

# Portraits of Persistence and Hope

Category: Bravery

written by Katharine Barnard | February 26, 2025

As a family doctor, I see acts of bravery every day. Not big, showy, public acts, but individual, ordinary acts. Acts by people who, in the face of adversity, choose to live and to believe in a future.

I can think of so many examples: Clara, alone in a triage room, learning her cervix is dilating only 26 weeks into her pregnancy, enduring another pelvic exam and the placement of an IV line. Maria, who lost her right arm to a gunshot wound, managing to live alone for 25 years, to inject her own insulin, to cook her dinners, to open her own mail. Angela, raising two boys alone after her partner was deported. Junior, entering recovery and facing memories of horrific abuse that were put to sleep for years by drink and drug. Valerie, a nurse whose severe rheumatoid arthritis is slowly shrinking her physical capabilities but not her mind. Every one of their paths requires some combination of the essential ingredients of bravery: fortitude, persistence, resourcefulness, and some measure of hope.

One day, leaving clinic, I pass one of my patients and her family as they walk to the bus station. Francine, slim-hipped and long-legged, takes quick, purposeful strides. She is close behind her husband, a tall and sturdy man who carries their 3-year-old on his back. In that moment, I have a vision of them crossing the high desert of Bolivia. It is tough for migrants there. Locals sell them overpriced bottles of water and forbid them from riding the buses. I imagine them walking through the jungles of Colombia, where strange animals howl in the nighttime. I imagine them wading through body-sucking mud and the raging rivers of the Darien Gap, and I wonder what death or horrors they saw in that place. Through all of this, they kept walking. Now they are here, and other threats are all around: economic hardship, politics, uncertain immigration status. Yet there they are, striding to the bus station, carrying on.

Continuing to move forward through adversity takes strength and persistence—and also hope. Francine is pregnant again. What could be more hopeful than a baby, and what more brave than bringing a baby into this world, this place, this moment in time.

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