



## The Cadence of Courage

BY GALEN GUENGERICH, SENIOR MINISTER, ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Arianna Huffington, the noted author and popular pundit, wrote a book entitled *On Becoming Fearless*. In it, she observed that too many women and girls today are afraid to be themselves—to inhabit the bodies they have, express the convictions they feel, demonstrate the talents they possess, and claim the autonomy that is rightly theirs. Most girls learn early that the best way to stay safe in our culture is to be pretty and quiet.

Fortunately for Huffington, she learned another way to respond when fear strikes. Her first step on the road to fearlessness came one night at the dinner table when she was a young girl. Her mother told a story about her own actions during the Greek Civil War at the time of the Occupation. As part of the Greek Red Cross, Huffington’s mother fled to the mountains with two Jewish girls. Her responsibility was to take care of wounded soldiers and hide the girls from the Germans.

One night, German soldiers arrived at their cabin and started shooting, threatening to kill everyone if the group did not surrender the Jews that the Germans (rightly) suspected they were hiding. Her mother, who spoke fluent German, spoke up and insisted that the Germans put down their guns, because there were no Jews in their midst. And then she watched as the German troops lowered their guns and walked away.

Hearing this story as a young girl, Arianna Huffington wondered how she would ever live up to such a standard. Her book is the story of how she eventually learned to embody fearlessness, as her mother had done. In a world with much to fear, this is a lesson we all need to learn.

Fortunately for most of us, our daily lives are not dominated by the constant fear of terrorism or genocide, or even rape. But there are other fears that lurk: the fear of being spurned by a lover or a friend; the fear of failing in a new venture or a new vocation; the fear of expressing what’s in our heart to the people around us. These fears are no less debilitating for having less deadly sources. Whether the issue is stopping genocide, changing jobs, or speaking truth, the temptation to stay put and keep quiet is hard to resist.

This temptation must be overcome, however. As the title of her book suggests, Arianna Huffington calls for women—and presumably men as well—to develop a sense of fearlessness. She says fearlessness is not the absence of fear, but rather the mastery of it. Because my own preference is always to describe positive virtues in positive terms, I favor the word another Greek writer used twenty-five hundred years ago to name the quality Huffington calls fearlessness. Plato’s term is courage.

One of Plato’s dialogues records a conversation between Socrates and two eminent Greek generals, Laches and Nicias. When asked by Socrates to say what courage is, Laches replies: That’s easy enough. Anyone who stays at his post, faces the enemy, and doesn’t run away, you may be sure is courageous.

Surely courage is more than staying put in battle, Socrates replies. Sometimes great victories are won by falling back and regrouping. Besides, people can be courageous in other areas of life: against the perils of the sea, or against disease or poverty. People can also be courageous in public affairs or in facing their own desires and pleasures.

This is quite true, Laches agrees.

So, Socrates continues, what is this thing, courage, which is the same in all of these cases?

Perhaps courage is a certain endurance of the soul, Laches ventures.

# Quest

Vol. LXX, No. 3

March 2015

Without courage,  
we cannot practice  
any other virtue  
with consistency.  
—Maya Angelou

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT COURAGE

- THE CADENCE OF COURAGE  
*Galen Guengerich*
- LIVING WITH A COURAGEOUS HEART  
*Kristina Spaude*
- STANDING LIKE A TREE  
*Victoria Safford*
- THE COURAGE TO ENDURE  
*George Tyger*
- CARRYING THE WASP  
*Suzyn Smith Webb*
- FROM YOUR MINISTER  
*Meg Riley*
- RESOURCES FOR LIVING  
*Lynn Ungar*
- WHEN THINGS FALL APART  
*Pema Chödrön*

But what if someone endures in doing something that is foolish, or hurtful, or mischievous, Socrates replies. Is that courage?

Obviously not, Laches admits.

