

Don't do the unthinkable, just do what's right: henry's morality in ford's novel

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Courage is not the absence of fear, but the will to overcome it. Jamie Ford's novel *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* shows this characteristic as a central element of its narrative. Henry is a Chinese boy who is living during World War II, a time of racial ignorance. His father is a traditional and stern Chinese man who is loyal to his homeland. Henry meets a Japanese girl, Keiko, who he creates an unbreakable bond with. Unfortunately, his father disapproves because of her ethnicity and she is moved to a relocation camp. But Henry won't quit until their flame is rekindled. Jamie Ford shows us that courage is not defined as saving the world, but doing what is right even in the face of adversity. Courage is demonstrated and celebrated in the novel when Henry hides Keiko's family photographs for her, Henry's mom secretly delivers Keiko's letters to Henry, and Henry visits Keiko at the relocation camp.

Henry shows courage progressively throughout the book. One of the ways he shows courage is when he hides Keiko's family photographs for her. Keiko asks Henry to keep her family photos so they would not have to burn them. She hopes to retrieve them after the war and Henry would not let her down. He takes the photos and hides them in a secluded area in his room, hoping he would be the only one who knows where they are. But one day he arrives home to see his parents in the living room with the family photos on the table. Henry knew the consequences if his parents found out even before Keiko handed him the photos. His parents are dismayed of his actions and Henry's relationship and trust with his father is terminated. But these are only the consequences if his parents found out. His father says on page 183, "If the FBI find this here- in our home, our Chinese American home- they can

arrest us. Take everything. They can throw us in jail and fine us for five thousand dollars for helping the enemy." Even with the additional consequences, Henry is unfazed and continues on his pilgrimage of temerity. His belief in justice, even if it affects his family, never strays from its course.

Henry's mom also shows how courage is a main theme in the novel. Because of Keiko's race, her and her family are sent away to an internment camp. But Henry and Keiko continue to communicate to each other through the letters they write to one another. When Keiko's letters arrive, Henry's mother takes the letters and place them under his pillow instead of exposing his secret. Although she is a dedicated wife, she is also an intrepid mother. In the novel, it says, " But somehow Henry's mother, sorting the mail first, found the letter each week and slipped it underneath his pillow. She did her best to be an obedient wife, to honor her husband's wishes, but to look out for her son as well"(211.) Henry's mom knew the great consequences if Henry's father found out about her helping hand. Her husband has a deep hatred for all Japanese because of what they did to his people back in his homeland. He considers all Japanese to be just as evil as the ones that destroyed his native land. But she continues on without hesitation to deliver her subversive acts of justice. She never expects an award or even acknowledgement, she just does what is right.

Another way Henry shows how courage is portrayed throughout the novel is when Keiko is moved again to another relocation camp in Idaho; Henry wants to say a proper goodbye and see Keiko one last time. Even in the wake of his father's stroke and disappointment, Henry decides that it's best to go see

Keiko. He knows how angry and frustrated his father would be if he finds out. Also, his father is in an unstable condition so Henry is the now the head the family. He says," But Idaho, that's too far, too dangerous...If something happened to me, who would take care of my mother. With my father bedridden, I'm the man now"(211). It is his job to take care of the family and maybe even provide for them now. Henry doesn't even know where he would stay or how he would be treated by people of Idaho. The degree of racism and how he would survive is also uncertain. But his courage shines the light through the darkness. He knows what is best, but he also knows what is right.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said," There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right." Courage is strength in the face of fear. We all possess courage, but not many of us actually use it. After all, it is much easier to start a challenge than it is to complete one, and people who have courage tend to see things through. Jamie Ford is asking us channel the inner " Henry" within us and to seek justice in difficult situations. Will you accept the call?