

# February More Voices: Bravery

Category: Bravery

written by Paul Gross | February 1, 2025

Dear Readers,

It's winter of my senior year of college. I'm returning to my dorm one afternoon and am startled to see its three-story brick edifice almost hidden beneath a blizzard of bedsheets, banners and placards. Is this some kind of celebration?

Drawing closer, I make out the bold letters on these makeshift signs: "NO CO-EDS IN SAGE," "KEEP CO-HOGS OUT."

This isn't a party; it's a protest. My school, previously all-male, has only recently started accepting women. I'm stunned that this is causing a backlash—and honestly puzzled as to why anyone would object to welcoming women into a dorm.

As I walk past students in front of the dorm, someone thrusts a petition at me. I shake my head.

Up in my third-floor room, I pace. I can't go along with the banners—their sentiments or their hostility. But who would know that? Any passerby would assume that I felt the same.

Do I have the courage to speak out?

On the largest piece of cardboard I can find, I draw a female symbol (♀) in Magic Marker. In case the message isn't clear, I fashion a fist in the middle.

It so happens that my window is two floors above the dorm entrance, and that's where I post my sign.

It doesn't take long for people to notice. I hear angry voices from the crowd below.

"Hey, who put that sign up?"

"What the —?"

*"Whose room is that?"*

I nervously descend the stairs to face my detractors. These are intelligent students at a prestigious liberal-arts institution. I have hopes of a calm, polite discussion—the kind we have in seminars.

But no. After being yelled at and called a "faggot" by a large, intimidating individual who, I'm sure, could beat me to a pulp, I retreat to my room. My window is pelted with snowballs.

I feel vulnerable and afraid. At the same time, I feel as if the choice is clear. The sign stays up.

The crisis eventually passes, although for the rest of the school year, the large individual keeps calling me a faggot every time our paths cross—and when I offer insults in return, I do worry that one day he may decide to thrash me.

Was this the bravest thing I've ever done? Braver than starting medical school? Braver than facing my diagnosis of type 1 diabetes?

Probably—because it involved choice and standing up to a crowd. And it was scary.

As I read the news these days, I've been thinking about people who have no choice and who are frightened right now—like undocumented workers and trans individuals, who feel as if they have targets painted on their backs. Or anyone else who might be considered “DEI,” and therefore subjected to scorn.

This from yesterday's *Washington Post*:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention removed or edited references to transgender people, gender identity and equity from its website Friday, racing to meet a late-afternoon deadline imposed by the federal Office of Personnel Management.

Whole pages about HIV testing for transgender people, guidelines for use of HIV medication and information on supporting LGBTQ+ youth health were no longer available late Friday.

Will members of targeted groups be brave enough to withstand what lies ahead?

Will the rest of us be brave enough to offer compassionate support—and to speak up and stand with them?

*Pulse* is not a political journal, and I debated whether to reflect upon our national moment in this letter—but, like my youthful self in my single dorm room, I feel as if the choice is clear.

This month's *More Voices* theme is Bravery. I hope not to draw screeds of anger, anguish or protest, but I do hope you'll share stories of how you stood up for what was just and fair, how you or a loved one found the courage to combat or come back from illness, or how you found the strength to do what was best for a patient despite resistance from entrenched forces.

Share your story using the [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme: [Grit](#).

Remember, your story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you. And thank you for being a part of this caring community.

With warm regards,

Paul Gross  
Editor