At this point Socrates mercifully turns to Nicias, who tries a different approach. He ventures that courage is somehow related to the sought after goal or the danger being avoided. Nicias eventually concludes that courage requires wisdom and the knowledge of what is good and worthy of pursuit, as well as what is evil and must therefore be avoided. As Socrates puts it, summarizing this argument, “Courage is not only knowledge of what is to be dreaded and what is to be dared, but knowledge of all goods and evils at every stage.”

The essence of courage, in other words, is not the ability to do something that is physically risky. Rather, it is to pursue a goal that is morally worthy or stand up against a force that is morally repugnant, despite the risks involved.

Courage is the knowledge of what is monstrous and must therefore be confronted, no matter if the risk is great and the outcome uncertain. Courage is the knowledge of what is worthy and must be pursued, no matter if the road is long and the path unclear.

But there is one more dimension to our understanding of courage. How do we know that terrorism, genocide, and rape are always monstrous evils? How do we know that human dignity is always a worthy goal? In a world of diverse religious beliefs and varied understandings of natural law, where does our collective knowledge of good and evil come from?

I once attended an address by Bill Schulz, former president of the UUA and former executive director of Amnesty USA. He said that one of the things he learned from a decade of dealing with torture and its perpetrators is that, for him at least, belief in the *inherent* worth and dignity of every person is a myth. He acknowledged

that this is hard to admit, especially for a Unitarian Universalist. We have long championed the individual as the final source of authority when it comes to deciding right and wrong, and when it comes to assigning worth and dignity. But, Schulz said, torture has taught him that worth and dignity are not inherent. There are too many malevolent human hearts, and too many god-forsaken places, where worth and dignity have no presence.

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### Courage does not eliminate fear; it sees a path through the fear to the calling that lies beyond.

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Worth must be assigned, Schulz insisted, and dignity must be taught. We cannot stand idly by and assume that these supposedly inherent qualities will magically spring forth in the world, like flowers in springtime. They will not. For worth and dignity to exist, we must speak and act in a way that creates a place for them. As Schulz put it: “Human rights are whatever the international community—through its various declarations, covenants, treaties, and conventions—say that they are.” When human dignity is at stake, as Schulz concluded, “We cannot escape confrontation with the forces of idolatry who would reserve worth to only a few.”

Simply put, courage is not plunging down a black diamond ski trail at breakneck speed, although it sometimes requires facing significant risks. Rather, courage is the ability to see good afar off and take a step toward it—despite the obvious risks. It is to see evil close at hand and take steps to confront it despite present danger. To know courage is to know a calling that is greater than fear.

The English word *courage* derives from the French *coeur*, which means

heart. This is a useful etymology. The work of the heart is not to pump a vast amount of blood in an instant and then rest for a season. Rather, the heart works best when its rhythm is steady and its beat is unrelenting.

Courage is like that, too. There is a cadence to courage: an inexorable march toward achieving what is good and confronting what is not. Courage does not eliminate fear; it sees a path through the fear to the calling that lies beyond.

Matthew Arnold, the acclaimed 19<sup>th</sup> century British poet and critic, wrote a poem titled “*Rugby Chapel*” in honor of his father. It’s about making a difference in the world. Arnold paints a gloomy picture of humanity as a feeble, wavering line, wandering the earth “in an eddy of purposeless dust.”

But once in a while, Arnold goes on to say, people appear on the scene who march to a different cadence.

*Then, in such hour of need  
Of your fainting, dispirited race,  
Ye, like angels, appear,  
Radiant with ardour divine!  
Beacons of hope, ye appear!  
Languor is not in your heart,  
Weakness is not in your word,  
Weariness not on your brow.  
Ye alight in our van! at your voice,  
Panic, despair, flee away.  
Ye move through the ranks, recall  
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,  
Praise, re-inspire the brave!  
Order, courage, return.*

Courage is not the feeling that good is invincible, nor is it the conviction that evil can never prosper. Rather, courage is a march through the fear to confront what is evil and pursue what is good. Courage has a cadence. It’s the wisdom to know which direction to go and the willingness to take a step in that direction. Whatever your fear, have courage. Face the direction you must go. Then take the first step. And then keep marching. ■

## Living with a Courageous Heart

BY KRISTINA SPAUDE, STUDENT MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO



*Anyone can slay a dragon, she told me, But try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. That's what takes a real hero.*

These words are from Brian Andreas, creator of StoryPeople, and one of my very favorite authors. His words ring in my mind: “Anyone can slay a dragon, she told me...” Maybe “dragon” means fear, or challenge, or stressor. I’d like to believe that everyone can overcome the obstacles that happen on their journeys if they have the support they need. It may just be true that anyone can slay a dragon, that this is something we are all capable of doing.

