she was on her way to India.

Today my mom and the rest of our family live in a free country. We have food on the table, and we practice Buddhism. I don’t think she regrets it, taking such a huge risk.
What is courage? Courage is overcoming a fear and not letting it control you anymore. Courage is experiencing something that is horrific and life-changing and not letting it stop you from going out in the world.

Every year, at least one of my relatives runs the Boston Marathon. It is always a fun experience, and I always enjoy spending time with all of my extended family as we cheer on our family members who face the challenge of 26.2 miles. That is, until April 15, 2013.

It started out a completely normal, nice, sunny day. My sister invited her friend over and my whole family went out to watch my cousin and father run. We stopped at a couple of places along the marathon route before finally stopping at the finish line. When my dad crossed the finish line with a huge smile on his face I screamed his name. I was so proud of his accomplishment. We decided to walk around a little bit before watching my cousin finish. My mom, grandfather and I found a spot to continue cheering on the right side of the finish line. My cousin, who wasn’t running, my aunt, uncle, and grandmother stood across the street because there wasn’t enough room for us all to stand together. I leaned over the railing, eagerly searching the sea of runners for my cousin who would be coming through very soon.

One second I could see my family across from me cheering on the runners, and then BOOM! A large blast filled my ears and an enormous black cloud of smoke erupted into the sky, right where my family had been standing. A window shattered, everyone was screaming, and I had no idea what was happening. My grandfather turned to my mom and me and pushed us away, screaming for us to run. Then he turned and ran towards the billowing smoke, frantically trying to find the rest of my family.

I took my mom’s hand and we sprinted down the streets, looking for the building that my sister and dad were in. All I felt was absolute terror and dread. Tears streamed down my face, and I couldn’t stop thinking about my family who had just been standing where there was now a wall of black smoke. I kept thinking about what damage the bomb had done to them. The streets were flooded with people and screams. I felt like it was too terrible to actually be happening. It was my worst nightmare, but there was no waking up from it.

We finally reached the building and found my sister and her friend, and we filled them in on what had happened. My mom was frantically trying to call all of my relatives, but none of them answered. It felt like we waited forever, scared out of our minds and anxious for any news.

After a while, my sister’s friend’s dad arrived and we walked home to our house. We waited at home until my dad got home, desperately trying to find any news about our family. I remember hearing my sister’s door close upstairs, and being terrified because I thought it was another bomb. In the days after, it was hard to sleep at night. Whenever I heard loud noises or saw suspicious looking people, I would scare myself into thinking that they were more bombs or terrorists. It took a while to start believing that the danger was over. Before that it took a ton of courage to even leave the house and trust the world again.

Eventually we got word that my family members were alive, but had been injured in the blast. My cousin was wounded from the shrapnel, and we were afraid she would lose her legs. My family had a very hard time getting over the incident, but it brought out a whole new kind of courage in all of us. My cousin had to have courage while being operated on. She had to be brave, show strength, and still have hope that it would turn out okay. My grandfather had to have the courage to act in an instant when he ran towards where the bomb had just exploded. Most of all, my entire family had to have courage to stay strong after enduring such a horrible and tragic experience. We had to move past our fears of the explosion, and we didn’t let it get in the way of living our lives.

This year, a lot of my family is running the marathon again, despite being a part of an experience that was so scarring. I don’t plan on cheering with my family at the finish line this year because it still feels too threatening to be in that area on Marathon Monday. Before the event, I hadn’t experienced very many circumstances where courage and bravery were needed, but the marathon bombing taught me what it truly means to be courageous. It is important to know that you are strong enough to be brave and courageous when it is really needed. The marathon taught me to conquer my biggest fears, and to never let any obstacles stop me from living my life.
Luis Guerrero Dume
Sara Zrike and Francisco de la Rosa, Teachers
Joseph J. Hurley K-8 School

It doesn’t matter how big your pain might be if you have your family by your side. Hope is the last thing you lose. Family is like branches on a tree. We all grow in different directions, but our roots remain as one.

It was very hard and painful for me to get used to being away from my mom when I was just a little kid. Sometimes, life brings you challenges that can feel impossible to overcome. How can I explain that my mom had to leave me in the Dominican Republic when I was only 11 months old? I didn’t understand why. All I knew was that the woman who took care of me was my aunt. She was the only mom I had.

I never saw my mom. The first time I saw her was when I was five years old. It’s definitely as hard as it sounds. It’s never easy to be away from someone you love, but you don’t realize how much they mean to you until you get to know that person. When I first saw my mom, she was a stranger to me. I refused to look at her as my mother after she left me, but that’s because I didn’t understand why she did it.

Like a lot of people, my mother came to the USA looking for a better life for my sister and me. I tried to understand this and finally had the courage to forgive her for leaving me behind. When my mom succeeded here in the USA and we could all be together again, it was extremely hard for me to leave behind my “parents” and most of the people I loved in the Dominican Republic.

After I came to the USA, it was hard for me to get used to a new language and to meet new people. My first year in the USA was the hardest, but even though I struggled, I never gave up. I fought and kept going just like my mom had to do. My mom made many sacrifices for me to be where I am right now, and I thank God for helping her. I regret making her pain bigger by not accepting her as my mom at first.

I learned that we must fight for what is pure and appreciate that something precious brings us happiness.

“My first year in the USA was the hardest, but even though I struggled, I never gave up.”
My definition of courage is being able to do something scary or hard without giving up, and having the strength to see it through. One time I had courage in my life was when I moved to the United States.

I was born in the United States, but then moved to Haiti with my grandma. In Haiti, I went to school every day wearing my green and white uniform, with my green school bag and my lunch inside a cat lunchbox. I remember my grandma waking up every day to make my lunch, which would be hot dogs, patties or spaghetti. Every day my aunt would take me to school. I'd come home and my grandma's maid would always be waiting for me. She would have some kind of snack for me, and always seemed to know exactly what I wanted. I would run around the backyard, saying hello to friends and family everywhere I went. Living in Haiti was paradise, the sun was always out and I was surrounded by people who loved me.

One day my mom flew in from America, and I was so happy to see her, but she told me that I would be going to America with her, and that I would go to school there and meet the rest of my family. I was happy I could be with my mom, but leaving behind everything I knew made me really sad and scared. My grandma would come with us, but that didn't make a difference. Leaving my school, friends and my family felt wrong. I felt it was wrong to make me leave everything I knew. I remember my friends and family throwing a big party, and us walking to the car with our luggage and driving to the airport. On the plane to the US, the red and blue flag faded from my view. No longer could I see my home, my neighborhood or my country. All around me were white fluffy clouds, and I no longer saw my home. I gathered up my courage and was able to leave my country. I found comfort in the fact that I would see my brother and sister again. When I walked out of the airport I remember a cold wind hitting me, and I knew I was no longer in Haiti.

I needed to be courageous. I knew I would have more opportunities in America because I would get a better education. I really had no other choice but to go with my mom, and at that point my courage came to me. Someone once told me courage is inside you, you just have to find it. I finally found my courage when I left behind everything I had ever known.

The experience of leaving the country and place I called home has made me stronger because I now know that I am able to adapt and rise to any challenge that comes my way. Previously, I felt like I never had courage, but now I know that I do, and that I always will have courage stored inside of me.

“I FINALLY FOUND MY COURAGE
WHEN I LEFT BEHIND EVERYTHING
I HAD EVER KNOWN.”
Courage is dealing with struggles. My struggle is persevering in a different world. When I was about five years old, I noticed that I saw numbers backward, and that I mixed up my “b” and “d” letters. When I was seven years old, my teacher called on me to read. I stood there like a piece of ice in Antarctica! When she called on me again, I took a deep breath. All the kids were staring at me. I started reading and everyone laughed at me. I ran out of the room, feeling that everyone would laugh at me for my entire life. Third grade was the worst! I had to write a story and I spelled most of my words wrong. Kids would tease me by asking me to spell “dog” so I did. Then they said, “Write it down,” so I did, but I spelled “bog.” I tried to ignore their teasing, but the teasing continued.

Every day I would go home and say, “I will never know how to read or write.” I always tried to get better at reading and writing. I have courage to work harder in reading and writing. I thought that in fourth grade I would at least spell some words right, but I was wrong. I still got teased because I could not read or write as well as the other kids.

At the end of fourth grade, someone told me I would never learn to read. My heart felt like someone was sticking needles in it! No matter how hard I tried, it wasn’t enough. In fifth grade someone said, “You should just join the circus as a monkey.” Tears fell down my face like Niagara Falls. I yelled, “I have dyslexia but I still have feelings!”

Ever since that day, I have been working on my reading and writing. My courage helps me to deal with my disability in my different world so I don’t let it or anyone bother me. I work hard each day to learn to read and write at my grade level.

“My courage helps me to deal with my disability in my different world.”
Hui Lu
Colleen Clifford, Teacher
Beebe School

I showed courage at the beginning of the school year in first grade, when I made the right decision to be who I am, and to show courage and perseverance. I was born in Massachusetts, but a few months later, my parents sent me to China. My grandparents took care of me while my parents worked in America. In 2006, when I was four, my grandparents brought my siblings and me back to Massachusetts. We had a hard time starting a new life in America.

I entered first grade when I was about seven. I didn’t go to kindergarten, so I had a difficult time speaking English and communicating with others. I couldn’t pronounce some words correctly and my classmates laughed at me. My friends often teased me about what I wore to school and my way of doing things, which made me aggravated. Still, I didn’t care what they said. I tried my best to be myself and to do whatever I could. Sometimes I wanted to tell them to shut up, but my words came out terribly wrong and the kids starting laughing at me again. I almost wanted to quit learning English. However, I tried really hard to have confidence and not give up.

As a result of all my hard work and courage, I finally got to know some simple words in English. I kept trying and did a lot of practice work at home. Soon, I was used to English and now I have no problem with it. I had to show those kids who had once teased me that I am who I am and I will never give up. I want to get better and better at English and someday I will be able to help other people who are learning English. After this experience I felt proud of myself, maybe just a little, and I am going to keep facing my fears and have faith.

“I showed courage when I made the right decision to be who I am.”
Courage is my will of fire that will never burn out. I have had asthma for my entire life and I have learned to deal with it. Sometimes it makes me feel powerless, like there’s nothing I can do. Kids would make fun of me when we played tag and I wasn’t fast enough. I would try to overcome this problem but never did. Later on, I would go on to join the track team and face my problem. I am here to tell my story of how I overcame my fear.

It was a hot summer day and my head was beading with sticky sweat. I had just finished doing stretches with my track team and other people from different schools. Now it was time for the one-quarter mile races, and I was shaking like a Chihuahua. My asthma didn’t allow me to run as fast as the other kids and I never did any serious training because I was afraid of this. My track coach bellowed, “Alright! So who’s going to run this race?”

Nervously, I raised my hand and got ready for the race. I got into the line and prepared myself while the announcer yelled, “3…2…1…GO!”

