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Courage as my anchor

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Growing up in a military camp shortly after a coup d'état, witnessing people getting maltreated because they did not agree with the activities of the ruling government was the order of the day. The more I witnessed these injustices, seeds of justice were sown within me coupled with a deep resolve to effect change. Courage grew within me to stand up against these injustices. I understood that one of the ways I could accomplish this dream was to be educated, so getting an education became my immediate goal. However, it did not take me long to realize that I had many hurdles to overcome in my quest to attain an education. Owing to the stereotypical gender roles ingrained in my culture, females are usually not granted the same opportunities as their male counterparts. For a long time, it was even perceived that there was no need to educate females since a woman's place is in the kitchen. This mindset generated so many obstacles in the way of females, who aspired to be educated.

Being a female, I encountered my fair share of these hindrances. In my case I was bent on attending one of the best girls' schools in my country. Suffice to say that the most challenging aspect of the encounter was the psychological strain I had to grapple with. I was enrolled in a public school, and as is often the case in developing countries, the public or government schools had fewer and inferior resources as compared to private schools. Once I made known my intentions to further my education at such an elite school, life in public school became very traumatic for me. I was constantly teased and reminded that the elite schools were reserved for the children of the wealthy, or the students that attended private schools. As if that was not enough, even my fellow female friends questioned my ability to get into such a prestigious

school. Honestly, sometimes the teasing and ridicule almost got on my nerves. It was really tempting to accept the status quo and see the kitchen as my domain.

Thankfully, in all of this, I did not give up on my pursuit or give in to the pressure. I found courage within to pull myself together. I recall telling myself that I owed it to myself to prove to the whole world that not only are females worth educating, but that granted the right opportunities, they could excel in any field of endeavor. I took it as a challenge to prove my critics wrong by defying the odds and surmounting and hurdle that was before me.

From then on, every smirk, and every ridicule was an additional motivation; the mockery turned into that extra energy I needed to stay on course. The resolve to affect change and the plight that females faced generated courage within me to study more. After countless sleepless nights, I aced the entrance exam and gained admission into the said school. Accomplishing this feat brought me fulfillment, not only because I had proven to my critics that females could do more than cook and serve, but because that experience fueled me more to become an attorney to advocate for the rights of the disadvantaged.

After my secondary school education, I travelled to the United States to accomplish my aspiration of becoming an attorney. Little did I know that my courage was about to be tested once more. Once I started schooling, I experienced an unforeseen culture shock and a lingual barrier. Although I spoke English, people could hardly understand me because of my accent. Every time it tried to contribute in class, I had to repeat myself several times before the professors could understand what I meant. Not only did professors have puzzled faces every time I asked a question, but some peers also started teasing me as a result. In addition to my accent, unbeknownst to me, there is a slight difference between the American English and the British system of English, in which I was educated in Ghana. This inadvertently caused errors in my

writing, and consequently led to my grades slipping in my first semester of college. I was devastated, because I had otherwise been a great communicator my whole life, but after coming to New York, I felt mute. I was frustrated, because I did not know why my grades were slipping. I had written like this my whole life, and it had otherwise been fine. Even though I felt like giving up, I found courage within myself to fix the problem; whatever it was. I was determined not to let my transatlantic journey to the United States to become an attorney be derailed by a language barrier. I told myself that I had overcome many deterrents, and I shall overcome this one also. Instead of succumbing to defeat, I frequented my school's library and writing center often to have every essay edited. I also read more extensively and practiced my speech often. I also practiced my writing by writing essays on any topic that interested me frequently. I had to learn to channel my exasperation into a positive energy. Every low grade on an essay became an additional motivation to get all my essays edited at the writing center. The courage I developed to work harder has paid off. In the next semester, I saw a tremendous improvement in my grades, I earned myself a seat in the Honors Program and a spot on the dean's list. I have also been named a Pinkerton fellow.

Even after all these accomplishments, I am aware of obstacles to achieving my aspirations daily. However, courage is what aided me surmount countless obstacles previously, and this same courage does not allow me to give up or throw in the towel. Daily, I push harder. Every minute, courage, my life coach, instructs me to work harder to take my place as an African female who refuses to be branded by the dictates of society. I daily find courage to surmount the limitations society attempts to place on me. As an immigrant in the United States who wants to become an attorney, I daily juggle cultural assimilation, language barriers, part time jobs and internships and family responsibilities. Yet, I do not lose my vision; courage drives me daily to

surmount daily obstacles and raise my GPA and prepare for the LSAT adequately, so I can attain my goal.

Finding courage in the face of obstacles has proven beneficial. Only by facing these hurdles and overcoming them have I come to appreciate the inner strength inside me. I have learned to harness and develop this strength daily. Now, I know that no obstacle is insurmountable. Again, only by being courageous and overcoming challenges have I been able to motivate other females to surmount any psychological or cultural barriers that society may place ahead of them. I can confidently tell young African girls to pursue an education in spite of the societal challenges because I did the same, and I know it is possible. When I go back to the public school I attended and I talk with young ladies, I know I can motivate them to reach higher and attend the high schools of their dreams.

One important benefit of exhibiting courage is that, now I have been able to help other people who are facing similar obstacles. My place of worship, the International Central Gospel Church, is an immigrant church. As the Youth Secretary, I came across many immigrant students who were experiencing a culture shock in their schools. As they came to me with issues of being bullied because of their accent, or their grades slipping, I identify with them and I am able to help them surmount these challenges. As a Pinkerton Fellow, I am placed with Good Shepherds Service, Brooklyn Life Program, where we work with juveniles who have been arrested to keep them from getting rearrested and going to jail. Every time, I talk to these adolescents, I become aware of the challenges they battle with. The psychological, academic, and societal hurdles they face are tangible. I have been through so many hurdles in my quest to fulfill my passion, so I easily identify with their frustrations, because I have been there before. However, I daily encourage them to rise beyond these hurdles, and I remind them that they are capable of

exceeding limitations. I help them find the courage within them that they did not even know they had. When I tell them how courage had aided me subdue my own share of obstacles, they are motivated, since they know that just like me, they can overcome.

Courage has always been anchor; that force that pushed me forward every time I felt I was overwhelmed or could not accomplish a particular feat, I always found courage to move on. Every feat I have accomplished, I owe it to my courageous spirit which does not settle for less nor bow to the status quo.