But the part I really love in this quote is the image of waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. How often do we wake up wishing for another ten minutes of sleep, anxious about the test or report or call or whatever Hard Thing that we have to deal with that day, wondering how our money can make it through to the next deposit, worried about friends and loved ones who are ill?

What would our days be like if every day as we awoke our first thought was to love the world all over again? It is a choice, after all. Of course, if it were easy to follow through with this all day every day, the world would be a lot less challenging place for us and for spiritual growth. Loving

the world all over again every day—that’s what takes a real hero.

When we think about the words “courage” and “hero,” we may not think of ourselves. We are the heroes of our own stories, though, and we may even have heroic moments in the stories of others. Seeing ourselves as heroes is a choice. Being courageous is also a choice: it is being afraid but doing—or not doing—something anyway. Fear is a required part of courage; if there is no fear, it isn’t courage.

Courage has many faces, but all of them share a truth: courage reveals our authentic self. Hemingway said that “Courage is grace under pressure.” Courage may not always be graceful, but it does let us see a part of ourselves that, without the act of confronting fears, we might not have otherwise seen or known. That pressure (whatever it is that we are confronting) creates situations in which we express who we are, who we know ourselves to be. Courage comes from somewhere deep within, calling us to be our best selves. Although we know that there may be painful consequences, courage calls us to do what we feel is the right thing, even if we are afraid—afraid of messing up, of saying the wrong thing, of the consequences, of being out of our comfort zones.

Courage is getting a heart disease diagnosis and deciding to change your diet and lifestyle, ultimately changing your life. Courage is taking your beloved pet to the vet for their final visit. Courage is applying for that dream job or to school and uprooting your life to make it work. Courage is walking into the room of a chronically angry, unappeasable patient to offer care *again*. Courage is reaching out to connect with that friend you lost touch with years ago. Courage is telling your two little girls that their father is going to die, and doing the things you promised him you would do. Courage is moving your mother, father, husband, sibling, child into assisted living or hospice because

you can no longer take care of them yourself.

Courage is asking for help when you need it. Courage is looking again for hope where you don’t see any. Courage is singing, even off-key, but with your full voice at church. Courage is going in for that medical test or procedure. Courage is welcoming the stranger. Courage is saying, “I’m sorry, I messed up. Can you forgive me?” Courage is being human instead of trying to be perfect. Courage is admitting, “This is really hard and I don’t know what to do.” Courage is being willing to try new things and make mistakes. Courage is trusting ourselves. Courage is waking up every morning and choosing to bless the world.

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*“Anyone can slay a dragon, she told me, But try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. That’s what takes a real hero.”*

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Living with a courageous heart is an aspiration, an intention, a way to be with ourselves and the world. It is something we will fall short of—from time to time or often—because we are human, because sometimes our minds or bodies, our hearts or spirits will hurt. And that’s okay. There will be times that we will miss the mark. There will be those times when we aren’t everything we know we can be. We won’t have the energy, or feel we don’t have the courage to spare.

These will be the times when we allow others to be heroes, to live that part of our story with courageous hearts and so extend us grace. In that way, by being willing to be seen as our most vulnerable selves, we become courageous, and learn to love the world all over again. ■



## Standing Like a Tree



BY VICTORIA SAFFORD,  
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CHURCH, MAHTOMEDI,  
MINNESOTA

Perhaps you remember the story about Antoinette Tuff. She's the woman in Atlanta, Georgia, who was working in the main office of an elementary school when a man burst in with an automatic rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition. Everyone got out, thanks to her. No one was hurt, because she talked to the man, and he heard her, and she talked to the police outside through the 911 operator, and they heard her, too. The chief of police in Atlanta said there is no question that this could have been, and almost was, another Newtown, CT. But it wasn't, thanks to her.