That day I won third place! I couldn’t have been more thrilled. After that race, I felt a weight lifted off my shoulders. I came to a realization that made me think of myself differently. I don’t have to be the fastest or the smartest. As long as I am happy with myself, my fears don’t affect the way I do things. Fear doesn’t have to take control of my life. Courage is when you learn to believe in yourself.

“Courage is when you learn to believe in yourself.”
When I first heard that my grandfather had dementia, I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t imagine him any differently. I had known him for a while, and it would be hard if this condition made him any different. The first time I saw him, it was extremely difficult.

The first few times I saw my grandfather in his nursing home, he asked why he was there. My parents and I told him that he was there because he was a little bit forgetful. He asked this question many times a day. Some days he would get upset, and some days he was happy. I tried to keep calm when my grandfather was upset, by telling myself that he would forget all of this by the end of the day. This worked for a while, but I knew I couldn’t keep thinking this.

I feel badly for my grandfather when he talks about moving back to North Carolina, where he grew up. He also talks about opening a restaurant and a cab company. He has so many ideas, but he can’t do them because he is in a nursing home.

I showed courage by not treating my grandfather any differently. This is because he is still part of my family. He didn’t deserve to be treated any differently. His condition may have blurred his memory, but my memory of him has never been stronger.

“I showed courage by not treating my grandfather any differently.”
Elijah Flores
Mary McGrath, Teacher
Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, Dorchester Campus

To me, courage is conquering something you thought you would never get over. Many people have done things that took courage. What have you done? I had courage when I got over my best friend, Steve, who had died. He was about twenty-two when he died, and would be turning twenty-four now. He may have been older than me, but we were so close.

It was about five to six PM on a warm but windy day when my grandmother and I were on our way to the Ray and Joan Kroc Center. I saw Steve with his two brothers on their house porch. Steve said to me, “What’s up, Elijah?” I said, “Hi,” back. I also told him, “I’ll come back quick, so don’t leave.” I went and played basketball for a while.

When I exited the community center, a tragedy was upon me. I saw glowing police cars, people crying, people stern, and glistening ambulances. My hands began to get sweaty and bumpy, and I kept worrying that one of my family members had been shot. I ran home and found my godmother crying in the backyard. I asked her, “Who died, Dinya?” She said nothing, so I asked again and she said, “Steve!” I wasn’t only mad, but disappointed that I wasn’t there to hear the bang and boom of gunshots, and to stick up for Steve. I cried and cried for several hours, days and even weeks. When I got home I could taste the salty taste of my tears falling in my mouth, and the fragrance of me coming from the gym, that was obviously a mistake.

A couple of months later I was still thinking of Steve. My mom and I were on our way to church on a Sunday. Church began and I took my seat with my mom. Something… just something about that day was good. I knew Steve was still with me in my heart. When the pastor mentioned, “God is in your heart forever,” I just thought of Steve and knew.

That’s what courage is to me. I got over Steve thinking I wouldn’t. That’s courage! Conquering something you thought you’d never get over. What have you done that took courage? Be courageous. And I still think of Steve now in my heart!

“To me, courage is conquering something you thought you would never get over.”
Courage means to be strong and to keep moving even when you lose someone you thought you couldn’t live without. The time my grandmother passed away from breast cancer was the time I had to show courage. I was only eight years old when this happened, and my ninth birthday was the next day. That was the worst day of my life. I thought I would never stop crying, but then I realized I had to be brave for my younger sister. I told myself to save the tears for my pillowcase!

I tried not to cry in front of my sister so she wouldn’t start crying. It was difficult for me to put on a brave face. I told my sister that our grandmother was in a better place now—Heaven. I told her that my grandmother would be watching over us like she always did, but just from a higher view point. Then I realized something great was going to come out of this difficult time. My grandmother was going to protect my family and me from now on.

My birthday was the next day, but my family was still grieving. I decided to put on a brave face and be happy. That day my sister cried a lot, but I told her that our grandmother would always be with us, no matter what. That put a big smile on her face. In those hard days, I learned that it is okay to cry when someone you really love is gone. It is also okay to talk about how you feel when they are gone. Now, I know how to be courageous and strong when someone you thought you couldn’t live without is gone.
To me, courage is when you walk through your fears and get to the other side. I was around two years old and in preschool when my mom got sick. She had to go to the doctor a lot.

One day, my mom got rushed to the hospital because she was in a lot of pain. After she went to the hospital, my dad and brother picked me up from preschool and took me to the hospital to see her. The next day, my brother, sister and I stayed home from school to visit my mom in the hospital.

When we got there my sister and I ran to my mom’s hospital room. My mom was so happy to see us, and I was so happy to see her. Before we got ready to go home, I laid next to her on the bed.

Three days later my mom got released from the hospital. We found out she was diagnosed with sarcoidosis.

Sarcoidosis is a very bad disease. My mom has to go to the doctor and hospital every month. Also, she has to take medicine every day and night. Sarcoidosis can damage your organs and it can damage your skin. My mom can’t have a job because of her illness. My mom can get sick easily, and sometimes it can affect her eyes. She is in bed a lot.

Before I go to school each day, I have to help my mom. For example, every morning I make her coffee and breakfast. Sometimes it’s hard for me to go to school, because I know my mother is home sick. When I feel this way, my mom tells me I have to go and that she will be okay.

Courage is facing your fears. I get scared because my mom is at home sick and I can’t always be there for her. What I can do is check on her when I am at home, and talk with her when I get scared about it. Courage is accepting illness.

“To me, courage is when you walk through your fears and get to the other side.”
I think of courage as the voice in the back of your head telling you to accomplish something even though it seems impossible. When I was told only one day in advance that I had to play an improvised trumpet solo, I believed the impossible had been asked of me. The task was about as possible as finding a needle in a haystack! When I got up on that stage to play the solo, I think I really showed courage.

I had been told I would be soloing, so I had been practicing a couple of Christmas tunes for two weeks. The day before the concert I felt proud and smiled to myself about all the preparation I had done. At the rehearsal as I took out my trumpet, my music teacher said, “Okay Caleb, you’ll be playing an improvisation of *C-Jam Blues* by Duke Ellington.” My heart sank to my stomach, but somehow I managed to keep the confident smile. When Mr. Lafleur turned away, my face was like the painting, “The Scream.” Improvisation meant that I would have to make up the jazz notes as I played them. I had never done a solo on stage before, nevermind improvise! The words, “Okay Caleb, you’ll be playing an improvisation on *C-Jam Blues*,” repeated over and over in my head for the rest of the school day and throughout the night. I went home petrified.

When I walked into the music studio the day of the concert, my hands were shaking and my teeth were chattering really loudly, even though it was 70 degrees. The music room was crowded with students who were playing in the concert. It was a sea of music equipment. My trumpet teacher was counting on me to be the centerpiece of the entire concert! I had never had that kind of trust placed in me before. I knew in my heart that I had to do this.

When I walked onto the stage, my heart was beating so fast I was surprised that the whole stage wasn’t shaking! The band played the piece that came right before my solo (a mix of A’s and G’s and the jazz scale). As they stopped playing the jazz scale I stood up. When I started to play the trumpet my knees were knocking and I felt really nervous, until I realized I was actually doing a pretty good job. The experience seemed to refresh me, and it wasn’t like playing a song that was written on paper. Since I was making up the notes, I could make the best song for me out of notes I knew!

When I played, I felt like I was coming out of a deep ocean after a long swim, I felt great! I felt really proud of myself, and afterwards my trumpet teacher complimented me on my playing. I am now hoping that I can get a chance to improvise more, because I had fun. Having courage changed how I felt about solo improvisation.

“I think of courage as the voice in the back of your head telling you to accomplish something even though it seems impossible.”
Courage is facing what you fear, and making sure your fears don’t get in your way or keep you from succeeding. It doesn’t matter what you’re afraid of, you just have to make sure fear doesn’t rule your life and keep you from accomplishing all your goals and dreams.

No one is free from fear. One of my worst fears is giving a presentation in front of people. I always try to avoid giving presentations at all cost, but there came a time when I couldn’t escape.

Recently, my school had a mandatory contest where you had to write an essay about the positive aspects of a country and give a presentation about it… IN FRONT OF THE ENTIRE MIDDLE SCHOOL! The essay wasn’t really the hard part (though it was hard). The presentation was what worried me. The nights leading up to the presentation, I tossed and turned in bed, nervous about it and trying to find a way around it. But I knew I would have to give it.

When I got to school on the day of the presentation, I was hoping everyone forgot about it, and it would just be a normal school day, but no. Our teacher told everyone to go to the cafeteria and get ready. After I got my things, I sat and watched the other presentations until the person before me went. I was sweating and rubbing my palms together from how nervous I was.

Suddenly, a wave of courage swept over me. I thought about all the people I’ve ever seen present, and realized that the best of them were confident. I knew some of those people had to be courageous to be confident. So, when my name was called I got up, set up my poster board, and with some degree of confidence, started talking.

When I was finished I realized I didn’t do that badly (I didn’t do great or anything, but I did much better than I expected.) After I sat back down I felt pretty good about what I had done, because that day the one thing that I wanted to avoid the most, the one thing that seemed impossible, the one type of project I feared more than any other, had been conquered. And I think that takes courage.

“Courage is facing what you fear and making sure your fears don’t get in your way or keep you from succeeding.”
Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher who wrote, “We are what we repeatedly do: virtue then is not an act, but a habit.” I’m no philosopher, however I do show a lot of virtues daily at my school, Boston Prep. The one that I show the most is courage. Our school defines courage as the virtue of taking a risk, no matter the personal cost, to help someone else. This can be as small as loaning someone your favorite pen, or raising your hand consistently in class. It could also be a bigger issue like stopping someone from cheating. The virtue of courage is becoming part of my character because I have practiced it repeatedly.

One time I practiced courage was when I got up and taught part of a poetry lesson in ELA. I was just sitting there doing my work. I was on my second step of interpreting a poem and I was on the main idea of each stanza. By the time I worked my way to the third step, my ELA teacher, Ms. Patterson, came toward me. The first thought that flitted to my mind was, “What am I doing wrong?” I dismissed it immediately. I was doing everything I was supposed to. She said, “Richard, would you like to come teach the class the 1-2-3 poem interpreting strategy?” My mind drew a blank and I struggled to say yes.

After the call to begin, which is a short announcement of introduction and encouragement before the class begins, she welcomed me to take her place at the front of the class. I struggled to smile and keep cool while I walked up. I began to teach my class about the 1-2-3 strategy. When I was done I headed back to my seat, feeling odd relief in my stomach. That is the aftermath of courage. When one shows courage, they may feel a bit of uneasiness at the beginning. That’s ok, it’s natural!

