

THE COLOR OF COURAGE

By Eva Starr

Courage is similar to a box of Crayola crayons – it comes in a variety of colors, sizes and shapes. We all start with a box of eight primary colors in the jumbo size. Next are the slim jims with a set of sweet sixteen. For the eclectic group, there is the neon box that lights up the sky. There are the glitter Crayolas to add sparkle to your world and finally the multi-colored box of 64, with colors such as periwinkle and magenta.

The latest color to be added to the Crayola box is courage. Yes, that's right. The inspiration for this color came from a courageous group of kids fighting cancer and other catastrophic illnesses at St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. Crayola asked children all over the country, "If courage were a color what would it look like?" Over 120 different hues were viewed. Thousands voted and the color chosen to represent the spirit of courage is...drum roll please, scarlet!

For a substantial number of us, hearing the word courage makes us think of some of the world's greatest leaders who stood for courage. Names like John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Cleopatra, Catherine the Great and Jesus Christ come to mind. No doubt these men and women exhibited courage throughout their lifetimes, but let's explore the sometimes overlooked facets of courage.

It takes strength to stand guard and courage to let down your guard, showing your vulnerability and allowing someone to peek into your soul. Let us not use strength to conquer the world but courage to surrender. How often have you fought for something just to fight instead of surrendering and admitting that you don't, in fact, have all the answers? For myself, I've never blended into the woodwork or fit into society's mold or the parameters my family set for me. I stood out like a black sheep and I'm proud of it, for it takes strength to fit in and courage to stand out.

How about the courage it takes our children to walk away from the bully on the playground, or to withstand the ridi-

cule of their peers? What about the courage to say no to drugs or alcohol and to be the only one at the party who doesn't fit in? I can remember when my youngest daughter was about seven-years-old. We lived in the bottom of a double house in Lakewood. The picnic table in the backyard belonged to the couple living upstairs. At the time, she was playing on it and chipped a piece of the wood. It took all the courage in the world for that little girl to march upstairs and confess to the mishap. Chances are the couple would never have noticed, but I was teaching her at the time about being responsible for your actions.

I've spent quite a bit of time in the Social Services field working with abused teenagers, children and women suffering from domestic violence. One of the countless lessons I learned from my work with victims is that it takes strength to endure abuse, but far more courage to stop it. Let's recognize the tremendous courage it takes for thousands of people to speak up and stop the cycle of domestic violence. It takes courage to sit in a courtroom as a child, or an adult, look your abuser straight in the eye, and tell the truth.

It takes stamina to feel a friend's pain and courage to feel your own pain. How many of us hide behind our afflictions, stuffing them, refusing to go deep inside and sit with them, for however long that may be. Next time you want to run from your pain, or cover it up with yet another addiction, I challenge you to sit with your ache. Sit alone in the dark with your wounds, talk to them, feel the pain, allow it to speak to you...really listen to your hurt. I guarantee you will never be the same again. Now that my dear friend takes courage.

It takes strength to love, but how many of us have the courage to allow ourselves to be loved? Scary isn't it? How about looking in the mirror and speaking words of self-love out loud to yourself. In the coaching work that I do, I can attest that looking in the mirror and saying, "I love and accept you exactly as you are," takes more courage than the average Joe can muster. My clients tell me that for them, this one single exercise is the hardest thing they've ever done. So if you're one of the mirror graduates, give yourself a round of applause for the courage it took you to get to that far.

As some of you are aware, I left Cleveland last December and traveled 3000 miles across the country to San Diego. I left behind 52 years of my life, friends and family to follow my passion. I headed toward an uncertain future: no job, no place to live, no savings in the bank and with full understanding that I knew only one person in the whole state of California. I traveled alone with only the belongings that would fit in my automobile, hitting one ice storm after another.

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There were times I sat crying in a bathtub in a seedy motel room in a neighborhood that looked like something out of "Psycho," thinking I'm not going to make it. Following one's dream, throwing logic and reason out the window on the wings of a prayer takes courage. It takes strength to survive and courage to live. Ask yourself if you are merely surviving or do you have the courage to live the life you dare to live?

In your box of Crayola crayons what color is your courage? Go ahead and invent a new color of courage all your own...maybe someday they'll name a crayon after you.

Eva Starr's spiritual journey has taken her coast-to-coast studying the various schools of thought. Starr has recently relocated to San Diego, CA. Visit reachforthemoon.net for up-dates or to be added to her mailing list. Contact Eva Starr at evastarr24@yahoo.com 440-930-8865 for speaking engagements.

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