There is a recording of the 911 call placed by Antoinette Tuff from her office. In it, you can clearly hear how she's speaking at once to the operator and to the man by her side with the rifle, conveying his demands and his questions, his intention to kill dozens of people. You can hear her relaying back responses from the police, who by now number in the hundreds outside the school with helicopters, weapons and riot gear; how without fail she addresses him as "sir," so naturally, with no tremor or hypocrisy at all, the way she might address a teacher in the school, or a parent, or the principal, with plain decency, southern courtesy; how at some point in that eternal 13 minutes, "sir" became "baby:"

*What's your name, baby?* Michael. Michael Hill. *My mother was a Hill!* (This is an African American bookkeeper, speaking like this to a young white man in Georgia, who's just told her he's mentally unstable and off his medication—a man with a serious weapon who's just said he has nothing left to live for and means to start shooting any minute.)

She says to him, *I know. We all go through something in life. I almost*

*committed suicide myself last year when my husband left me, but I didn't and look at me now. It's gonna be all right, baby. You're gonna be all right. They're not gonna shoot you. We're not gonna hate you. That's a brave thing you're doing, giving yourself up. I'm proud of you.*

She said this after she got him to lie down and lay his gun aside, assuring him that she would stay standing when the police came in so they would know he hadn't hurt her. She said, *I love you. You're all right*, all the while calling him *Michael*, calling him *baby* and *sweetie* and *sweetheart* and *sir*.

That woman stood her ground that day. Like the tree that the poet Howard Nemerov describes, she was a giant,

*steady as a rock and always  
trembling,  
her Being deceptively armored, her  
Becoming deceptively  
vulnerable...  
To be so tough, and take the light so  
well,  
Freely providing forbidden  
knowledge  
Of so many things about heaven and  
earth  
For which we should otherwise  
have no word—  
...people are rarely [this] lovely,  
And even when they have great  
qualities  
They tend to tell you rather than  
exemplify  
What they believe themselves  
to be about...*

What is your life about?

Like oak, like willow, like sycamore, this woman Antoinette Tuff exemplified in every gesture what she's all about. As one writer said about the episode, "Religion in practice is always more beautiful than religion in words."

In the days that followed, a talk show psychologist praised Ms. Tuff, telling CNN that she had deployed excellent

instrumental strategy and an exemplary negotiating style. All this may be true, but she herself had a different explanation and it involved no strategy at all, and it was certainly not about her "style." She said that what got her through was the teaching of her church to "anchor on the Lord in tough times."

She anchored on the Lord. The person who sent me the article sent a question in her email: *What could that mean for us? What does that mean? The love she talks about sounds a lot like Universalism, like standing on the side of love, but how are we to talk about it?*

"Anchor on the Lord" may sound a little churchy to you, or a little too religious, or a lot; too old-fashioned, too theistic, too Baptist, too Christian. So what would you call it? What *do* you call it, standing up in what Ms. Tuff called "tough times?" What do you call that courage, that radical love, radical empathy, radical grace? What holds your moral roots in place? What holds you to your highest aspiration, your deepest truth, your calling, your longing, your conviction?

Good religion requires good language, clear thinking, but you can't over-think it, or you might miss your moment, trying to reason it out. In Antoinette Tuff's situation, there wasn't time. Reason and logic could have understandably led to panic, but she wasn't looking for logic, and she wasn't praying for courage or strength, safety or strategy, quick wit or a way out.

She was praying, she said afterwards, for sufficient love, love large enough to hold Michael, to see the other person in the room, whatever the circumstance, not as a "deranged gunman," nor even as a threat, but ever and always as a human being, someone with a story and a struggle, just like her, and also singular, a child of God, a person full of his own worth and dignity.