I learned that I, as a person, am not naturally very courageous. But, Boston Prep has pushed me to release my inner courage and now I have more of it. To continue pushing myself to show courage, I plan on doing really difficult math problems and going to the library by myself in order to strengthen my abilities. I realize I need help and ask for it. I will continue to be courageous this way. Also, when my mom and dad aren’t able to pick me up, I am to go straight to the library. I don’t really know my way through Roxbury and I’m scared to ask strangers. Even so, I will plan to do as I’m told and ask someone so I can reach the library. Doing these things will continue to build my courageous spirit.

“When one shows courage, they may feel a bit of uneasiness at the beginning. That’s ok, it’s natural!”
It was the summer when I was ten years old and going into fifth grade. You could say I was a shy person. I froze up when someone asked me a question I didn’t know the answer to, especially if that person was someone I hadn’t met before. That summer changed me. It was the summer I went to Girls Rock Camp.

Girls Rock Camp happens twice a year, one week in July, and another week in August. It’s a camp where girls learn how to play an instrument, form a band, create a song, and have a lot of fun. At the end of the week, you perform the song in front of all the other girls, teachers and family members. It can be difficult to perform a song with people you have just met, on an instrument you have just learned to play, with about 500 people watching.

During the week, we learned how to support each other, how we can use our power to improve the world, and how we can do anything we set our minds to. The instruments we could choose from were drums, guitar, keyboard, bass guitar or to sing. The first day you form a band. Every band has to have a drummer to keep the beat.

In my band there was a guitarist, Olivia, a drummer, Alejandra, a singer, Virginia, and two bassists, Helen and me. By the end of the week my band, The Poisonous Nightshades, was putting the finishing touches on our song, a song we had written ourselves.

“It’s amazing that you can meet someone at the beginning of the week and create a song with them by the end,” I told my band member, Helen.

“Wow! That is amazing!” she replied. On Friday, our last day to practice, we had to design our band shirts. We would wear the shirts the next day when we performed. It was like a uniform, to distinguish the bands from each other. My band, The Poisonous Nightshades, had a shirt design of a sword with a snake wrapped around it and the letters P and N on either side of it.

On the day of the performance, my band mates and I were so nervous we were trembling.

“Hey Virginia, are you nervous?” I asked her.

“Yeah, really nervous. I have to sing in front of so many people!” she said, her voice cracking.

“Don’t worry, Virginia. You’ll be alright,” said Alejandra in a comforting voice, even though I could tell she was really nervous. Her eyes were darting around like crazy. She had to keep the beat for everyone in the band, or else. Everyone was counting on her.

“You’ll be ok too, Alejandra,” I whispered to her.

“Thank you, Gabriela,” she whispered back. I was so nervous that I thought I would faint on the stage, right in the middle of the song. When it was our turn to play our song, we went on stage and I was sweating like a pig.

“Eek! I’m so nervous. What if I mess up?” shrieked Olivia, right in my ear.

“Don’t worry guys, we’ll be fine,” said Helen, calming us all down. With that, Alejandra started playing. I took a deep breath and started playing. I think that was the best we had ever played the song. It was perfect! The crowd also thought we did an amazing job. They started clapping in the middle of the song, I felt like I was in a famous band. I realized later that we played so well because it was just us. We blocked out the 500 other people watching. It was just as though we were practicing.

That was a time when I was brave, because performing in front of 500 people is not easy, especially for a shy person like me. Would you have done it if you had the chance?
What is courage to me? Courage is standing up for what you believe in. Nelson Mandela once 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.”

A courageous moment that I faced in my life was when I decided to shave my head to support kids with cancer. The quote by Nelson Mandela means a lot to me because I conquered my fear of being teased.

On Saturday, June 24, 2013 I went to Gillette Stadium because I had signed up to shave my head and to raise money for kids with cancer at www.buzzforkids.org. I wanted to shave my head, but I was nervous about being teased at school. I saw an ad for “The Kids Cancer Buzz-Off” on TV. To participate, you have to raise money for kids with cancer. I raised $1,150 in a month.

As we approached the very large stadium on the day of the Buzz-Off, all I could think was, “This stadium is huge, I wonder what the inside looks like.” I was so excited, but I was also nervous because I was afraid of what people would think of me. I kept thinking to myself, “How will people react when they see me with no hair. Will I be teased?”

Once we got there my dad and I got in line so I could be in the first five to get their head shaved. At that moment I had butterflies. As we stood in line I kept telling my dad, “I am so hungry, when can I eat something?” He responded, “After they shave your head.”

“Attention everyone, thank you for coming to the 2013 Buzz for Kids event,” the spokeslady said. “Let’s get started.” My Dad motioned me toward a girl with half blue and half black hair. She also had a whole bunch of tattoos. I was not scared at all, I was more excited. It was so cool. When we all sat down at our stations there were two women in their 60s with their hair dyed pink. I felt the cold metal razor on my head, and I saw the flash of my mom, dad, and Uma’s cameras.

At the end of the event when everyone was bald, Gronk came in and gave the program $1.5 million in a big check. This was a big help. As we drove home I kept asking my mom if I had to go to school and she kept saying, “Yes!” I started to fall asleep in the car.

I have learned a lot about courage in the time I have written this essay. I have learned that courage can happen to anyone, at any time, at any place. For someone to face a fear is, and always will be, courageous. If there is something you want to do but are afraid to, do it anyways and don’t let people’s words bring you down.

“For someone to face a fear is, and always will be, courageous.”
“Jump!” I yelled, and in seconds we were in the middle of the Charles River. This was the day I showed courage.

It all started on a hot day in the summer. I was in the advanced sailing group over at the Charles River. On that day, the tasks were to sail without an instructor, and to sail in a sailboat without a keel, a part of a boat that keeps it from tipping over.

At about 11:00 AM it was time to go out on the water. I was with Michael, a cousin of my friend. We rigged the boat and got ready to sail. About ten minutes later, I turned the tiller and we went out onto the Charles River. Since it was a windy day there was a yellow flag warning out, the second highest sailing warning. Our boat made some moderate tips. Michael was nervous because he had never been in a boat like this before. Finally, the wind died down and we got ready for our first task on the water, which was to make tacks and jibes, a form of switching sails and turning around in our boat. After we made about two tacks and jibes the wind came back. We tried to make the third tack, but the wind was too strong and our boat was taking on too much water.

Michael’s job on the boat was to control the main sheet, which controls the main sail. If the boat is tipping, you need to let go of the main sheet. Next to us were rocks, so I was concentrating on not banging into the rocks. I finally moved the boat to get away from the rocks. Our boat was still gaining water when I finally yelled, “Jump!” and within seconds we were in the Charles River. A counselor saw us and jumped out of his boat, which had two other people in it. A few seconds after he jumped out of his boat, his boat capsized.

This scenario was scary, but we showed courage to get through it. Ten minutes later, a rescue boat came to get us. Michael and I were shivering when we finally got back to the dock. We all talked about our “Trouble on the Charles.”
One great evening when I was nine, my family and my friend’s family were at my mom’s friend’s house for dinner. We ate a delicious meal and went inside the playroom to have fun. There was a very big, black, shiny, beautiful guitar hanging on the smoothly painted wall. My friend’s sister was about eleven years old. She climbed up on the couch to get the guitar. She played it and then hung it back on the wall. Her nine-year-old brother wanted to play with it too, but he dropped the guitar while trying to get it. Sadly, my five year old brother and I were sitting right under the guitar. It came crashing and smashing down on our heads. One nail cut my brother’s head, and the other nail cut my forehead.

We both came out crying with our once white shirts now red with blood. My mom soon figured that we had to go to the emergency room. We all hopped in the car and sped to the hospital. I was courageous when I calmed down and took everything easy. The minute I got into the operating room I was nervous, but not scared. The doctor sprayed water on my head and I found it relaxing. I waited patiently and when they were done I thanked the doctor for stitching my head. I walked to the waiting room laughing and licking a Popsicle. I whispered to my brother, “It did not hurt a bit. It won’t hurt you, I promise.” He believed me and went to get his head stitched. When he came out he was smiling and we all left laughing.

Courage is important to me because if I don’t show courage then I would consider myself a scared person. I would not be considered a brave person. Courage should be important to us all. Courage conquers our fears. It teaches us lessons. Without courage in our lives we would never be able to face the obstacles that get in our way.

When you are courageous you gain respect and have good character. If I am not courageous, then none of my children will be in the future. I always remember the accident with the guitar, and I try to be even more courageous.

“Without courage in our lives we would never be able to face the obstacles that get in our way.”
When I was 11 years old, I went to a restaurant with my family. As I was sitting down, I saw a man walk over to a lady’s bag that was left on a chair. The man started to look inside of the woman’s bag. He took the woman’s wallet and phone out of the bag and looked around to see if anyone had seen him. Then, he started to walk away like nothing had happened.

I had seen him take the wallet and phone, so I went to tell an adult, but no one believed me. My mom thought I was lying because I used to lie a lot. My dad did not trust me either. I looked to see if the guy had left, but he had not. He was back at the buffet table, eating like he had not done anything! I was kind of scared because the guy could have hurt me if I spoke up about the phone and wallet.

I kept my eyes on the guy while I decided what to do next. My family started to leave the restaurant. I decided to confront the man. “Why did you steal the phone and wallet?” I asked.

The man looked at me like I was crazy.

“What phone and wallet?” he asked.

“That one you took out of the bag,” I replied.

“You mean the phone and wallet I took out of my wife’s bag?”

“What? Your wife?” I said in a surprised voice. “But you looked so sneaky, like a thief.”

The man explained that his wife was paying for the meal, so she needed her wallet. The man needed to make a call, so he used his wife’s phone. I went to ask the woman to see if this was all true. It was. I felt dumb, but the woman thanked me.

“Why are you thanking me?” I asked. She explained that I could’ve gotten hurt if I had confronted someone who really did take her wallet and phone, so it took courage to confront her husband.

I never thought about that. I guess I wasn’t thinking about what could have happened. I was just trying to do the right thing. Even though you may not catch the bad guys and turn out a hero, you can still have courage!

“Even though you may not catch the bad guys and turn out a hero, you can still have courage!”
When I think of the powerful word courage, I think of a memory at my old school.

It was a regular day of school and I was in P.E. with two girls, Ashley and Jasmine. We were all in the girls’ locker room getting ready for P.E. As we walked out of the locker room, the girls choked me and pushed me into the wall. One of them sank her nails into the skin of my neck. They beat me up and told me not to tell anyone. I was on the floor crying for help. Finally, I got help. My ribs were bruised and I couldn’t walk well.

After a few weeks I healed, and I had to go to a meeting with the girls and their parents. We were in the school’s conference room. I had been afraid to go to school and my leg was shaking like crazy. My father was sitting on my left, and my mother was sitting on my right. They were both furious, while I was terrified.

The girls who beat me up denied doing it. They said they didn’t touch me. I was very scared because they were lying. That’s when I spoke up and said, “No. They did beat me up.” The girls put their heads down and looked ashamed.

