

“*The Many Faces of Courage*”

by Barbara Bonner

“Courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all others possible.”
—Aristotle

While my books, *Inspiring Generosity* and *Inspiring Courage*, are most obviously focused on the two virtues in their titles, another important player at work in these books is the power of inspiration.

In writing about both generosity and courage, my goal was to offer my readers moments of unanticipated inspiration that would crack open their understanding of these qualities and move them into a new place in their lives, changed by that inspired experience.

Easier said than done.

While I have spent years studying courage, I was certain that any kind of summary of what I had learned—a treatise, tome or dissertation—would do little to inspire readers toward a personal lightning-bolt moment of insight and revelation.

And so I turned to the three sources that had truly inspired me in my own explorations.

I offer up over 100 quotations from the world’s greatest thinkers, looking at courage through many distinctive lenses—wise, funny, spiritual, philosophical, historic, artistic, religious, eccentric.

Many value this book for its collection of poems whose focus is courage. Poets are perennially drawn to the subject of courage because it touches us at our deepest core, speaking to the very essence of what it means to be alive. Since literature is such an important part of my own life, finding the 30 poems that I felt were most inspiring was a real joy. And limiting myself to 30 was real torture. I include some truly magnificent poetry by a very diverse bunch indeed: Maya Angelou, Wendell Berry, Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Amelia Earhart (yes, really), Marie Howe, Langston Hughes, Donald Justice, Rudyard Kipling (I had to include the great “If”), Yusef Komunyakaa, Philip Levine and Mary Oliver, among many others.

And finally, I turned to stories of courage that have inspired me. One of the unanticipated discoveries in my work on courage was the vast spectrum of ways in which courage shows up in our lives in unexpected ways.

Reconciliation can take courage. Deciding not to fight can sometimes be as courageous as charging into battle. Activism and ferociously committing one’s life to benefit others can tap into great courage. Standing up to bullies and terrorists requires courage, as does

undergoing surgery and cancer treatments, and giving birth. Falling in love and creating art are both courageous in their own ways. Learning a new skill, starting a business and athletic achievement can require determined courage. There is tremendous courage in comforting the dying, asking for help and taking great risks for great causes. Living with compassion and an open heart can require courage of a different stripe. In my own life, I'm learning the courage required by aging.

Among the profiles I offer in the book, I was honored to share the story of Debi Jackson, a conservative Southern Baptist from Alabama, whose courage was the greatest gift she could offer her three-year-old transgender daughter as they navigated largely uncharted territory together, with love and courage as their guides.

I love the story of Tim DeChristopher, who, as a young student at the University of Utah, surprised himself by standing up against powerful corporate forces in a radical move to protect the environment—a move that put him in prison for two years.

The author of one thousand articles as the *New York Times* correspondent in Tehran, journalist Nazila Fathi spent years risking her life to report to the world the truth of what was happening in her native country, and ultimately escaped in the middle of the night with her young family—as 15 sharpshooters waited for her with orders for her execution.

And who can resist the inspiration of the great swimmer Diana Nyad, who, at the age of 64, after 35 years of trying and four failures, walked onto the beach in Key West after swimming 111 miles in 53 hours nonstop from Cuba—the first person to achieve this milestone without a shark cage to protect her?

In offering this buffet of quotations, poems and stories, my hope is to inspire readers' inner courage, so its transformative power may light their way.