The only thing at risk that day was her integrity, and she would not relinquish it. She would not be moved. ■

## The Courage to Endure

BY CHAPLAIN (CPT) GEORGE TYGER

One of the things I miss most about home is having a comfortable place to sit. It isn't something most people think about, but over time, it becomes more and more important. Cushioned seats make a big difference. As I travel around, rarely do I find a soft place to sit. Soldiers do the best they can with what they have. However, you can only do so much with plywood and two-by-fours. Most of the discomforts of deployment are small, like plywood seats, but month after month, they add up.

It is easy to pray for things to be better, or different, or just easier. In my experience, these prayers are rarely answered. I don't think prayer works that way anyway. The power of prayer does not lie in its ability to change the

world we live in as much as in its potential to change we who live in the world.

Too often, wishing or praying for things to be different leads only to frustration and a downward spiral of negative thoughts and emotions. There are some things that will not change. Confronted with these hard realities, it is better to seek courage to face them than to hope in vain for a miracle.

This courage to endure is more difficult to find than the courage required for a one-time act of heroism. This everyday courage to drive on day in, day out requires more than overcoming fear. It requires us to overcome ourselves.

Maybe you never imagined yourself as courageous. Maybe you see your work as mundane. You are not out kicking down doors, grabbing up bad guys, or

stopping the next spectacular attack. Even on a combat deployment, very few of us here are doing any of those things. But that does not mean that what you do does not require a real kind of courage, the kind of courage that gets you out of bed every morning and gives you the power to keep going late into the night.

This courage may not get you a medal. It may go unnoticed. Yet perseverance in spite of all the reasons you could find to give up is something to be proud of. It is this kind of courage that completes the mission and brings us safely home. ■

*From War Zone Faith: An Army Chaplain's Reflections from Afghanistan, published by Skinner House Books in 2013, and available through the UUA bookstore (800-215-9076 or [www.uuabookstore.org](http://www.uuabookstore.org)).*

## Carrying the Wasp

BY SUZYN SMITH WEBB,  
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In theory, courage is a good thing. One of the best things.

As Screwtape, the Senior Devil in *The Screwtape Letters* puts it: *We [in hell] have made men proud of most vices, but not of cowardice. Whenever we have almost succeeded in doing so, the Enemy [God] permits a war or an earthquake or some other calamity, and at once courage becomes so obviously lovely and important even in human eyes that all our work is undone, and there is still at least one vice of which they feel genuine shame....*

As a matter of practice, the truth is more complex. Bill Maher pointed out that the 9/11 bombers were not cowards. In the days after 9/11, the President was calling the terrorists "cowards," but, as Maher noted, one can say a lot of things about a man who purposefully crashes a plane that he himself is inside, but that he's

a coward shouldn't be one of them.

But it's not just that courage can be used for evil. I don't think courage counts unless you're actually using it for good. One time I was having lunch with a friend and her children and one of the children was stung by a wasp. The crying child crawled onto his mother's lap. The wasp, still in shock itself, fluttered down onto a napkin on the table. We watched in silence.

"It would be nice if *somebody* got rid of that wasp," my friend said. She picked up the napkin, wasp still inside, and held it out to me. The judgment was implied. If I didn't get rid of it, I was inconsiderate of a mother who needed to be tending to her child. Annoyance creased her face.

Angry wasp—with the potential to put me in anaphylactic shock? Or friend who thinks less of me? Tough call.

I took the wasp. Holding the edges of the napkin as if it contained explosive material, I took the unhappy critter outside, set it down on the table and watched, quivering, until it flew away.

Carrying the wasp, though it involved facing one of my fears, was not an act of courage. I didn't do it to help the child or the mother. I did it because as a grown woman, I was embarrassed not to. Something one does for someone else's approval cannot count as a courageous act.

