

Second Place Winner
Division II – 10-12th Grades
Moral Courage Without Borders
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Moral Courage is the ability to act for the well-being of others despite the possible dangers it may bring to your own well-being and safety. Jacques Bérès, one of the founders of Doctors Without Borders, an international humanitarian-aid and non-governmental organization that helps those in need of medical care in poor countries that are often regions of war, displayed and continues to display the epitome of moral courage.

Born in 1941, Dr. Bérès learned battlefield surgery in Vietnam in 1967 and has “spent more than 40 years in some of the most dangerous war zones around the world, experiencing conflicts in Vietnam, Liberia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Chechnya, Iraq and most recently in Libya” (De la Baumemarch 23) . He helped create Doctors Without Borders in 1980 which operates “free of any political, military, or religious agendas” and because of this, the hospitals attract individuals who are viewed by most as inhuman and undeserving of medical care, such as members of terrorist groups (“MSF Frequently Asked Questions”). Beres said that “More than fifty percent of the warriors” he cared for “were jihadists, not just foreigners, but with the look of jihadists, with Koranic verses on their foreheads”(“Syria: 'Half the fighters..’”). He was struck in particular by two of the jihadist fighters he treated and says they “were very young, seemingly so quiet, really nice-looking guys” (“Syria: 'Half the fighters..’”). Many terrorists are in fact children who have been forced to participate, and have had little choice in their affiliation with terrorist groups, and although “the exploitation of children by terrorist groups is not new” groups such as “ISIS, Boko Haram, and the Pakistani Taliban are increasingly using children to carry out their activities”(Bloom 1). By turning a blind eye and providing care to those in need, Bérès demonstrates that human life is more important than any nationality or religious affiliation could ever be.

Today, at 71 years old, Jacques Bérès continues his efforts with Doctors Without Borders, and recently crossed the Syrian border because he “saw useless suffering, cruelty” towards “children and families”(De la Baumemarch 12). His continued efforts have helped hundreds of people receive medical care in areas of the world where hospitals are limited.

In my future, I hope to be a pediatric surgeon with Doctors Without Borders, and am thus inspired by Dr. Bérès’ story. I am particularly drawn to his encounters with child terrorists, because although I don’t condone the plight of the terrorist, as a pediatric surgeon those younger groups of people are who I would come in contact with most often. Those children, who are forced to join terrorist groups, have difficult childhoods, and although I cannot ultimately change their future, I can ensure that they know that they are valued human beings. Childhood is supposed to be the brightest time in a person’s life, and although I cannot change their entire lives which already seem marginalized by the career they will be forced into, I can ensure that

their younger years, often times filled with injuries and sickness, are more enjoyable, because every person, if nothing else, deserves a happy childhood. It is certainly not an easy job, and requires countless hours of training and strenuous effort in less than favorable conditions, but putting yourself in harms way to help suffering people with your talents, is the greatest image of love for humankind that exists. He also demonstrates the way I hope to live and I believe every person should, with curiosity, courage, compassion, and commitment. He had the ability to look past his initial judgments of people who some would consider unworthy of compassion, and put forth the greatest effort to save many their lives, and although he did not agree with them, he found tremendous value in their lives anyway. This is an inspiring message and action to live by in a world of violence, intolerance, and hate.

Some would certainly argue that Dr. Beres shouldn't have provided help to groups of terrorists while serving in Syria with Doctors Without Borders. What they fail to see, however, is that the beauty in the organization is that it does not take into consideration the "good guys" or the "bad guys". It helps people in need no matter where they stand politically, socially, or religiously. The organization as a whole demonstrates moral courage because the doctors leave the comfort of their stable countries, giving up years of their salaries, to aid those who are less fortunate, and live lives of poverty, crime, and violence.

Dr. Beres demonstrates moral courage because he put himself into harm's way in order to help injured people in poor countries around the world. Furthermore, in the current world, where violence is the commonplace, the teachings of Beres can be extended much further than the medical field alone. His life represents the ultimate sense of compassion for suffering people, and the value of caring for someone simply because they are human. His career demonstrates how far love can move society towards peace. His achievement are a demonstration of compassion towards oppressed people, despite fear and violence, and suggest that the solution to war is not by means of threatening, or intimidation, but rather, is love, and the sense that all people inhabit one planet, and are thus one community united across the globe.