

Bravery is not a contest

By [E. Carrington Heath](#)

June 8, 2015

Last week Caitlyn Jenner's picture appeared on the front cover of *Vanity Fair*. Immediately people online began to juxtapose her photo next to photos of veterans and first responders, saying that "real bravery" looked like the latter, and that Caitlyn was not brave.

I reject that false dichotomy. Bravery is not something that only those who have been in certain experiences can claim. Rather, bravery is the manner in which we respond to situations that occur in our lives. Some make the front pages. Most do not. Here is where I have seen bravery in my life and my work as a pastor:

Bravery is my father putting his family on a plane in Saigon in 1965 while he stayed behind. And bravery is my mother, 26 years old with two small children, waiting in the aftermath of an explosion in Vietnam for a call that took days to come telling her that her husband was alive.

Bravery is the police officer who walks the streets every day. And bravery is the police officer who turns a partner in for brutality.

Bravery is the person who finally stands up to a bully. And bravery is the bully who faces who they have become and chooses to change.

Bravery is walking into your first AA meeting and saying, "I'm an alcoholic." And bravery is the family member who finally refuses to bail someone out again.

Bravery is the politician who votes for an unpopular bill, even though they know it will cost them the election. And bravery is the citizen who lobbies for a bill they know will never be passed.

Bravery is the woman who gets up and goes to work despite the crushing depression. And bravery is the man who goes to the ER after days of a manic episode and says, "I need help."

Bravery is going to war when asked. And bravery is saying your conscience will not let you do so.

Bravery is a bunch of gay and trans folks seeking shelter together in a bar named Stonewall in 1969. And bravery is the young man who tells his evangelical parents, "I'm gay."

Bravery is the woman who lives every day fighting PTSD from that time she was assaulted. And bravery is the man who talks about how once he was raped.

Bravery is allies standing up to bigots. And bravery is walking past armed men with guns so that you can pray in your own mosque.

Bravery is coming home from war. And bravery is the veteran who fights every day to stay alive.

Bravery is the firefighter who walks into their first burning building. And bravery is the family who picks up the pieces when their house burns down.

Bravery is watching your loved one's coffin being lowered into the ground. And bravery is saying you will try to keep other families from ever facing the same kind of loss.

Bravery is the trans man who injects testosterone into his thigh for the first time. And bravery is the trans woman who says, "Call me by my name."

Bravery is not a contest. Bravery is a choice. True bravery is often hard to find. When we see it, no matter where, it should always be applauded.

*Originally posted at [Heath's blog](#)*