

A time for
BRAVERY

*What
happens
when
Australia
chooses
courage
?*

edited by
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Contents

Editors' Note	1
Piero and the Heroes We Turn Away	5
<i>Yanis Varoufakis</i>	
Bravery Isn't Optional	11
<i>Craig Foster AM</i>	
On Bravery: If Not You, Then Who?	17
<i>Dr Sophie Scamps MP</i>	
Collective Ambition	23
<i>Ben Quilty</i>	
The Floor Between Fear and Freedom	29
<i>Senator Fatima Payman</i>	
Bridging the Bravery Gap	35
<i>Sisonke Msimang</i>	
Big Divestiture Energy	41
<i>Josh Bornstein</i>	
Those Who Inspire Us: Bravery in Two Australian LGBTIQA+ Rights Campaigns	47
<i>Rodney Croome AM</i>	
The Power of Public Opinion	53
<i>Mike Rann AC CNZM</i>	
Courage, At The Last	59
<i>Dr Amy Coopes</i>	

Courage is a Virtuous Habit Our Politicians Can Re-learn. . .	65
<i>Bill Browne</i>	
The Fading Dream of a Home of One's Own	73
<i>Frank Bongiorno AM</i>	
The Weight of a Human Life	79
<i>Professor Georgina V Long AO</i>	
More Than We Can Afford: the High Price of Gambling Advertising.	87
<i>Tim Costello AO</i>	
The Missing Legacy of Green Bans.	93
<i>Stephen Long</i>	
Two Truths and One Lie	101
<i>Amy Remeikis</i>	
Bravery or Political Naïvety? Public Service or Personal Indulgence?	107
<i>Frank Brennan AO</i>	
A Policy of Bravery.	113
<i>Greg Jericho</i>	
The Latest David and Goliath Battle in Tasmania	119
<i>Eloise Carr</i>	
Bravery at Home	125
<i>Dr Amy Thunig-McGregor</i>	
Why Bravery Alone Won't Get Us Through the Great Disruption	131
<i>Leanne Minshull</i>	
The Urgent Need to Ensure the Survival of a Habitable Planet this Century	137
<i>John Hewson AM</i>	

Stability and Reform	145
<i>Barrie Cassidy</i>	
No One Left Behind	149
<i>Michele O'Neil</i>	
Who Gets the Microphone.	155
<i>Dr Richard Denniss</i>	
We Are All Fighting Fires.	161
<i>Jim Casey</i>	
Bravery is Persistence in Trusting Our Convictions: Championing the ICJ Climate Case.	167
<i>Hon Ralph Regenvanu</i>	
A Rising Tide of Bravery: Everyday Courage and the Case for Mass Civil Resistance.	173
<i>Naomi Hodgson</i>	
It Has to Be You.	179
<i>Polly Hemming</i>	
Endnotes	185
Contributors.	189



Editors' Note

When you hear the word “brave”, it might first conjure an image of a firefighter running towards a fire while everyone else is running away from it, or frontline service workers through the pandemic, unsure of the potential costs to their own health from treating those infected. And while we have essays from a firefighter and from medical doctors in this book, these essays show what it is to be brave in many forms. Whether it’s an artist making work that attacks the status quo or a public servant challenging bureaucratic orthodoxies, bravery is often in the eye of the beholder. And, we think what Australia needs right now is each and every kind of considered, determined and courageous action if we are going to tackle the most critical crises of our age.

This is a time of poly-crisis: from climate catastrophe to eroding democratic integrity, from geopolitical conflict to rising inequality. Political, social and environmental problems fill our newsfeeds and capture our attention, fuelling anxiety as we worry about whether it is possible to change course. This book brings together reflections on bravery from around Australia, and the world, describing times when people found a way to be brave: offering models for courage as we move past the first quarter of the twenty-first century.

Amy Thunig-McGregor and Ben Quilty approach the question of bravery in culture from different perspectives: For Thunig-McGregor it's from the culture we each make in our homes and for Quilty it is the culture our artists make for the wider public.

Dr Sophie Scamps, Senator Fatima Payman, former South Australian Premier Mike Rann, Bill Browne, Frank Bongiorno, Richard Denniss and Barrie Cassidy examine what political bravery can look like — whether it's crossing the floor of Parliament, enacting new policy on housing or taking a step to become an independent candidate despite a fear of public speaking.

Georgina Long and Amy Coopes consider bravery in medicine — whether in the emergency department or on the floor of the emergency department.

Tim Costello, Stephen Long, Eloise Carr, Josh Bornstein and Greg Jericho show what it looks like when people stand up to corporate interests, from the pressures of international fisheries companies to construction and gambling.

