

"A Phoenix Rising From the Ashes"

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9.24.12

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau once exclaimed that "Virtue is a state of war, and to live in it we have always to combat with ourselves¹." The virtue of courage has given meaning to my life while in a constant war with my inner fears. Plagued by uneasiness all of my life, I find it liberating that it can change with a simple act of bravery. This gives me hope that my desires for tranquility, love and happiness will come true in spite of what I've faced throughout my life. Valor has shifted my view of how to live with anxieties and fears that has controlled my life by allowing me to exit my circle of comfort.

My experiences with my Student Congress team in high school best represents how I stepped out of my comfort zone and courageously faced my fears. A University of Waterloo report from July of this year reported that people with low self-esteem were more comfortable stating their views online than in face-to-face interactions². At the beginning of high school, I developed strong interest in politics. However, since I was extremely anxious to talk about my views in person, I only posted online with a computer screen to give me false comfort. I felt uncomfortable on speaking to others, even on politics. One day, I joined a team called Student Congress. At my first tournament, I was the worst performing member in my team. I stuttered my words, moved my hands erratically, shook the paper I had in my hand, made no eye contact, and struggled with questions asked by others. As I sat down after my only speech, I felt devastation, sadness and fear. However, at my next tournament, I decided enough was enough. I knew that I could not live in a state of worry, so I confidently delivered more speeches than any team member. If I confronted my anxieties, then I would improve my abilities in both speaking and thinking. Over the season, I developed both talents. I qualified for the State Championships and I finally felt the passion that I yearned for all my life. For the next four years, I qualified to the State and National Championships and captained my team to being the best in my league. It was magnificent to get away from a computer screen and see how much potential I possessed. I had sacrificed the status quo using valor to understand that there were

doors that could be open to find hidden talents I never believed existed.

My musical ability was controlled by a dominant anxiety that was vanquished by my courage to fully express my feelings in my heart. Today, I can play “Hangar 18” by Megadeth or “Bohemian Rhapsody” by Queen to my friends and family on guitar. However, a few years ago I would have never suspected that I could play either of these difficult songs. While in the 7th grade, I became interested in my local school band and I chose to play the saxophone. I felt fearful with the instrument and always failed to play a short passage correctly. At the end of the year, we had our first concert to play in and I was extremely nervous that a crowd of people that would listen to me. On the night of the concert, I could not play a simple note no matter how hard my instructor tried to help me. I played so atrociously that I refused to pick up an instrument after that. For the next two years, I received jokes on how terrible my musical ability was by so-called friends and I became depressed that I could never translate my feelings with an instrument. In my sophomore year of high school, however, I became extremely interested in a beginner brass class. I joined the class and chose the baritone horn to play. I played the baritone the same way I played the saxophone and I nearly decided to give up. My instructor suggested that I was more suited towards the tuba and I hesitantly accepted. Immediately, I felt comfortable with the instrument and played superbly. I joined the concert band the following year and became the top player in my section, while looking forward to every concert. At my instructor’s request, I also joined the Jazz band and felt all the fears leave my mind as I played a confident rhythm in the trombone section. I never played the trombone before so to immediately feel confident was a significant start. By far, the greatest reinforcement to my courage was playing in front of audience in Italy. To go from being the worst performer in my middle school band to being a great rhythm player in my jazz ensemble and concert band made me reconsider my fears on other instruments I wished to play. I once played on a guitar, but decided to stop after I felt I was never going to get better. With my new found confidence, I

picked up the instrument once more and began to see vast improvements to my ability. I often refer to author Tim Gallaway's formula on how overall performance is equal to potential minus interference to show what changed within me³. As of now, I can boast that my musical fears have diminished because I limited the interference that has constantly been a part of my playing. The valor I felt in allowing my sound to be heard by others in spite of what I have been through made me reconsider what else I should change about my life.

Even today, I still face challenges against my deepest fears and anxieties on joining social movements or gatherings that impede my growth to control my life for the better. When I was young, my friends used to be imaginary and I felt that I could never make any friends or join any cliques. As I grew up, I focused on heading home to relax in my small bubble as I played games to distract myself. While the world faced growing concerns that needed people to address it, I stayed home playing as video games and defeating all enemies I came across. Yet, I couldn't even bother to face the enemy within me or around the world. As Jeff Buckley, a musical role model once stated in the song "Eternal Life", "When will I find the strength to bring me relief?"⁴ I was often asked to go to a movement that dealt with a political issue. Strangely enough, I refused to go because of such strong fears that dictated my every move. But I realized that through my experiences in Student Congress and music, that I was inhibiting my potential. I joined a local group in high school called PS 4 Volunteers that helped low-income and special needs children. However, I slowly regressed to my fearful and quiet act and once had a child remark to me if I at all spoke. I never became fully active with the program and felt numerous regrets. Recently, I decided that I can't continue to live in a world full of fear and I am proud to state that I am becoming active within Queens College through the school newspaper, Socialist Alternative and Student Government. I've felt hesitant at times to carry out measures with these groups, but I know that I have to sacrifice these fears in order to fulfill my deepest desires to ensure a world that I desire. The world is a beautiful garden that needs passionate

gardeners. I've always regretted never joining a social group but I always know there is enough time to change these habits. I feel proud that I'll participate in my first protest with Socialist Alternative against all fears that tell not to. I'm making many friends through these organizations and feel interested in gatherings with others. Valor has brought so much change to my life in terms of collectivism that I'm starting to feel empowered against the troubles that have withheld stability in my life

A personal hero of mine, Bill Hicks, once stated that "life is just a ride⁵".

Throughout my life, I felt consumed by fears, anxieties, and judgments by others. But now I realize, through the power of courage, that life is a ride. Courage excites a feeling like no other virtue when we see how our individualism can be intertwined with our world around us. When valor arises, my thoughts turn into what I should do next, rather than the "what ifs" that used to plague my mind. My mind has faced a significant battle over many areas and I know that in the end it was well worth fighting forth. There were lost causes, but there are victories that I am proud to share to inspire me for another day. I leave my life of fear to a life of courage as I make a new home out of my old comfort zone and into the great world beyond.

Work-Cited

¹ "Jean-Jacques Rousseau." *Thinkexist*. N.p., 2012. Web. 27 Sep 2012. <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/virtue_is_a_state_of_war-and_to_live_in_it_we/15366.html>

² Nauert, Rick. "Facebook May Be Harmful to Self-Esteem." *PsychCentral*. n. page. Web. 27 Sep. 2012. <<http://psychcentral.com/news/2012/02/03/facebook-may-be-harmful-to-self-esteem/34421.html>>

³ Gallaway, Tim. *The Inner Game*. N.p., 2012. Web. 27 Sep 2012. <<http://theinnergame.com/>>.

⁴ Buckley, Jeff, perf. *Eternal Life*. Prod. Andy Wallace. Sony Music Corporation, 1994. Videocassette. 27 Sep 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFgHy-ia8RM>>

⁵ Hicks, Bill. *Love All the People*. Constable, 2005. eBook.