I had gone through this awful moment, and I spoke up for what was right while sitting in the same room with the people who had made going to school so traumatic. Right then and there I knew I had courage.

“RIGHT THEN AND THERE I KNEW I HAD COURAGE.”
Courage can look like a lot of things. It can be defending your beliefs when no one agrees with you. It can be speaking in public. It can be moving past obstacles and staying happy, or it can be doing the right thing even when doing the wrong thing is easier, and no one else is willing to do the right thing. Courage can be being a leader, not a follower, or it can be standing up to a bully and not letting his/her words change you. It can be something big, such as staying hopeful when you have a disease, like Max did, or it can be something small, like supporting a friend who is having trouble. I show courage in small ways.

In my class there is one girl (she will remain anonymous) who struggles because of things going on in her home. (To protect her privacy, I will not be more specific.) As a result, she is not always able to finish her homework. Some people criticize her for not doing her work, but I try to help her get it done. I feel obligated to help my friend because no one else does, and I feel that everyone deserves to be able to succeed in school no matter what their family situation is. I’m never really worried that people will criticize me for helping her. What they say cannot change me and what I do.

There is one occasion that I remember when my class was on a field trip to the Museum of Science. Everyone stopped to get pictures at the photo booth, and my friend asked if we could get a photo together because she didn’t have any pictures of us except for when we were in preschool. I agreed, and we stepped into the photo booth. Then, some people came along and they seemed to think we were boyfriend and girlfriend. They started chanting for us to kiss. I found their behavior offensive, and also very obnoxious. Just because we are close friends doesn’t mean we’re in that kind of relationship! But we did not let their words deter us, and we did take the photo.

“It HAVE SHOWN COURAGE BY IGNORING A BULLY’s WORDS AND NOT LETTING THEM CHANGE ME.”
Courage is the quality of spirit or mind that enables an individual to face fear, danger, difficulty, intimidation and pain, among other things, without fear. This is ask.com’s definition, but my definition is different. I’m going to tell you a story about bullying. In my life, I’ve been bullied a lot.

One day my friend and I were talking on the bus. Then, a boy came up and pushed me. He stuck his middle finger up at me and called me the “b” word. I said, “Why did you do that?”

“Just shut up, would you?” he said.

I was shocked because I did not know what to say. I thought to myself, should I tell someone? Would I get hurt? Should I go tell my mother, or would that just make it worse? I decided to ask my friend for advice. My friend said, “You have a bully on your hands.” I was speechless.

The bullying continued and he eventually gave me a black eye. After letting the bullying go on for a long time, I eventually built up enough courage to tell my grandmother and teacher. They were able to stop him from bullying me at first, but he continued with it soon afterwards! Why would he do this? I thought everything would be all right, but things got worse after that. My self-esteem dropped and sometimes I cried.

One day I got the courage to stand up for myself and I said, “Leave me alone!” The words came out in a blur. I had this feeling. It was a good feeling. It was called courage.

I got removed from my old school because I got bullied a lot. I still get bullied, but I know the right way to deal with the situation! It was hard but I still dealt with it.

You and I are worth more than gold!
Courage is something you need to respect and use for learning. Courage is having the bravery to help those who need it. My mom and dad show me what courage is because they serve in the US Army, and they save innocent people from those who would harm them. They show courage every day because they risk their own lives for people they don’t even know. My dad is now living with me, but my mom is still in the army.

One time I had courage like my parents was when I helped someone I didn’t know. I was walking to my class in a bad neighborhood. I was in fifth grade and I felt tired and nervous. Then, I saw some bullies who were hitting a kid and pushing him into a wall. I walked up to them and yelled, “Stop!” The bullies started to threaten me by saying, “You want to mess with me, kid?!” This made me angry because they were now being mean to me. Before it could get any worse, a bystander said, “Stop it!” and the bullies got scared and ran away. I asked the kid being victimized if he was okay and he said, “Yeah, thanks for helping me out.”

Even though I never saw the kid again, I am glad that I had the courage to help him. I learned courage from my parents who told me to help people out whenever you see them being hurt.

“Courage is having the bravery to help those who need it.”
Sara Zakaria
Christina Terranova, Teacher
Ferryway School

It was another exhausting day at swim class. I had just finished my 200 freestyle, sprinting the whole way. I almost flopped down on the dirty floor from fatigue. A few minutes later I went over to my best friend in my class, Matt, but he didn’t have that smiley, happy face that I see every day. He seemed depressed and angry.

“What’s wrong, Matt?” I asked. But he didn’t have to answer. I saw a pained expression in his eyes. I quickly turned around to see five guys looking devilish.

“Matt, are you acting straight by talking to Sara? Because you ain’t gonna fool us,” one of the guys said.

“You are the gayest of gays. Freaking (let’s pretend he said freaking) queer,” another one said.

I took off my goggles and cap. I stood up. “Look, just because he is gay doesn’t mean he isn’t human. He is just like you. And how dare you make fun of him! Would you make fun of an African American person because he’s black?”

They all shook their heads no.

“Then don’t make fun of Matt because he is gay! So why don’t you just go away, now.”

I was about to flip out on them if they didn’t leave. While they were leaving, one of them pushed me into the pool.

I swam to the end of the pool where Matt stood. He grabbed my hand and helped pull me out. “Thanks for sticking up for me. It means a lot.”

I smiled. “No problem. Such jerks, right?” He nodded in agreement.

Courage means that you have to stand up for something, even if you stand alone.

“Courage means that you have to stand up for something, even if you stand alone.”
Jailyn Camilo
Amy Higginbotham, Teacher
William B. Rogers Middle School

Courage can be different things such as standing up to a bully, standing up for a friend or taking a risk. Have you ever really thought about what courage means to you? My definition of courage is being brave and not letting anything get you in life, like when my family and I had to live in a temporary shelter.

In 2012 my family moved to a shelter in Boston. When my older sister, Lenice, and I saw our brown and white shelter from the outside, we thought it would be an exciting place to live, like being at an amusement park. But when my dad opened the door we could only see the old brown building, flowered wallpaper and a gigantic rat running across the kitchen. Back in Passaic, we had a beautiful white home and no rats. Now, I hated the idea of living in a shelter and living in Boston. I had a fear of rats! I went into my room and all I saw was a drawer and two twin beds with no blanket covers. All I could think was, “This is going to be a bad home for a family with no job and no money.”

A few months passed. The shelter was very dirty, like streets that had trash. Many rats came and tried to look for food. When I saw a gigantic rat, I was too scared to even encounter it, never mind try and kill it. I would just run away and my sister would come up to me and say, “Jailyn, you can’t be scared of rats any more because when they see a human, they run away. They won’t harm you.” I would try to calm myself down by remembering that no rat can harm anyone, and if I saw that rat again I would walk up to it and know the next move the rat would make would be to run away like a baby. I couldn’t believe I was living in this situation, with rats and a dirty place to live. I felt so discouraged.

I remember a cold December day when there was no school because of a snowstorm. The power went out almost immediately, so I tried to stay calm and not run to my parents. All I could see was pitch black, there wasn’t any light at all and I was scared. I was scared my family would stay there forever seeing rats, and living like this for the rest of my life. I hated sharing my space and not having space of my own. My family slept beside me and I wondered to myself, how long will we be here? I stayed up all night waiting for the snowstorm to end. The snowstorm passed and everything went back to “normal.”

Eventually, my family did find a way to survive and now we live in our own apartment and I have my own room! It’s nice to live in your own space with your own things. For a while, it was very scary to think we would be in a shelter for a long time.

Courage is a power in your life that never goes away. It makes good things happen in your life. My courage helped me with many emotions, like being fearful of my living situation, rats and sometimes of the dark. You don’t know what will happen to your life when you live in a shelter. I used courage by trying to keep positive, by not making life more difficult for my parents, and by keeping up with my schoolwork. Living in the shelter took courage every day, and now I feel like I am a stronger person because of this experience.

“Courage is a power in your life that never goes away.”
CASSIDY CONNOLLY

Jeanine Stansfield, Teacher
Warren Prescott K-8 School

To me, courage means that you stick up for yourself and are brave. Sometimes, it’s hard to have courage. You never know when you’re going to need courage. You could have courage for others who can’t do it themselves. This is what I think courage means.

The time I had courage was more than a year ago. I had to stand up for myself and for what I thought was right for me. It was when I didn’t feel too right at my mom’s house. I knew what was going on there, and I knew deep down inside that I had to get strong, be brave and build up the courage to speak up. At her house there was a lot of fighting and drug use. I didn’t really want to tell my dad about it, but it was the right thing to do and I knew he would understand me. It was very hard to tell my dad because I love my mom a lot, and I didn’t want to hurt her feelings, or for her to be mad at me. But, I had to think of my safety and what was best for me.

I ended up telling my dad about the things that were happening at my mom’s house. It took all my courage to speak up to him and to my counselor about it. My counselor said that the visits with my mom needed to stop for a while for my safety.

When my dad called my mom to tell her that I wouldn’t be going to her house, she flipped out. Later that day, my mom showed up at my dad’s home and caused a big scene. We had to call the police.

My dad decided to go to court to stop the visits to my mom’s house. After that, I went about three months without seeing my mom. It was very peaceful and I felt good about myself. Now, Dad had to get the courage to go back to court and fight for my safety. I didn’t go to school that day because I wouldn’t have been able to concentrate on my schoolwork. When he got back he told me that I had to go see my mom on Mondays and Tuesdays from 2:30 PM to 9 PM. I was very disappointed to hear this result. I was in tears and wondered why I could not go in front of the judge and tell her I’m not going. But Dad made me feel a little better when he reminded me that at least the judge took away the sleepovers.

When my mom got me back there were still fights and other situations going on. Also, we had to meet up with DSS a couple of times, to see if my mom was doing the right thing. That is why I have courage and how I became a strong little girl in life.

“To me, courage means that you stick up for yourself and are brave.”
Michael Page  
Nate Lewallen, Teacher  
McKinley Middle School

I think that courage is when you are resilient and persistent through rough situations. For example, when someone dies or leaves your life. When my dad left me I went to a group home. That’s what happened to me. Let me tell you my story.

My dad left me when I was just three years old, right when I was moving to Florida. I was devastated. I was acting up because I had issues with my mom. I always had issues with my mom because I never had any father to son time. I always had mother to son time. Having time with both parents is better. Why? I need a father because it’ll be a big help to have a man in the family so I can play basketball. I do not remember a lot about him, but I remember I loved him and I would never want to lose him. When he left, he left my life scarred forever.

That is when the problems started to happen. They started because my dad left when he was just starting to get to know me. I went to my first program when I was five. I was mad when my dad left because people always made fun of me at the program and I had no one to back me up. I was afraid to tell my mom because I thought my mom would tell somebody, and then the other kids would think that I was a snitch and it would get worse. But, I thought I should tell somebody because it would get even worse if I didn’t. I had to decide, “Should I tell my mom or the staff?” So, I told the staff and everyone stopped picking on me. I missed my mom a lot. She called me and visited me, but I still missed her.

