



2020 Approved Chords of Courage Song Subject Candidates

There are so many people around the world who have performed incredible acts of courage and kindness through tragedy. You are welcome and encouraged to submit your own courageous song subjects for approval under STEP 1 – APPLICATION on this website. Below, we have provided a few examples of those who meet the 2020 Song Subject Criteria:

Someone or group who has performed an act of courage and suffered in the process or performed an act of inspiration born of tragedy, whose actions resulted in significant, positive change BETWEEN 1970 AND TODAY

Susan Bro – After her daughter was tragically killed in Charlottesville, she emerged as a powerful voice for justice, equality, fairness and social activism. Susan is the mother of Heather Heyer and co-Founder of the Heather Heyer Foundation (HHF). The foundation was launched to carry on Heather’s legacy after she tragically lost her life while standing up for social justice on August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Rais Bhuiyan. Rais Bhuiyan is an American Muslim who ten days after 9/11 was shot from point blank range by a white supremacist in Dallas, TX. His near-death experience and subsequent religious pilgrimage sparked a profound journey, including an international campaign advocating to save his attacker from death row. Ever since, Rais has kept his death bed promise to do more for others, dedicating his life to transforming hearts and opening minds through restorative justice, building bridges, storytelling and public speaking.

Adrienne Haslet – Boston Marathon bombing survivor and amputee, whose resilience and determination led to her walking, dancing and even running marathons again. She is a global advocate for amputee rights. Adrienne speaks around the world about her road to recovery and the life lessons she has learned. “I refuse to be called a victim. I am not defined by what happened in my life. I am a survivor, defined by how I live my life.”

Alanna Simmons – Alana is the granddaughter of the Reverend Daniel L. Simmons Sr., one of the parishioners who gathered for Bible study at “Mother” Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC when a white Columbia area man opened fire. Rev. Simmons was one of nine murdered in cold blood on June 17, 2015, a senseless victim of the murderer’s attempt to ignite a “race war.” Just days after her grandfather was slain, Alana along with family members of other Charleston victims, publicly forgave her grandfather’s killer in a South Carolina courtroom. Shortly after, Alana created the social media hash tag #HateWontWin to encourage people to post a picture showing love to someone “different from them.” Instantly, the hashtag went viral and her website “Hate Won’t Win” was born. Its mission is to create a more culturally cohesive society that appreciates and celebrates differences instead of allowing them to divide us. Alana says, “Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate, they lived in love and they preached love, and their legacies will be love.”

Derek Black and Matthew Stevenson. Derek Black was raised in one of the most prominent families leading the white nationalist movement. His father founded the first white nationalist website and largest online community, Stormfront, and Derek spent the first two decades of his life as an enthusiastic activist in his family's movement. Matthew Stevenson was born and raised in South Florida. As the son of a grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Derek Black was once the heir apparent of the white nationalist movement.

Shortly after enrolling in New College of Florida, Matthew Stevenson began organizing a weekly Sabbath dinner in his dormitory that included people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. A lifelong student in the Kabbalah Centre, he had long believed in the importance of treating other people with dignity, even when doing so might be unpopular.

Derek also attended New College and was outed as the son of prominent white nationalists and a rising leader within the movement. Amidst an enormous student uproar over his presence on campus, Matthew invited him to join one of his Sabbath gatherings so that he could see firsthand the people that the white nationalist ideology despised. In 2011, Derek soon became a regular attendee, and as the connections made at those Sabbaths became deeper, his views began to change. Through long and sometimes painful conversations with friends Derek made at those dinners, he conceded that the evidence for the ideology he had fought so hard to promote did not hold up, and that he had caused harm by promoting it. Their transformational friendship challenged the hold of white supremacist ideology on a young man and highlights the capacity for anything to promote dialogue and reject hate.

Eva Moses Kor and Father Patrick Desbois – Eva Moses Kor is a survivor of the Holocaust, a forgiveness advocate, and a revered public speaker. One of the few surviving twins of the medical experiments of Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, Eva's driving message is "never give up." A community leader, a champion of human rights, and a tireless educator, Eva is a brilliant example of the power of the human spirit. In 1995, Eva opened CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Terre Haute, IN, the only Holocaust museum in the state, to promote hope, healing, respect and responsibility. CANDLES is the only organization in the world dedicated to the memory of the twin victims and survivors of medical experimentation at Auschwitz.

Father Desbois' interest in the Holocaust started at a young age, because his grandfather, who helped raise him, was a French soldier who had been deported to the Nazi prison camp in Rava-Ruska during World War II. His grandfather did not speak much of his time in the camp, and Father Desbois remained curious about the Holocaust and its Jewish victims. Father Patrick Desbois is the Founder and President of the international organization Yahad-In Unum, which is dedicated to bringing evidence of genocides to light. Over the course of more than 15 years, Yahad-In Unum has interviewed 6,171 eyewitnesses of Nazi executions of Jews and Roma, and identified 2,546 execution sites across Eastern Europe.

