

Searching for Activism

Category: Courage

written by Pamela Adelstein | March 13, 2022

My senior year in college, I took a course called Women and Radicalism. It was an exciting class. We studied radical movements on the left and right, with a focus on women's participation. The course featured a weekend retreat with women activists. For two days, women took the stage to describe their causes and advocacy roles. I attended many sessions, in awe of these phenomenal women who were making a difference in the world. I noted that most of them had been thrust into their cause by a personal adverse event, such as gun violence or an environmental catastrophe.

I wanted to be like these brave, strong women. To have the courage and conviction to stand up to the patriarchy and the persecutors. To have an impact. There was one problem. I didn't have a cause. Listening to these women overwhelmed me. There were so many issues to agitate about. How would I choose?

Then I realized the cause often finds the activist. Activists do not always go searching for a cause. I was just 20 years old, and a cause had not yet found me.

Since then, causes have presented themselves to me, in my work and in my parenting: issues like health-care access and safe spaces for LGBTQ people. I try to be an "upstander"—to speak up when I notice others are being hurt, disrespected, or put down. I strive to summon the courage and strength to stand bravely, voice my truth, and fight for good.

I have thought about the scale of the impact that an individual can have. When I care for patients, the impact is one person at a time. When I advocate at my children's schools or at my synagogue, the impact occurs on a slightly larger scale. When I advocate at a governmental level, the potential exists to touch many more individuals, but at the same time the personal touch is more distant; it's harder to measure the impact. I struggle with how to be the best advocate I can.

Tragically, there are many issues and places in the world where advocacy is needed now. Often it feels as if we are backsliding, losing ground to prior progress. I want a better world for our children. We need to give our them the tools so they, too, can advocate. We need to model courage and conviction and stand behind them.

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