When I was six I went to my second program called Coastal. There was a kid that used to pick on me and punch me. I was scared because at Coastal they leave you in a dark room with a bed whenever you act up.

When I was seven I went to my third program. I was scared because people were a lot bigger than me. They used to pick on me. I stayed there for seven months. I got into a lot of fights. People there were not friendly. As a matter of fact, they hated me. That is why we got into fights. I really missed my mom when I was there. I not only missed my mom, but I missed my dad, too. I got out a little while after my birthday. I went to back to my school and I saw all my old friends.

When I turned eleven I moved back to Boston, and about a month after that I went to another program called the Italian Home. There are four dorms at the Italian Home: the Bears, Tigers, Comets, and Stars. I used to be in the Bears, but now I’m in the Stars because it is my second time and the staff wants to make sure I won’t have to come back.

When they said that, I knew my mom must feel the same way, even more than the staff. This is not the first program I’ve been in. That’s why she wants me back. I’ve been in programs all my life. I’ve been in the Italian Home since June and now it’s February, so she really wants me home. I’ve been away for a long time, but I can’t be negative. I have to stay positive about things. For example, every day at the Italian Home we get ready for school. I stay strong and resilient by coming to school, even though I mostly get picked on in class every day.

No matter what happens, I stay persistent. My clinician at the Italian Home hasn’t told me when I’m going home, but I think it will be soon. The staff tells me that I’m a good kid. They tell me that I should be good so that I can go home. They tell me I have a really nice mom and I should show her more respect. I’m working on it little by little at every visit. I am still struggling but I am working on it. My mom and my dad love me so I’m doing everything I can to get out of the Italian Home. I do really well at the Italian Home so I think I’ll be out soon. If my dad were here I sure hope he would be proud of me.
I was sitting outside on my porch weeping as my parents were bickering. I wanted this all to go away, but I knew it wouldn’t. Showing courage when my parents got divorced was difficult, but everything turned out splendidly. To me, courage is when you’re in a difficult time and you fight to make sure everything turns out all right. It makes everything come out the right way.

Bravery has emerged throughout my life ever since I was little. I was courageous when my parents weren’t together. I felt like my heart was broken when they got divorced. They split up when I was seven. This was tough for me because I didn’t understand everything at the time. My dad moved out and went with his girlfriend and I couldn’t see him. I really loved him with all my heart, and it was hard to just let him out of my life.

I had to be courageous because there were many things going on in my life and it happened so quickly. My parents always argued about unimportant things. They argued over where to eat, or why they asked each other so many questions. They were young and weren’t as smart. They didn’t have jobs, and didn’t have lots of responsibilities. They had three kids and it was hard to take care of everything. My siblings also felt very sad because they couldn’t see our dad either. I tried to be optimistic and cheer them up as much as I could.

A year later my parents talked and I could see my dad again. I felt like I won the lottery. I was so happy I could see my dad, I love him a lot. Later on, my dad had a child with his girlfriend. I was not angry, but very joyful. My mom and dad are still friends. They wanted to teach me that even if they are not together they can still be friends. I got through this difficult time by being strong.

When my parents split apart, I had to be very brave. It was hard to lose the life that I had known. I want to tell you something that I hope you’ll never forget. The bad days will end, and the new good days will come. That is a time when I had to be very courageous. I hope that this will be something I will always remember.

“To me, courage is when you’re in a difficult time and you fight to make sure everything turns out all right.”
I think that courage is when someone does something for their friends or family even though it frightens them. Showing courage is stepping out of your comfort zone for the greater good. One person who shows courage is my mother. As a child, my mother faced many challenges during the Civil War in Somalia and with her very ill parents.

This time was challenging for my mother because during the war, food was scarce. The little food they had went to the smallest children because they needed it more. Also, the medicine went to the elderly, like her parents. It was frightening to wake up in the morning thinking of the real possibility that your family could get killed, or that you could die. It was also challenging because, as the oldest child, she had to carry out the family’s chores. This included cooking, cleaning, sewing, washing, and feeding and supervising her siblings. When all the chores were done, she would then have to teach her siblings.

My mother was about nineteen years of age when her parents finally started to feel better. My mother had so many responsibilities when she was a little girl that she couldn’t go to the mosque. A mosque is a place where Muslims learn about their religion from the Koran. Most people start going to the mosque around age seven, and my mother was teased a lot because she was much older when she started going. She didn’t care though, and she kept going because she was eager to learn.

A few years later the wars in Somalia were getting so bad that many people started evacuating to Kenya. In Kenya, my mother met my dad, Abdirazak Abdi, and soon after they got married. My parents had their first child, Ibrahim Gurhan, my oldest brother, then they had three more children. When they realized how much worse the war was becoming, they wanted our family to live in a safe place like America. When they finally got here, they moved around to a lot of different states, so it was hard for them to make friends.

After they moved to Maine, my mother gave birth to me. It was difficult because our house was crowded and my mom had to spend a lot of money on us. In the end, our family decided to move to Boston to get better jobs and a better education. Living in America was very hard on my mom because she had to learn English, get used to the customs, and learn about the different foods. This story is proof of the many hardships my mom had to face. Many people would feel badly about their life if they had endured the same, but my mom is different. Even though fear was looking her in the eye she never gave up on her family and most importantly, herself. This is why I think my mother shows courage.
To me, courage is having hope when no one else seems to, looking to the bright side of things when it all seems to be dark, and being strong for yourself and for others, too. As Mary Anne Radmacher said, “Courage doesn’t always roar, sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day that says, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’ ” To me, this explains my meek, but strong-hearted grandmother, also known as Pom Pom.

Before I was born my grandmother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was so little, I didn’t really notice that she was sick until someone told me, which started to explain why we did certain things, like why we always went to the hospital, or why my mom would cry for her some nights. It explained why her left arm would swell up, and how she was always taking pills. It all started to make sense.

One thing I think I noticed the most was that she was still herself. I thought that if someone got cancer, they would be sad for the rest of their life. I was wrong, so wrong! Pom Pom would still bake the nasty blueberry muffins we made together, even though we knew no one would eat them (not even us). She would still blow up the air mattress, even though she knew my dog was the only one who was going to sleep there. She still could dance better than my mom, and teach my brother and me to dance to old Irish songs in the kitchen on rainy days, and we still got up at midnight to make sandwiches and tea. Best of all, she would still tell us stories about how she was really the blonde lady in *King Kong* and they just messed up the credits! She was still her fun, courageous self.

Later on, my grandmother got a tumor. She got very sick and lost all of her hair a month later. She knew it was going to be hard, but that did not bring her down. Eventually things did change. She tried so hard to get up the stairs to make us midnight snacks, but she couldn’t. She tried so hard to focus on making our blueberry muffins, but it didn’t work. She tried so hard not to fall asleep after taking her pills, but she couldn’t. She always did have a little strength left in her to dance with us in the kitchen on days when she was feeling glum. She felt so badly about not being able to be with us as much because she had to get so many operations. Everything became a big deal to her. She would put rocks in her pockets so it looked like she gained weight, so that she would not have to stay overnight, and she could keep her promise of a sleepover with us. Every day her bones grew weaker as her heart grew stronger. Every day she was determined to prove she was more than a person with cancer, she was a survivor!

When my grandmother died quietly in August of 2010, it broke my heart. But it showed me something. It showed me she always had hope, and she was always strong. She always tried to be happy for others. That night showed me what true courage is. It is not about being strong, loud or proud, like going skydiving. It is about being able to say, “I will try!”

“To me, courage is having hope when no one else seems to, looking to the bright side of things when it all seems to be dark, and being strong for yourself and for others, too.”
Faith Monahan
Erin Walsh, Teacher
Saint Patrick School

Courage is when you are in a frightening situation, but you do something about it. An example of courage is when my mother started having a seizure and I called 911. This is what courage means to me.

One day during Christmas break of this year my mother was acting completely normal. All of a sudden, something was really wrong. She started crying and laughing hysterically, and a few seconds later she was shivering uncontrollably. Slowly, she lay down on the cold, hard ground and white foam came out of her mouth, as my sister and I screamed for her. I thought my mother was going to die right in front of me. Luckily, my aunt was over that day to help. It was the most terrifying five minutes of my life.

I have no idea what happened in those short minutes. My hands were shaking from fear and heavy crying as I grabbed the home phone. I quickly dialed 911 and tried my best to answer the questions. My aunt tried to explain what had happened to the kind man on the phone. My siblings weren’t crying like I was, maybe because they didn’t fully understand, but I don’t think I did either. The paramedics came shortly after.

The paramedics took my mother as I ran downstairs to hide and to try and forget what was going on. I heard my mother say she didn’t know who she was or who my aunt was. My next thought was, what if my mom forgot me? I was scared that she would forget she loved me. That didn’t happen, thank God, but much worse things were wrong with her.

My mother was in and out of a coma for three days. We were told that she had brain and lung cancer. Every time she coughed, it would put pressure on her brain until her brain couldn’t take it anymore. Luckily, she is home with us today and not in some type of rehab. She didn’t forget us. She still loves us as much as she ever did, and we love her just as much. One day she will be a cancer survivor instead of a cancer victim.

“We don’t choose to be courageous, we just have to be.”
Luis Perez
Jacqueline Wesner, Teacher
Saint Columbkille Partnership School

Courage. What comes to mind when you hear this word? Respect, bravery, admiration, fear or maybe...nothing. Courage can often be hard to define and even harder to demonstrate. Some people would say that a courageous person is someone with a strong heart, while others would say that actual courage is telling the truth instead of denying it. In the dictionary, courage is defined as, “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and to withstand danger, fear or difficulty.”

I personally believe that courage is a combination of these qualities, as well as having the ability to face challenges, especially when you think no one believes in you, or worse, when you don’t believe in yourself. I saw courage in myself when I went to a new school. At first I tried to be cool and get friends, but the whole fifth grade year was tough for me. I was running from teachers, my mom was called in to my school more than five times, and I was given more than three “strikes,” or warnings. I am lucky it was school and not baseball, or I would have been out already.

I had to step up because I did not want to leave my school. I later discovered that at my old school they were promoting me each year when I did not understand the material, and I missed out on my early years of education. Now, in sixth grade, it is harder for me because I do not understand what the teacher is teaching as well as others do. When the other kids are learning and I am not, I feel left out. However, one of my learning issues was that I felt stupid and did not believe in myself. I felt lonely, like I could not do anything right, and I felt like if I asked for help I would not be cool. So I never did. I had to find the courage to ask for help, to stop worrying about being cool, and to start to take care of myself and my grades so I could become who I want to be.

