



*Being a reader my whole life and allowed by both of my parents to choose what I wanted to read, I have a foundational belief that children and young adults have a right to choose what they read.*

## Everyday Bravery

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It is easy to recognize bravery in first responders who rush toward a burning fire or rising flood waters to rescue people. However, we often miss the everyday bravery of the people around us. Yet, the bravery we observe every day tends to have a more profound impact on us. Throughout this issue you will see similar definitions for bravery: courage is the willingness to confront adversity, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation.

My mother, a great influence in my life, modeled this kind of bravery every day. A victim of polio as a child, she had to learn to walk again with the added impediment of one leg being a bit longer than the other and each foot a different size. All her life she struggled with her balance and the challenge of shoe shopping. She never let that get in her way of doing what she wanted to do. Mom played basketball in high school, learned to play the organ (which had lots of foot pedals), and loved to dance. Bravery confronted adversity.

Born in the fifties, I grew up in Little Rock. Too young to understand integration and what was happening at Little Rock Central High School, I did notice that my mother started having tea parties. The purpose of the tea parties was to develop personal relationships and strategize ways to end segregation. These tea parties were my first encounters with African American women and children. I didn't pay a lot of attention to the conversations among the women, but I enjoyed playing with the children and eating the cookies. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I realized the courage it must have taken for my mother to

invite African Americans into my very white middle-class neighborhood, and for those women to come to our house. Bravery confronted intimidation and bigotry.

After I left home for college, my mother decided to go back to school to get her Master's degree in music. To earn extra money, my mother accompanied other music majors on the piano. This led to a gig accompanying some participants in the Miss Gay Arkansas pageant, and she continued to play the piano for their talent portion of the pageant for several years as well as acting as a voice coach for contestants. These activities led to an increased circle of gay friends who could often be found at our house visiting their honorary mother. This was the seventies, and a middle-aged woman having gay friends was not exactly looked upon with great favor. Again, bravery confronted intimidation and bigotry.

My mother's example of everyday bravery helped me get through a multiple-book challenge at the high school a number of years ago where I was one of the two librarians. This challenge was very public and resulted in negative letters to the editor and columns in the local paper as well as ugly phone calls. The prosecuting attorney was approached with a request to have us arrested as purveyors of pornography. It was very difficult to show up every day in the library when facing so much negativity. Sound familiar?

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a right to choose what they read. As a school librarian, it was my responsibility in collection development to balance what was appropriate for my students and what they wanted or needed to read. In this issue Lia Fisher-Janosz discusses in her article finding courage in curation as well as providing a safe, nonjudgmental space in the school library. The school library, being the heart of the school, is where kindness and caring can be modeled and encouraged.

Providing a safe school library to give students the opportunity to be brave as they explore new ideas and experiences is the subject of Ashley Hawkins's article. Students need support as they struggle with their gender or sexual identity, being bullied, or just figuring out how they fit in their world. Ashley shares examples of her students finding the bravery to be themselves, to take leadership roles, and to protect their community through civic engagement.

Although Julie Stivers makes no claim to being a brave person, her article discusses the importance of being present for our students, and creating an inclusive library. While I have always felt that student voice is important and should be honored, Julie has taken it a step further. In her article, she describes a student-led professional development for school librarians that she created with three of her students. This professional development focuses on a framework for building inclusive libraries. Julie may not view herself as being brave, but being *here* for our students sometimes requires taking a risk, and that *is* brave.

Today's political climate is fraught with dangers for school librarians: legislating what we can't teach, what we can't have in library collections, and criminalizing school librarians. It takes bravery to fight against the efforts to limit the resources and learning opportunities

that our students can access through the school library. Arlene Laverde walks us through her journey to testify in front of the New York State Assembly's Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology. Her advocacy for effective school libraries that are led by certified school librarians as being crucial to equity and inclusion is an inspiring example of bravery.

My mother did not necessarily consider herself a brave person, but she did try to live her life with kindness and acceptance towards all. Just as my mother influenced me with her everyday bravery, the authors in this issue can inspire us with examples of their own and their students' everyday bravery. In preparing for this column, I spent some time looking for quotes about bravery. This one by Jasmine Guy, an American actress (Whitley Gilbert-Wayne in *A Different World*, a spinoff from *The Cosby Show*) best encapsulates the theme of this issue: "I believe people who practice their beliefs in daily life are activists." I would add that they are also brave.

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