

# The cage by ruth minsky sender - a discussion on courage

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## **The Cage Essay**

Someone once said “ Courage is not the absence of fear- but the willingness to proceed in spite of it. Being courageous does not mean being completely fearless but rather doing what you have to do regardless of fear. In the novel The Cage by Ruth Minsky Sender, we see examples of this kind of courage in the characters of Riva, Anna, Motele, and Moishela.

One example would be when Riva, at the age of 16, became responsible for her brothers. A social worker from the Lodz ghetto where Riva and her family lived was trying to separate Riva from her brothers since they had no guardian to look after them. The social worker was going to find homes for each of them, but the family did not want to be apart from each other. To keep her brothers with her, she decided to adopt them and become their legal guardian. As stated on page 59 of The Cage, ““ At the same time- I must point this out to you before you sign- you are losing the rights of a child. Today, you become an adult.”” When Riva signed the papers to become the legal guardian of her brothers, she lost her rights as a child and became an adult. By doing that, she was put at a greater risk of being put into labor camps and could now be charged as an adult if she got into trouble. Another quote, said by Yulek to Riva on page 117 was, ““ You are the guardian of your brothers. You are legally and morally responsible for their lives.”” Riva, besides being legally in control of her brothers, was expected to care for her brothers because it was the right thing to do. In spite of her fear of being taking to the labor camps, Riva adopted her brothers to ensure their safety and keep her family together.

A second example of courage would be when Anna, the camp doctor at Mittelsteine, stood up to Madam Commandant to request that Riva could be taken to a hospital. Riva's hand had become infected through a cut and the infection was spreading so she needed surgery. The doctor at the camp, Anna, told Madam Commandant about the severity of Riva's condition and asked if she could be taken to a hospital. Madam Commandant angrily disagreed with the idea but Anna continued to calmly explain her reasoning for sending Riva to the hospital. She explained that Riva boosted the morale of the other woman through her poems. Eventually, Madam Commandant allowed Riva to be taken to a hospital under the supervision of Madam Overseer. A quote from page 204 that describes Anna's courage is "' Well, well, doctor. You have nerve.' The Commandants voice startles me." Madam Commandant realized how brave Anna was for confronting her. Another quote from the same page is when Anna said "' One has to do what is right'" This shows that Anna knew the risk that she was taking for standing up to the Commandant and she did it anyway because she knew it was the right thing to do.

The last example of courage would be when Riva's brothers gave up their food rations for a week to sneak vitamins into the ghetto for Riva. Riva had been diagnosed with calcium deficiency and was very weak so her brothers, Motele and Moishele, sold their weekly food rations to get the vitamins into the ghetto. A quote from page 52 says,

“ They are called Vigantol. We waited a long time for them to be smuggled into the ghetto. We were lucky; they are impossible to get.” On the same page, a quote says

“ We sold our bread ration for the week.” Motele and Moishele knew that it was dangerous and extremely hard to get the vitamins into the ghetto, but they sacrificed their bread rations for the week to buy them to help Riva.

Through the characters of Riva, Anna, Motele, and Moishele, Ruth Minsky Sender demonstrates how courage thrives in the face of fear, especially when our lives depend upon it. The actions of those characters remind me of the honorable men and women who lost their lives during the Twin Towers terrorist attack on 9/11/2001. Whether they were firefighters, police officers, or even selfless citizens, they knew that their lives were being endangered by trying to help the victims. For some, their valiant efforts cost them their lives, making them victims of the horrific disaster too. These people stared fear in the eyes and proved that true courage is in all of us, but only some are willing to unleash it.