I was scared to ask for help, so at first I just acted like I didn’t understand. I thought my teacher would just notice that I needed help. That did not happen, so I had to become a man and stand up. That was the only thing I could do, so that is what I did. The next day I came early to ask for help and my teacher and I planned to meet after school. I started to stay for extra help. I started to ask questions in class. Some of my friends made fun of me and called me a “goody goody.” I just wanted to be a better student so I could be successful.

My grades have gotten higher and I have started to feel good inside. This took a lot of courage, but I did it for myself and my mom. My grades went from D’s and F’s to B’s and A’s. My teacher says she is very proud of me.

It took a lot of courage, and I didn’t think I could do it, but I did.

“I HAD TO FIND THE COURAGE TO ASK FOR HELP, TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT BEING COOL, AND TO START TAKING CARE OF MYSELF AND MY GRADES SO I COULD BECOME WHO I WANT TO BE.”
There are a lot of different forms of courage, but to me, courage is to prove people wrong who don’t believe in you, and to stand up and speak up for what you believe in. Courage is trying new things without being afraid of failing. There have been a lot of times when I used courage, and from those different experiences I learned a lot of different things. Today I’m going to share one of my experiences that almost all immigrants in the USA go through.

As you might know, I wasn’t born in America. But like a lot of kids, my dream was to live in the USA because I always wanted to be a dancer, and America is a place full of opportunities. But when I got here my opinions started to change. On my first day of school, I remember waking up very excited. It was a very chilly day, and I remember walking to the bus stop with my older sister. She was telling me not to be nervous and to just be myself. I was so nervous about meeting new friends because I have always been too shy to talk with people. When I got to school that first day everybody made me feel comfortable, and it was the first time I met so many friends in one day. At first, I was very happy and excited about my new school and new friends, but then my opinions changed and some of my friends turned into enemies.

Everything changed during the first few weeks of school. My experience began very well, until I got to ESL class. One day we were reading a story and my teacher asked me to read out loud. I was very scared, but I tried anyway and did my best. When I was reading the other kids started laughing at me. My heart started to beat very fast and I fought back my tears to show that I didn’t care, but the truth was that I did care very much. That was the most embarrassing day of my life. However, I took that moment and those laughs and turned them into a challenge for myself. My challenge was to be one of the best students in my class. During the rest of last year and this year I have worked very hard to improve my reading, and I gave all I had to reach my goal. All that hard work went very well because I’m getting very good grades now and my English has improved a lot. I moved up from ESL1 to ESL3 in just two years. I’m very proud of myself that I made the choice to not give up.

Going through this experience was very good for me because I learned a lot of things. If you are doing something that you are not good at and your friends are making fun of you, don’t take it as a bad thing, but take it as a challenge. To reach your goals you need to have a challenge that encourages you to work hard. I always tell my friends that you don’t have to be good at everything you do, but if you want something badly you need to work for it, and to work very hard like I did. I hope you can take my advice if you are having the same trouble that I did. I’m sure you will succeed!

“Courage is trying new things without being afraid of failing.”
Being courageous means you are scared, but you still push through no matter what the difficulty. I needed courage in my life when I had a type of cancer called leukemia. I was scared because I thought I wouldn’t make it. I didn’t like the fact that I made everyone so worried and scared about me. Sometimes I would wake up crying because of my constant nightmares. One night I woke up at 3:00 in the morning because I heard my mom crying in the bathroom. I went to her and asked her what was wrong. “Nothing,” she said, but I knew why she was crying.

At that moment I realized why I didn’t give up and give in to fear. I was scared out of my wits, but I never liked seeing anyone cry. I had to go to the doctor every week to get shots. I hate needles, but I didn’t care because every blood sample brought me closer to being cured. In order to beat cancer I had to forget all my fears.

I was ten years old when I had surgery. I remember being on a metal table. I was scared enough to pass out, but I tried to stay calm because I knew these guys were trying to help me and struggling would make their job harder, and because the quicker I could get this done, the faster I would get to go home.

In the end the surgery was successful, and in 2013 I officially became a cancer survivor. Although I still have a scar to remind me, I don’t let it bother me. Always give hope to others and have faith in yourself through hard times. To this day I am told that I am really healthy. Remember that although there are going to be some bumps in the road, never be afraid and have the courage to do what you need to do to get through the tough times. That’s courage.

“Although there are going to be some bumps in the road, never be afraid and have the courage to do what you need to do to get through the tough times.”
Courage Beyond Boston

A special supplement featuring essays from our national and international partners

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

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s Global Initiative

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum began working with international partners in 2007 in response to a growing need for 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 seek to share our materials and offer educational opportunities for children outside of Boston.

Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

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

We are proud to feature inspiring stories of courage written by students from across the United States in the 23rd volume of The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond. This year’s collection includes essays written by students from: Washington, D.C.; Indianapolis, IN; Philadelphia, PA; Wake Forest, NC; Mechanicsburg, PA; Memphis, TN; Birmingham, AL; West Point, NY; Beverly Hills, MI; and Atlanta, GA.

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
Have you ever been afraid or scared? New Zealand mountaineer, explorer and philanthropist Sir Edmund Hillary once said, “I have been seriously afraid at times, but use my fear as a stimulating factor rather than allowing it to paralyze me.” I can relate to Sir Edmund Hillary because this has happened in my life as well.

It was May 7, 2006. I was six years old. This was the day that I will never forget. I woke up feeling hungry, but then I remembered that my mom told me I could not eat anything because this was the morning of my surgery. You see, I was born with Cerebral Palsy, more specifically Spastic Diplegia and Tibial Torsion. In plain English, my body, both legs and a foot needed to be broken and realigned. When you are six and you hear broken legs, foot, hospital, surgery, fear immediately sets in. My mom explained to me that I had been taking physical therapy since I was six months old, wearing braces on my legs since I was about a year old, and that I did not learn to walk until I was three years old. Now, at the age of six, my doctors felt strongly it was the best time to have alignment surgery. My mom explained to me that I would have pain after the surgery, but that the doctors would have medicines to control it. This scared me to death, but she told me that this surgery would help me to have a better quality of life in the future, and to be more self-sufficient. I was still scared, but I kept the thought of being courageous as my main focus to carry me through all of the challenges ahead of me.

After surgery the pain was agonizing, and it seemed as if none of the medicine the doctors gave me helped. I kept having muscle spasms because my muscles were now in slightly new positions than they had been in before. I had extreme swelling, and I had to be recast numerous times. I spent eight weeks in a cast and was sent to inpatient rehabilitation for another six weeks.

When I arrived at rehab I was afraid to do the exercises and activities they wanted me to do. In my mind my bones were not healed yet, and I thought that if I tried to walk my legs and foot were going to break. My mom reassured me that they would not. That evening I got to thinking that I would face my fear and do my best to become stronger and better than ever before.

Even after rehab was completed I still had a long way to go • more physical therapy, more bracing, and more doctor visits. I still had to use a walker, and there was a possibility that I would need more surgeries in the future.

For me, this is a lifelong condition but it does not define who I am or what I can achieve. From the age of six to the age of thirteen I have seen the results of my hard work and dedication. I no longer wear leg braces, nor do I use a walker. I believe fear is a choice. When you let it stop you in your tracks, living is put on hold. When you cast it aside and keep moving forward, life will take you places you have never imagined. I am proud of who I am because I faced my fears then, I face them now, and I will continue to face them in the future. There will be many obstacles in my life but I refuse to let fear be one of them!

“I AM PROUD OF WHO I AM BECAUSE I FACED MY FEARS THEN, I FACE THEM NOW, AND I WILL CONTINUE TO FACE THEM IN THE FUTURE.”
What is courage? Courage means to struggle with patience and pain, and dare to face problems.

My name is Mai Sotira. I am in grade 8. My house is in Kauk Rovieng village, Kampong Cham province, Cambodia. I have five brothers and one sister. I am the fifth son in the family. My parents are poor rice farmers.

I had a very hard time when I was in the primary school because my parents couldn’t afford school supplies, especially notebooks. Because of that I went to the rice field to look for the string rice, the food left in the rice fields after the farmers harvest the fields. I sold it for money. I also looked after the neighboring cows for 12 cents per day.

My parents work very hard. When I have free time I always help them to do the housework. I also take the cows to feed in a field far from my house, and come back when the sun sets. My brothers and I go fishing in the fields far from the village to catch fish, frogs, snails and crabs for cooking in order to save some money for my parents.

When I was in the third grade my brother fell from a palm tree. My parents spent all the money from selling palm juice and vegetables to pay the hospital bills. I stopped studying for one year in order to look after him. Now he has recovered, but he has mental problems which caused him to stop going to school.

When I resumed school in the fourth grade, my father also became sick. When I entered the sixth grade, my third brother had a traffic accident. My mother and I had spent all the money on curing my father and my brother who fell from the palm tree, so at that time we had no money left for curing my other brother from the traffic accident. My mother had to borrow money from the neighboring villagers. My mother worked very hard to get money to pay for the medicines my brother and my father needed, and also to support my brothers and me so we could go to school.

My father left home and didn’t tell my mother where he went, leaving my mother to take care of all the children. It is a big burden on her. She has a lot of courage for our family and she never gives up. My mother’s courage enabled me to become an 8th grade student. When I graduate from school I want to be a teacher in my village.

“My mother has a lot of courage for our family and she never gives up.”
Chhin Thera
The Cambridge School for Cambodia
Kauk Rovieng Village, Cambodia
Translated by Sok Chamroeurn, Program Officer, The World Assistance for Cambodia

To me, courage is to struggle with patience and to stand strong to overcome obstacles in all circumstances.

My name is Chhin Thera, my house is in Kauk Rovieng village, Kampong Cham province, Cambodia. My family has five members including my mother and father.

My mother is a food seller to the shoe factory workers, and my father is a palm tree climber who collects palm juice and makes palm sugar to sell in the village. In 2012 I had a lot of difficulties. My parents couldn’t afford to buy school supplies for me, so my mother asked me to harvest wild vegetables like morning glory from the ponds to sell in the village.

I used the money from selling vegetable to buy school supplies. Last year I was in the 7th grade. I was very happy because I was chosen by the school principal to receive a scholarship offered by the Ministry of Education for poor students. I am very happy that this program started last year. It is very helpful to me. I always spend that money to buy school supplies and uniforms. This makes me study harder.

During the summer school vacation some of my classmates went to study English in the evening, which is free for all kids in the villages. English class is located more than one kilometer from my house. I wanted to go learn English too, but I have no bike like the other students, so I had to walk to the English class every evening. My mother felt such pity for me that she repaired an old broken bike that belonged to my grandfather, so that I could ride to English class.

Finally she agreed with me. She asked me to take my little brother with me every time I go to school. I am happy to follow her advice. It is not easy to go to school with my brother along with me, but I do it. Because I want to keep studying, I have to endure difficulties. I am very happy that I can still go to school. If I didn’t have the courage to ask my mother to let me continue studying, I would be disappointed about not going to school.

