

Courage

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For as long as I can remember, I have had hearing loss in my right ear. Hearing aids helped, but they never fully corrected my loss. I despised wearing them, and I would often “forget” to bring them to school. I did not appreciate how they made the world sound louder; it was *too* loud for my taste, and I did not like how they looked either. This led me to be very shy, quiet, and self-conscious during my earlier childhood years. I relied on my eyes to read mouths if my good left ear was not enough. If I missed something, I usually would not ask for help. I was embarrassed and afraid. Most of all, I lacked courage.

I switched schools when I entered ninth grade. That was my turning point. Suddenly, nobody knew me. Nobody knew if I was shy, outgoing, fearful, or courageous. I realized that I could be any of those traits. So, I chose to be outgoing and courageous. I joined various clubs, teams, and took advanced classes. I volunteered for numerous organizations. I became confident. Public health professor Dr. Shahram Heshmat claims that “there is a positive link between confidence and courage” (Heshmat). Heshmat argues that courage is a “primary force” in achieving one’s goals (Heshmat). My new-found confidence allowed me to develop meaningful relationships with my peers. I made friendships that will last a lifetime.

How did this happen? How did I go from being shy and apprehensive to friendly and courageous? Switching schools was certainly an aid in the process, but it was more than that. I was tired. I was tired of being the shy and quiet girl. I was tired of not maximizing my education, my time, and my life. I wanted to be a participant in conversations. I wanted to vocalize my opinions when I agreed or disagreed with something that someone said. Even if I am not physically able to hear everything, I wanted to be heard. So, I made sure to get the front seat in every class so I could hear everything. If I missed something that was said, I asked about it. I learned to play the piano, so my music was able to speak for me when I was not ready to. Just the

sheer idea of learning to play the piano used to scare me when I was younger. I thought I would never be good enough because of my hearing impairment. But, I decided to try. I spent tens of hours a week practicing. I am still practicing. I am very proud of what I have achieved thus far.

Simply infusing myself with the smallest bits of courage positively fostered my personal development. I was able to build relationships with teachers and friends. I became a mentor to students younger than me. I was able to be me. My growth did not stop there, however. I started to speak up about issues that mattered to me, even when I was the minority opinion: feminism, equal rights, and many others. When I was courageous enough to speak up, I noticed others started to join in with me. But do not let me mislead you into thinking that it was all easy.

Asking questions to gain deeper understandings was one challenge. Being courageous helped me overcome that obstacle. However, once that battle was won, a new challenge ensued: differences of opinions on important, relevant issues. I come from a traditional community of immigrants. Women never had any role outside the home in the old country. Today, many of the children of my community still possess traditional, stubborn views on women's roles. My parents have no sons. So, they open-mindedly raised me and my sisters to pursue any career we want. They taught us that gender is not a hindrance to our academic goals. They taught us to be fearless and courageous. I used the tools they gave me to confidently participate in conversations. I vocalized my opinions to my classmates. It was difficult. Some of my male classmates were ruthless, and many of my female classmates did not share my aspirations.

Years have passed since then. My community has evolved and continues to do so gradually. Today, I am part of an intellectual and friendly community of men and women who share my thoughts and views. My friendships are more meaningful and substantial. The courage to speak up and vocalize my opinions allowed this to happen. Minority opinions can become a

majority, and the powerless can become powerful. This idea is not new. In the early twentieth century, George Orwell recorded his experience as a sub-divisional police officer of Moulmein. In his writings he argues, “when the white man turns tyrant, it is his own freedom that he destroys” (Orwell 159). Once again, recent events have proven that police officers are not as powerful as once thought. With courage, ordinary people and minority groups can successfully band together to achieve justice and morality.

It took me a significant amount of time to realize the importance of courage: it is an extremely effective aid in promoting one’s beliefs. Once I had this realization, I took numerous arduous steps towards becoming courageous. Throughout this multi-step process, I learned that courage is not something that is easily acquired. Leading authority on persuasion and leadership Kathleen K. Reardon agrees. She asserts, “courageous action is really a special kind of calculated risk-taking” (Reardon). It is not simple and effortless. Asking questions in quiet classrooms is uncomfortable. Joining clubs and meeting new people can be daunting. These actions demand real courage.

Despite my previous experiences, I am no master of courage. I am a freshman in a virtual college. It is difficult to ask questions in class. It is challenging to build relationships with professors and fellow students. My courage is repeatedly tested. However, when I conquer my fears and apprehension, the rewards are endless. Receiving positive feedback from my professors and classmates is just one example. Being courageous also allows me to attain the deepest and richest understanding of my studies. This virtue and mode of behavior enhanced my studies, relationships, and personal development. Some people think there is no need for courage in this era. They believe certain groups will speak and be heard, while others will get pushed to the sidelines. That statement is far from true. Courage allows people to achieve their goals and attain

meaningful experiences. It is the tool that allows man to question the status quo and search for true morality.

Works Cited

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