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### **Facing Fear**

Is walking away courage? My definition of courage is the ability to face one's fear. Of the four Greek cardinal virtues, I feel courage is the most essential. According to Maya Angelou, "Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently." This is true; this cardinal virtue shaped my life.

Growing up in Guyana, I faced many challenges which subsequently built my courage and shaped me into the woman I am today. I have always been a person who loves to take risks and be an out-of-the-box thinker. However, my courage was challenged after I got married and came to the United States in 2012. My husband was a manager at a coffee shop, and I was pregnant with my son. In January 2013, after nearly losing my life, I gave birth to my beautiful baby. We were so happy and had hopes of a great future together as a family.

In the summer of 2016, however, I got out of bed feeling hopeful and ready to conquer another day. As I was getting my son ready for the park, my husband attacked me verbally: "You bitch, you dirty whore...." Once again, he accused me of having an affair that I wasn't. This was all too familiar to me as I had endure his accusations for the past two years. I knew what was coming next. It was like doing the same science experiment over and over again, foolishly expecting a different result. As I was trying to calm him down in the presence of my son, he

started to punch me repeatedly in my head; this triggered the screams of my three year old. Our son's alarm didn't stop him; in fact, he looked at me mercilessly and repeatedly punched, kicked and slapped me. Just as he reached for a knife to stab me, the cops interrupted. Luckily, my neighbor had heard our screams and called the local precinct. My husband was arrested for domestic violence and taken away. This was my saving grace.

After this traumatic moment in my life, I was too embarrassed to face the world. For months I couldn't comb my hair because my head felt so numb. I remembered weeping all night when my son fell asleep, contemplating what to do next. I was fresh to the American life, as I was never allowed by my husband to take the trains by myself, get a college education, drive or do anything that would make me feel independent as a woman. Moreover, I didn't have any money saved or family in America to walk me through things. I felt I was stuck on a boat alone on a stormy night, but the storm wasn't ending. I kept searching for something hopeful to cling to and I realized it was my job as a home health care aide with a great boss who promised to be there for me always, and he was. With my son as my source of inspiration, a few months later I found the fortitude to shape my pain into a more meaningful me. I did all the things my husband hadn't wanted me to accomplish as a woman and wife.

First, I applied for college at Queensborough and while waiting for acceptance, I found the time to get my driver's license; my confidence grew with each small success. A few months later, I was approved for college and began immediately. I was working in the day and going to school at night while my landlord provided child-care. At this time my son and I was living in a basement because that was all I could afford. I never filed for child support incentives because I didn't want to depend on a man for anything. I was determined to do it all on my own.

As time passed, I saved up enough to purchase a used car. It was incredibly difficult traveling in the snow to and from school, to work and home. Life became much easier with a car. With time I grew more confident and brave as a woman.

In another year, I had saved up enough to move into my own apartment with my son. It was a very emotional moment in my life. I had to take several moments and really absorb the amount of pride I was feeling as to how far I came as a person, reflecting that two years prior all I wanted to do was curl up in a hole and hide from the world. Now I was in a lovely apartment, well furnished with everything beautiful and new. My son finally had a place to call home. The courage it took this silly girl to germinate from someone who had nothing to someone who now has her life together was better than winning the lottery. Even though my success is still loading as I'm completing my BSN degree, I feel so accomplished. I have been on the Deans List three semesters in a row with a fourth pending; all while nurturing my now five year old who is under consideration for a gifted program. This is all attributed to my courage and determination for a better life.

Everyone encounters challenging moments in life but what distinguishes us as an individual is the boldness to diffuse these challenges and isolate a more meaningful, productive you. I challenged all my pain into accomplishments by walking away.

Courage has planted its seed in me, germinating in my overcoming every obstacle that challenges my path to a better life. I'm equipped with this cardinal virtue to withstand adversity, becoming the woman everyone looks up to. Courage is what gave me life after I felt dead emotionally and physically. Courage is the weapon that magnifies a win in every battle and

provides the strength to be undefeated. I bravely forge on, grateful for my immigrant fortitude.

As William Ernest Henley described in his poem "Invictus," I stand "bloody and unbowed."