“This TO ME, COURAGE IS TO STRUGGLE WITH PATIENCE AND TO STAND STRONG TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.”
Being a military kid can be hard at times. I think I show courage by being a military kid. I have to be supportive, look ahead and try new things. One second you just moved into a new home, then the next second you’re packing up to leave. Everything flashes by in a heartbeat, but you remember it all.

Having to move every couple of years is hard. I have to say goodbye to all of my friends. I try to keep up with my old friends, but I am too busy learning about my new friends. I also have to change schools all the time. It’s hard at first, but once I make some friends and know all the teachers I have a great year. I just got back from Okinawa, Japan. I lived there for five years. Okinawa is a sixty-mile island next to Japan. I lived on a military base but I still had to learn a lot. I had to learn the language, culture and the people. My family couldn’t see relatives unless they came to Okinawa, which isn’t very easy.

It was awful when my dad had to go to combat. I never knew if he would come back fine, injured or not come back at all. I would get anxious when he couldn’t reply to my emails right away. My dad would often miss holidays, birthdays and other important dates. Another bad thing to hear about was when a friend’s parent would get injured. I remember my friend in first grade had to fly to Hawaii to be with her dad. He lost both his hands in combat. I’m just happy that my dad is okay.

I think the worst thing about being a military kid is not knowing my future. My family and I have no idea where we are moving next until a couple months before we leave. We could move out of the United States again or to somewhere else in America. I could either like where we are moving or hate where I’m moving. I also don’t know if my dad will deploy again or not. The one thing I do know is that when I move I will have to start all over again, like someone just keeps hitting delete to my story.

A family in the military has good and bad times. So you just have to make the good times count. Although there is some worry and stress, they are just obstacles you have to jump over. Not knowing can be tough, but in the end things turned out just fine. I don’t show courage by what I do, but by what I am.

“I DON’T SHOW COURAGE BY WHAT I DO, BUT BY WHAT I AM.”
I demonstrate courage in my life by caring for my younger siblings every day. This is a very difficult responsibility.

I live in El Salvador and I care for my little brother Jose, who is only two, and my little sister Yenifer, who is only five. I have cared for them since they were born. I am only 13, but I try to do the best job possible. At first it was hard, but little by little I got used to it.

I care for my siblings like a mother. I prepare their meals, bathe them, take them out for walks, and help them with whatever else they need. My mom is away a lot, and sometimes she does not come home to sleep. I have trouble sleeping because I think about all the things I have to do. If I cry, I cover my face. I do not want my siblings to realize I am scared. If my mom did not get to sleep during the night, I get up at 1 AM to finish my homework, do some housework and make the day’s food.

Although I am only 13, I have gotten used to handling all of these responsibilities. My siblings are so important to me and I love them as if they were my children. It hurts me to not be with my mom, but when I’m with my siblings I feel much better. I give my siblings love and everything they need.

I show courage in my life by not showing fear in my situation. I hope my siblings know that I will never leave them for anything in the world.

“I demonstrate courage in my life by caring for my younger siblings every day.”
What is courage? What things can you do to have courage? Is having courage important? Courage is the ability and willingness to confront fear, pain or danger. Courage also makes you brave and a stronger person. Having courage is doing something that you’re uncertain about, and succeeding.

It all started when I was a baby. I had eczema. Eczema is a medical condition in which patches of skin become rough and inflamed, with blisters that cause itching and bleeding, sometimes resulting from a reaction to irritation, but more typically having no obvious external cause. As I got older, I realized that I was itching and having rashes on my arms. My mother told me that I had eczema and I got it from my dad’s side of the family. I couldn’t believe I had dry skin on my arms and legs. I would also have splotches on my face at times. Following that, if I licked my lips, a ring would form around my mouth. I would always itch everywhere, especially at nighttime. I couldn’t believe any of this, it sounds sort of impossible.

At school, it was horrible. I just wanted to escape to Narnia. Everyone would see my arm and scream, “That's disgusting!” If I touched them they would go get hand sanitizer. It was so embarrassing to come to school with really greasy arms. I felt so weird when I would walk in school. People would also stare and wonder what happened to me. They would ask really annoying questions, like if I got burned. I started to wear jackets every day because of my eczema. I would wear jackets to cover up my arms because people would ask so many questions.

One day at school, a girl said that I was a freak and not normal. In my head I thought, “Normal is boring.” I was sick of everyone saying stuff about me. So I stood up, and I told her that calling me a freak is just mean, and that she was being a bully. I felt a lot of courage as soon as I stated that. Everyone started to smile and clap for me. Everything was jumbled up in my head and it just exploded as soon as she said that about me. She got mad and sat in the corner of the room. I knew that I didn’t have to go apologize to her. I knew that she was a bully and I was stating my opinion for once. I realized that I’m a beautiful individual that has a skin problem, but I’m still beautiful in my own way.

“**Having courage is doing something that you’re uncertain about, and succeeding.**"
Amer Habbab
Sara Coyle, Teacher
Courage in My Life
National Essay Contest Runner-Up
Beverly Hills Academy in Beverly Hills, Michigan

I can never stand seeing my younger brother being bullied. My older brother is always very busy, so I play with my younger brother a lot. I am very good at football, but I am very bad at basketball. I am always the last one picked. One time someone said, “You suck! You can’t play!” I don’t consider myself short, but I am shorter than my friends. Is this why I am bad? I don’t know. I do play basketball on Wednesdays and I am going to try out for football. I would like to increase my skills at each sport.

My younger brother is eight. He is short and skinny. I think of him as a person who looks up to me. We have a lot of things in common; we both like sports, cooking and playing together. We make up our own games.

The problem that he and I are facing is other people saying to us, “You suck! Shut up! You are so short! You can’t even play right! Teacher’s pet! Don’t pick him! Get him!”

Before I came to America, I lived in Syria. There, I was picked first for games. Here, I am not welcomed and I feel unappreciated. I have been through this before. I do like school, and I like my teacher. But now I see my younger brother being bullied. There is a kid who is fourteen who bullies him and me about how bad we are at basketball. He makes my brother cry when he doesn’t let my brother play with the others, or when he steals the ball from him (it is a big deal for my brother). Sometimes, the bully would even throw the ball outside of the gym.

One time, I saw him bully my brother, so I elevated to my top speed until I reached him. He was going to punch my brother, but I got between both of them. He said, “What are you doing?” I told him I was protecting my brother, and I asked him to stop. That did not work. I asked the bully why he was acting this way, and he said because he likes annoying people. “That’s a bad idea,” I whispered. Then, he replied, “Fine, I will stop annoying him.” This time it actually worked! A tip for anyone facing a bully is to ask the person why he or she is doing what they are doing and to please stop. If this does not work, you should tell an adult.

This was an act of courage because I protected my brother. I might have been punched in the face, but I stood up for my brother. To me, courage means to do something to protect another, even if you are going to be hurt.

“To me, courage means to do something to protect another, even if you are going to be hurt.”
To me, courage can be helping people who are making bad decisions. I want to help them begin a good and sweet life without the bad influences.

When I was sixteen I had two best friends. They were doing something very wrong. Every day they were missing class at school. They were doing that because they were with kids making bad decisions. They were drinking and smoking in the street. When I talked to them about not doing that and told them that they should be going to class, they shouted and said mean things to me. They told me their future is in drinking and not in school. I didn’t give up because I believed that one day they would change. When I was at home or at church I would pray to God to help them. They needed help.

One day, I met one of my friends and I asked, “Where is your other friend?” He told me he was drinking. I asked my friend to walk with me on the beach and talk. Fortunately, he did accept my invitation. We started to talk about our best moments. I finally had the courage to tell him that they were important to me and were like brothers to me. I didn’t want bad things to happen to either of them. So I told them they had to go to class and study. I encouraged them to reach their dreams. They both have great futures.

I invited both of my friends to do homework with me at my home. They both accepted my invitation. When they got there they fought with each other, but later calmed down and we had friendly conversation. We did this many times.

I am thankful because today they are not drinking and smoking. They are doing well in their studies. I am proud of them because they have become strong students. I thank God because he heard my prayers. I am also thankful because I had the courage to talk with my friends about their bad decisions. I am happy I had courage because now I have my friends back.

“I HAD THE COURAGE TO TALK WITH MY FRIENDS ABOUT THEIR BAD DECISIONS.”
Raygene Lightfoot
Juliet Reed, Teacher
Courage in My Life
National Essay Contest Runner-Up
Smith Middle School in Birmingham, Alabama

I have demonstrated a lot of courage in my life. I recall one time when I told my class that I have sickle cell anemia. I was really scared at first. I thought that they would look at me differently. I thought they would look at me as some type of monster. When I finally told them, they still looked at me as one of them. They knew that I was no different than them.

It turned out that my friends wanted to learn more about sickle cell. I told them all I knew and I also told them where they could learn more about it. They went home and looked it up and came back to tell me things I didn’t know. They learned a lot about it. They found out it was a hereditary blood disease that can be passed along genetically in families.

After my friends learned so much, they started to look out for me. They make sure I stay hydrated. They know the signs of when I’m in pain. They make sure I take good care of myself to prevent sickle cell crisis. They check up on me daily.

Now, I know my friends love me and care about me. Since then I have had a lot of courage. I never doubt myself when I am scared. My friends encourage me. This is my story of courage.

“Since then I have had a lot of courage. I never doubt myself when I am scared.”
Have you ever done or seen someone do a courageous act? Doing something courageous means that you are brave and help people out. The definition of courage is, “The ability to do something that frightens one.” Everyone is afraid of something even if they don’t show it at first. I will tell you about something courageous that my uncle did.

On January 28, 2014, there was a big snowstorm in Atlanta, GA. About two inches of snow floated down to the ground that day. Many people were stuck on the highway for a good five to ten hours. Because there isn’t much snow that finds its way to Atlanta, the city didn’t have enough salt trucks to go around. Therefore, the streets were very icy and slippery.

Even though he knew the dangers, my uncle put chains on his tires and went to help people who were stuck at work. He found out that his boss was stuck at his office, so he went and got his boss. His boss decided to stay the night because it would become chaotic at night. This is courageous because many people didn’t even think of going out in the traffic to help others. My uncle’s boss was very thankful, and got his car back the next day to drive home.

Courage is important because it will help people stay safe, and it will make life easier for some people. Lots of people don’t have courage because they think about the situation too much. They end up scaring themselves out of the idea and let it be. My uncle’s boss will never forget the time when his coworker came and rescued him from his office.

Now you know what courage is, and how it will make the world a better place. I hope you will use courage in the future and teach it to all of the people you know. Courage is an important thing that only some people have. Maybe you’re one of them, maybe not. It’s up to you to decide.