When I was a small child, maybe ten years old, my brother sat next to a wasp nest and got something like twenty stings. He ran into the living room, hysterical. Being a well-meaning, if not terribly bright child, I went running out and grabbed the blankie he'd left behind, calming him considerably, *and* getting six or eight stings for myself. I did that because it was the only thing I could think of that would make him feel better. It was worth facing down angry wasps to help him out.

That was courage. Of course, the stings I got and the resulting allergic reaction is how one develops a phobia that haunts one into adulthood. Nobody ever said virtue was easy. ■



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

The older I get, the crankier I am about fear. My own fear, other people's fear. I can see back across decades to all of the times when I have stood moving my lips soundlessly like the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz* while some disembodied voice thundered, "QUIET!" And, way too many times, I have obeyed that formless voice.

Audre Lorde wrote an essay entitled "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" right after her cancer diagnosis. In it, she said:

*In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality... what I most regretted were my silences... [times when I had] waited for someone else's words... Of what had I ever been afraid? I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.*

"Of what had I ever been afraid?" Lorde asks, and we could all give our answers. Physical pain, loss of important relationships, emotional shunning, humiliation, failure, torture, loss of jobs or money or stature, loss of comfort or privilege.... And because of our fear, as Lorde says so eloquently, we betray ourselves into small silences.

It's in those moments, in those small silences, that we need to summon courage to speak or to act. But in those terrified moments, silence or remaining frozen often feels like our safest choice, and we heed that disembodied voice that bellows, "QUIET!"

How do we defy that voice? How do we choose courage? I'm as scared as anyone, but when I think back on moments when I didn't give fear the final word, I can see that what helped me to

speak or act were connections. Connections to my own strength often come through my connections with other people's strength—people I know personally and people whose stories inspire me.

I have words that I call to mind from people I don't know, including Audre Lorde, from the same essay I referenced above. Her words ring out across the years, and her eventual death from cancer only sharpens them:

*Perhaps... I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?*

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### How do we choose courage?

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Sometimes I imagine Audre Lorde asking me, *Are you doing your work?* Her presence, in that question, brings with it the risks she took throughout her life, crossing borders and pushing boundaries. Her life's work gives me courage to live my own.

Sometimes, in those terrified moments, I've imagined a time later, when I'm "safe" again, telling people who love me the story of a particular, frightening, moment and what I did with it. This makes me consider how I want my story to unfold, what stories I'd like to be able to tell about myself. It also reminds me that there are people who are, invisibly, with me, even when I am alone. Calling them to me can give me courage.

Unitarian Universalism has allowed me to know many people of courage whom I can call to mind when I am afraid. Folks like June Barrett. June and her husband, Lt. Col. James Barrett, were providing escort support to Dr. John Britton as part of their volunteer service in the UU Congregation in Pensacola Florida in 1994. An anti-abortion zealot shot all three of them as

they drove into a clinic where Britton would provide medical services including abortions. Jim Barrett and John Britton died immediately; June pretended to be dead until medical service personnel came and took her to the hospital. She had shrapnel in her body until she died in 2011.

I had the privilege of spending time with June in our work for reproductive justice. She told me that as she lay feigning her own death, knowing that her husband was dead, she recommitted her life to work for women's access to abortion. Rather than take this experience as a reason to back off and stay safe, it gave her more courage and clarified for her even more sharply what it meant to do her own work.

I hope I will never have to face what June faced, but there have been plenty of times when I have drawn on her courage to help me go forward. I take courage by drawing upon relationships, drawing strength from my connection with others who exhibit it. And I notice that the more courage I exhibit myself, the stronger those connections become.

It is my deepest wish that the unique and widely dispersed community that is the Church of the Larger Fellowship builds courage from the ingredients found here—from the words, the thoughts, the deeds of others whom you may never personally know, or from connections with those you meet. Just as ours is not a faith that holds that our sins were atoned for by the death of Jesus on the cross, we also believe that each person must do their own work in life, manifest their own courage.