The Hon Ralph Regenvanu, Jim Casey, Michele O'Neil and Naomi Hodgson each consider how collective action — from banding together in a case before the International Court of Justice to unionising in a workplace — can bring about change.

Rodney Croome, Amy Remeikis and Frank Brennan explore what happens when individuals stand up to structures that exert power and control over our lives, perhaps in the form of perpetuating homophobia or toeing the line in mainstream media.

Sisonke Msimang and Yanis Varoufakis tackle racism, be it in the form of refugee policy or how Australia treats migrants.

Craig Foster, John Hewson and Leanne Minshull each ask

what steps are necessary to address the poly-crises that confront us.

The book concludes with Polly Hemming delivering a timely reminder that bravery is not just something for exceptional people, for someone else who has the skills or resources or know-how: brave action on our biggest challenges can start with you.

We are often asked: what is the next step? What can I do? One answer is to take a moment to be inspired by the times that Australia has been brave. It is our hope that this collection of essays does that for you, and that you share these essays with friends, family, colleagues and are moved to see what bravery you can introduce into your own life. One thing is certain: what clears the path to change is action. And the time for action is now.



Piero and the Heroes

We Turn Away

Yanis Varoufakis

Piero was unrecognisable on his hospital bed, with plaster and bandages covering his entire body and most of his face. Having no inkling that he was into skydiving, I was mystified when I heard of how his parachute had drifted, depositing him on the highway right in the path of the oncoming truck whose windshield shattered as it broke Piero's body. I had to wait for a week before he was well enough to explain why he had leapt from a plane into the wet, wind-lashed Essex sky.

Piero was a political refugee from Chile. Until the day General Augusto Pinochet wrecked Chilean democracy, murdering the elected president and placing the country under a fascist dictatorship, Piero was an up-and-coming lecturer in political science at the University of Santiago and an advisor to the government. Married to Maria, a young colleague, and expecting their first child, Piero was bristling with optimism and energy.

But then Pinochet's coup changed everything in the original 9/11, 11 September 1973.

In the early hours of that morning, Piero, his brother and his father were abducted by military police, along with thousands of others, many of whom were never seen again. The bodies of his father and brother were discovered a few months later, a single bullet in each of their eyes. The reason Piero was not shot was the military police believed he had the names and whereabouts of people who had eluded them. So, they tortured him. Night and day. For months. And when that did not work, they transported him to a "black site" in the north of the country where they continued torturing him until he lost his memory, his mind even.

Piero's wife, Maria, his mother, Emilia, and his sister, Bianca, clung on to the idea that he was alive, somewhere. Fussing over Pedro, his newborn son, they lived in hope that he would, suddenly, turn up on their doorstep. But years passed. Rotting in a cell, incapable of speaking or recalling his name, Piero turned into a ghost.

Finally one day in 1976, a band of partisans that continued the fight against Pinochet's regime in the forested mountains up north, broke into the black site and released all the prisoners. Piero found himself in a wooden cabin, high up in the Andes, where he was nursed back to health by his liberators.

By 1979 his memory was back. Through a network of friends he learnt that, in the meantime, Maria, his son and Bianca had made use of a UN refugee relocation program to move to London. Eager to join them, he put all his efforts into rehabilitating his body enough for the long climb up the Andes and then through an unguarded border crossing into Argentina and freedom.

A year later, Piero was landing at Heathrow airport bound for Essex University — to enrol in a second doctorate — which is where we struck up our friendship.

One morning, Piero looked perkier than usual. “I found them!” he said. Apparently, through the UN, he got the new address of Maria and his son. That same morning he jumped on the train to London full of trepidation.

When I saw him the next day, his face was a mask of pain. “I knew they assumed me dead,” he told me, “so I was not going to just turn up — first I needed to gauge their situation.” Like a spy, he waited outside the address he had scribbled on a piece of paper until Maria with Pedro, the eight-year-old son he had never laid eyes on, left for school. They were not alone. That’s when he realised that, during the preceding eight years, having lost any hope that he was alive, and having migrated to a distant land, Maria had remarried. At that moment Piero made the hardest decision: because of his love for Maria, he would remain dead to them. Only after swearing his sister Bianca to secrecy did he agree to meet her — a tearful reunion that I was lucky to witness.

“Appearing in front of Maria will tear her apart, again,” he said in a resolute voice. “She will feel guilty, torn between me and her new life. She deserves better.” And so it was that Piero would travel to London three times a week just to stand outside the school to see, but never speak to, Pedro. Then he would return to us at Essex University where he would do his research, mingle with his friends and refuse to be treated as a victim.

That was well before his hospitalisation. “So, what’s with the parachuting?” I asked him when he was well enough to talk. His absurd explanation fitted perfectly with the rest of his dramatic