“Courage is important because it will help people stay safe.”
On the last day of school I was told that my school, Laura H. Carnell School, was going to shut down, and that I would be transferred to Warren G. Harding Middle School. I was apprehensive because I had attended Carnell since kindergarten • that's eight years! On top of that, Harding had a very bad reputation. The Great Schools website ranked Harding one out of ten stars. My friends said that almost every day there would be fights and lots of bullying. Half of my friends transferred to different schools. I was more scared than a mouse running from a snake.

I thought Harding would be in a remote area, but then my father told me that Harding is only eight minutes away by car. After a month or so had passed, I was getting used to the change. I had great teachers and I made lots of friends. The students did not treat us, the Carnell students, differently. But, my happiness did not last long.

One day while I was doing my homework, my father came up to me and said, “Guess what?”

“What?” I asked.

“I bought a motel in North Carolina and I am going there. You and the rest of the family can come during long weekends, and when the school year ends, we will move there.”

I felt as if someone had torn me apart. My father thinks I am a connoisseur at management because I handle people and responsibilities very well. I wanted to tell him, “No, I need you. Please don’t leave.” My father told me the three buses I had to take to get to school, and when I had to take them. I stood there listening, like a lifeless body.

I was petrified because I had never taken a bus before, my brother was depending on me to take him to school, and my father’s trust was weighing on me. My courage is my family. With their belief and support, I was not going to let them down. On the day of school, I was determined to go on the three buses I had to take. I was more terrified than a person who had seen a ghost, but as Edward Vernon Rickenbacker said, “Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you are scared.” I got to school and back home on time without any trouble. I was happier than a clam.

I was overjoyed to realize the courage inside of me. Everyone is able to gain courage by believing in themselves. Now, I take the bus to school and back home every day. Sometimes I take the bus to other places, too! Now, I enjoy going on the bus and that’s a big change! I was able to keep the trust and belief of my family members. I have passed my challenge and that’s what gives my life color and my fire flames • my ability to have courage.

“Everyone is able to gain courage by believing in themselves.”
Hilario Damiao Macuacua
Kirsten Palmer, Teacher
Chicuque Secondary School, Mozambique

One time I had to take the local Chopa (mini-van bus) to school. I am a student and I had to pay 6 meticais to ride the bus. That is what all students pay. The workers and adults pay 10 meticais. When I arrived at the bus stop I had 6 meticais and the driver told me I needed to pay 10. I told him I was a student. Everyone on the bus told me the driver didn’t understand what I was saying. We had a communication issue because I wanted to pay 6 meticais and he wanted 10 meticais. We didn’t see eye to eye. I also told him that I had a student ID in my wallet. He didn’t want to see it.

I had a phone in my hand and the driver took it from me. He said, “If you want your phone back you will have to pay me 10 meticais.” I didn’t know what to do. I had courage to go to the local police station. In my village it is not common to go and tell the police about issues like this. I am only a student but I had courage. I told the police officer what had happened. I told him that the driver didn’t want to listen to me and that he took my phone. The police officer came with me to the bus stop.

We waited for the driver to come by. When he stopped he saw the police officer and me. He tried to hide and not be seen. The police officer talked to him and got my phone back. I had to have courage to talk to the police officer and to get back what was mine. It was very hard, but with courage I was able to do it.

“I had to have courage to talk to the police officer and to get back what was mine.”
Owen Bergquist  
Shannon Lowry, Teacher  
Courage in My Life  
National Essay Contest Runner-Up  
Rolesville Middle School in Rolesville, North Carolina

Last year I signed up for a strength-training program that is coached by an imposing ex-Navy Seal. My first day, I walked in ready to show them what I’ve got. I was not prepared for what lay ahead of me. I looked around the room and nobody looked like me. It was a room full of twenty big football players trying to keep strong during the off-season. And me? I was a 51-pound, short, skinny, non-athletic, weak kid. I looked around at their muscles and could only imagine what they were thinking about me. At that moment, I realized that I not only needed hard work, but courage to get through this. During the program, we met every week on Tuesdays, and then did assigned workouts by ourselves every day. Every Tuesday workout was very hard. For example, one week we would run a 5k, and another week we would do exercises with squats, jumping jacks and pushups. Each time we met, the workouts varied, but they were never easy. Even with the difficult workouts and the fact that I didn’t fit in, I decided to stick with the program. Week after week I proved to myself and to the class that I could do this. I was constantly getting called out and mentioned for good form and hard work on the exercises.

After 10 weeks we had the final exam. It was a tough, grueling three-hour final. Some kids were about to give up, some were crying and some even threw up! It was just flat-out hard. And I, the little kid who nobody thought would make it through the first class, did the entire program and passed the final. My parents could not have been prouder, my coach could not have been prouder, and I could not have been prouder. I looked at these football kids and realized that they had been judging me by my outside, by my appearance, or my cover. If they had known my inside story, they probably would have judged me harder.

What they did not know was that as a baby I had open-heart surgery. I was born with a severe defect that needed to be fixed before I turned one. Thanks to an excellent surgeon, I have no restrictions to my activities. However, my heart doesn’t work as a normal heart would. If the kids had known, they probably would have written me off, and thought, “Not only is he small and weak, but he has a heart problem which means he won’t be able to make it through this.” But I did.

After I finished the final, I looked back on that first day of the program and I realized that I found the courage it took to make it. At first I thought, “Look at these kids! They’re huge! I’ll never keep up with them!” I didn’t have any faith in myself. But I learned that you have to push yourself when you’re scared. When you push yourself through fear, you can be successful even when you think it’s impossible. Courage is the way to make the impossible possible!

“Courage is the way to make the impossible possible!”
Reagan Green
Donna Himmelberger, Teacher
Courage in My Life
National Essay Contest Runner-Up
West Point Middle School in West Point, New York

Courage is an important characteristic to have because it helps you grow as a person. There was a time when I needed to be brave. When I got my hearing aid, I needed a big dose of courage. Luckily, I found the courage to face my fears. This is my story.

My story begins with me hearing normally. For the first nine years of my life I had no issues with my hearing, I had normal hearing like most people. But one summer I started feeling like my ear was clogged from wax or water. A few months later, my mom whispered in my ear and I didn't hear her at all. We knew something was wrong. Soon the audiologist confirmed my fears • I had lost some of the hearing in my left ear and she recommended a hearing aid.

The idea of making a change was hard, but I learned that the things I was worried about turned out okay. I was worried the hearing aid would feel unusual, like there was something hanging out of my ear all day. However, in reality you can barely feel it! Also, I would be the only one in my whole family, including my cousins, aunts and uncles, to have a hearing aid. It was scary to think about, but it made me unique. Finally, I didn’t know what people would think of my hearing aid and me, but people reacted totally differently from how I expected.

I was worried about how my family would act around me. I didn’t know if my siblings would make fun of me or not. Since they didn’t make me feel bad, I gained more courage. Would my parents ignore me and not help me get through having a hearing aid? They did the total opposite. My mom and dad always remind me to put in my hearing aid before I go to school. They buy me batteries for my hearing aid, and they tell me what to say when people are curious about it. Before I knew how my parents were going to help me, I was afraid that if I lost it I would be in major trouble. But if I misplace my hearing aid, my parents just help me find it.

I was most scared about people asking questions about my hearing aid. I didn’t know what I would say. Once, someone asked me what was in my ear, and I said with courage, “It’s my hearing aid!” One strange thing was when people would stare at it. That would make me feel uncomfortable, but then they wouldn’t care that I have a hearing aid. I assumed that once all my friends saw it they wouldn’t want anything to do with me, but they actually thought it was cool. Sometimes when we were alone, they even wanted to try it on! My confidence overcomes my fear of how people will act when they see I have a hearing aid.

I lost my hearing, but not my courage. Courage means to be brave. That’s what I always try to do when I don’t know what to do. Everything turned out fine and still is. I was embarrassed at first, but a hearing aid is something I really needed, and I wouldn’t have gotten through it without courage!

“Courage means to be brave. That’s what I always try to do when I don’t know what to do.”
Anyone or anything can fall apart when you least expect it to. It’s almost the easier thing to let go and give up. But to hold it together when everyone else would understand if you fell apart, that’s true strength.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the most frightening experiences of my life. It was very hard for a five year old to go through so much and not know what’s going on. It’s horrifying to watch your childhood, the place you were born, go underwater and not be able to come back. Even worse, is to leave your mother behind not knowing if she will return alive. All of it happened so fast and I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was 2005 and my family was panicking. I thought we were going on a vacation, but I was very wrong. The newscast called for a hurricane. No words can describe how we felt. Hurricanes usually passed by New Orleans. My grandma told us not to worry because she thought we were coming back. We never did. It was all a blur and I couldn’t fully process everything. Can you imagine a five year old leaving everything she once had and never seeing it again?

After we packed and everything that we needed was in the truck, we piled into the car and we were off. The worst part was that we didn’t have any back-up plans. None of us knew exactly where we were going. A few days after leaving New Orleans we were still on the road. By that time it was obvious that the storm was hitting close by. The rain was intense, and the wind was blowing so fast that some cars on the highway couldn’t even move. We were only in a small Jeep, and the water was coming up to our tires. We asked ourselves, “Are we going to make it?” My mind was all over the place. It was such a bad day, one of the scariest days of my life. The radio in the car was on and I heard that there were already hundreds of deaths. I didn’t want my family to be one of them.

Soon, the car ran out of gas and we had to get out. Some of my strong cousins had to push the car to get through the water. I was so small and I couldn’t walk through so much water. My uncle had to put me on his back. The water was rising and it seemed as if it was going nowhere. Honestly, it was a pain and a struggle. We had to make it through so many roads of water. All of a sudden, my uncle found an 18-wheeler truck on the side of the road. The truck was fully gassed and abandoned. My family and I gathered our things and went inside. There was a lot of room in the truck, so we had places to sleep. I’m not going to lie, it wasn’t the most comfortable situation.

So far, confusion and nervousness was all I felt. I didn’t know how to feel about what was going on. My grandma told us we were in Texas. We had to find a way to sleep somewhere more comfortable, so we slept in a homeless shelter. Nothing was easy, and we were all separated in the shelter. My grandma, my younger cousin, my aunt and I had to sleep in sleeping bags on the floor. The only food that was supplied to us was chips, juice and crackers half the time. At that moment things were hard. After we left the homeless shelter, we traveled from Texas to Alabama to Georgia. There, my uncle and aunt found us a motel called Super 8 Motel. A few days later, we found out that my mom and some of my family members were in Indianapolis. It was a huge shock to all of us since that was the first time we had talked to her since the hurricane.

About two weeks after I talked to my mom, they sent us bus tickets to meet them in Indianapolis. Ever since, Indianapolis is where I’ve grown up and settled down. I’ve made great friends and made a nice life for myself. Things were hard to get used to at first. But now, I wouldn’t change anything for the world!

“To hold it together when everyone else would understand if you fell apart, that’s true strength.”