May you find courage to do the work that is uniquely yours to do on this fragile planet. May you speak when words are needed, and be boldly silent when that is called for. May you know the deep care and connections that are everywhere around you, holding you in place no less surely than planets are held in their orbits. And may you hear the stars sing hallelujah when you dare to do and be exactly what is yours. ■

## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

A few months back 17-year-old Malala Yousafzai became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. I expect that you've heard Malala's remarkable story—how she was shot in the head by the Taliban for advocating for the right for girls and women in Pakistan to get an education. And how, after long treatment, she has regained her ability to speak, and is continuing to use that voice to speak out for peace and justice and human rights.

There is no doubt in my mind that Malala is an extremely courageous young woman. I can't even imagine the kind of guts that it takes to stand up for your rights when there are people with guns who are prepared to keep you—and your friends—from getting access to something as basic as the right to an education. But there's something else that stands out for me about Malala's courage. Really, she was just going to school.

She was just going to school, like millions of other kids around the world. Kids who manage to learn in refugee camps. Kids who get to school even though they have no home and had no breakfast to start the day. Kids who know that as soon as they get to recess they will have to face a bully. Kids who can only get to school by walking down streets where people regularly get shot. Kids with learning disabilities or anxiety disorders or medical challenges who feel like it's hard just getting through the day. Kids who are trying to fit in their school work around taking care of little brothers and sisters. Kids who are trying to keep it together while their parents are getting a divorce or are dealing with mental or physical illness.

Around the world, millions of kids show the most extraordinary courage just walking through the door of a



schoolroom. And that's not even counting the courage of children who stand up to bullies when they see someone else is threatened.

Or who ask a question when they're afraid they'll look stupid. Or walk up to someone they don't know at lunchtime to ask if they're OK.

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**That's what courage is: the point where weakness, fear and hopelessness die....**

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The reality is that even the people who show the most remarkable kinds of courage—the ones who face down the guns—are doing pretty much the same thing as those of us who exhibit the kinds of ordinary courage that will never get you a Nobel Peace Prize. They do what has to be done. They take the next step. They refuse to get stuck in the way things are because they can see that there is a better place, and they know that the only way to get to that better place is to keep putting one foot in front of the other.



The courage part is not so much in the choice to walk past the people carrying guns as it is in the choice to keep walking. As Malala walked to school each day, she didn't know

that small-minded people would really be so afraid of educated women that they would actually try to kill her. Her courage as a teenage girl dedicated to women's rights in a country that wanted to deny her full personhood was remarkable. But the truly extraordinary courage comes in the fact that her suffering has only made her more determined to keep working for human rights for all people. Her experience of violence has only made her more committed to the cause of peace.

In a speech to the United Nations—her first public speech after the attack—Malala said:

*Dear Friends, on the 9th of October 2012, the Taliban shot me on the left side of my forehead. They shot my friends, too. They thought that the bullets would silence us. But they failed. And then, out of that silence came thousands of voices. The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born. I am the same Malala. My ambitions are the same. My hopes are the same. My dreams are the same.*

That's what courage sounds like: the thousands of voices that cry out from the silence. That's what courage looks like: a girl standing to speak. That's what courage is: the point where weakness, fear and hopelessness die, because you know that the only real choice is to keep moving forward in the direction of your ambitions and hopes and dreams.

My friends, may strength and power and courage be born again and again throughout all of your truly remarkable journeys toward your dreams. ■

**“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”**

—T. S. Eliot

We want to risk going too far, risk growing too big. Because it means that more people in need receive a message of UU hope, compassion, and love. Help us take the risk of growing by making a contribution of \$100 or giving what you can, by visiting [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org) or by calling 800-231-3027. Because of you, the CLF has become a thriving and growing congregation. Help us keep going! ■



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That you can join a lively conversation on the theme of this issue in a Facebook group? Search for CLF Quest Monthly Theme Group on Facebook.

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When things fall apart and we can't get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working ...this is our chance to come out of our self-protecting bubble and to realize that we are never alone...Deep down in the human spirit there is a reservoir of courage. It is always available, waiting to be discovered. ■

*From Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears, by Pema Chödrön, edited by Sandy Boucher, published by Shambhala in 2011.*