Gabriella "Gaby" Pacheco – From the DREAM Act to DACA, she has been a courageous leader in the movement for immigration reform. Gaby is a nationally recognized immigrant rights leader. In 2005, she and other Miami Dade College students founded a Florida-based immigrant youth group advocating for tuition equity and immigrant rights. In 2010, alongside three other undocumented students, Gaby led the Trail of Dreams, a four-month walk from Miami to Washington, DC to call attention to the plight of immigrant families under the threat of deportation. In 2012, as political director for United We Dream, she spearheaded the efforts that led to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. On April 22, 2013, Pacheco became the first undocumented Latina to testify in front of Congress, speaking to the Senate Judiciary Committee about the urgent need for immigration reform. Gaby is known for her compassionate activism and work to dismantle anti-immigrant sentiments.

Christine Leinonen – Christine Leinonen is the mother of Christopher Andrew "Dru" Leinonen, an LGBT activist and professional counselor, who was among the 49 killed at Pulse Nightclub in

Orlando, Florida on June 12, 2016. The attack was the biggest mass shooting in the history of the United States to date, as well as the biggest attack on the LGBT community in history. To honor the memory of her only child, Christine has stood up as an advocate for common sense gun reforms and supported “The Dru Project” an LGBTQIA organization founded by Dru and his friends- a mission to spread love across the nation and promote gay straight alliances. “He can’t do that on his own now, but I can do it for him. I can speak for him.”

Megan and Grace Phelps-Roper – In 2012, Megan and Grace chose to leave the Westboro Baptist Church, the fundamentalist church led by their grandfather and composed primarily of family members, in which the two sisters had spent their entire lives. Westboro is notorious for staging thousands of protests condemning gays and Jews, with signs such as “God Hates Fags” and “Jews Killed Jesus,” and for picketing the funerals of military personnel killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unable to continue to follow the doctrines of their church, Megan and Grace left Westboro, knowing that their family would never see or speak to them again. For the past few years, Megan and Grace have dedicated themselves to forging relationships with the communities they once condemned.

Ambassador Jakob Finci – Jakob Finci’s family came to Sarajevo in the 16th century, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. He was born in 1943, shortly after his parents were liberated from an Italian detention camp. During the Bosnian War (1992-95), he headed La Benevolencija, a Jewish communal organization that gave humanitarian aid to Muslims, Croats, and Serbs during the siege of Sarajevo by Bosnian Serb forces. His efforts helped to save more than a thousand Muslims by providing documents which enabled them to pass as Jews. He later chaired the effort to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission following the conflict.

Jacqueline Murekatete – Jacqueline Murekatete is a survivor of the Rwandan Genocide and a human rights activist. In 1994, at the age of nine, Jacqueline’s parents and siblings were murdered, along with hundreds of thousands of other Tutsis, by members of the Hutu majority. Adopted by an uncle in the United States, Jacqueline first told her story after hearing a Holocaust survivor, David Gewitzman, speak at her school. She is a lawyer, human rights activist and the founder of the nonprofit organization Genocide Survivors Foundation.

Judy and Dennis Shepard – On October 6, 1998, Judy and Dennis’ son, Matthew, a 21 year-old student at the University of Wyoming, was beaten and murdered near Laramie, Wyoming by two men because he was gay. Matthew Shepard’s murder became a catalyst for a national effort to pass federal hate crime legislation and led Judy and Dennis to dedicate their lives to preventing another parent from experiencing what they had. In 2009, after a decade of work, Judy and Dennis watched as President Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Federal Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

Amardeep Singh Kaleka – On August 5, 2012, a white supremacist attacked the Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing six people, including the temple’s founder, Satwant Singh Kaleka. As the tragedy unfolded, and in the days and weeks that followed, Satwant Singh Kaleka’s son, Amardeep, emerged as the voice of the Sikh community of Oak Creek. His courage and eloquence in the wake of the shooting and his powerful call for understanding and respect resonated throughout the nation.

Pat Kuttles – In July, 1999, Pat Kuttles’ son, Private First Class Barry Winchell, was beaten to death by another soldier because he was thought to be gay. Since Barry’s murder, Pat Kuttles has dedicated her life to securing justice for her son, and has emerged as one of the most powerful voices in the movement to repeal the U.S. military’s policy on sexual orientation, which is known simply as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” [Follow-up: The Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act of 2010 became effective September 20, 2011.]

David Brown and Mike Shillingburg - In 1973, David Brown was one of a handful of black students bused across Dallas to integrate the previously all white Mark Twain Elementary School. He was taunted by parents and protesters as he entered the school. Inside, his white classmates refused to talk to him, everyone except Mike Shillingburg. The friendship between these two twelve year old boys—one black and one white— would change race relations at Mark Twain and their lives. But after the school year ended, they would not see each other until chance reunited them 38 years later.

Wei Chen – Wei was one of dozens of Asian students who were attacked during a day-long series of assaults by fellow students at South Philadelphia High School in 2010. Using civil disobedience and coalition building, Wei changed the climate of fear and violence at South Philly and forced the school system and the city to examine the way it looked at Asian immigrants.

Tammy Aaberg – Became an advocate against bullying and school policies which fail to protect LGBT students after her 15 year old son committed suicide July, 2010, because he was bullied for being gay. Determined to prevent this from happening to another child, Tammy has become an advocate against bullying and school policies which fail to protect LGBT students.

Professor Liviu Librescu – A prominent professor at Virginia Tech, he was a Romanian–American scientist and engineer and a Holocaust survivor. On April 16, 2007, Prof. Librescu heard gun fire in the hallway outside his classroom. Ordering his students to escape by the windows, he held the door closed as the gunman fought to get in. Thirty-two people, including Liviu Librescu, were killed in the shooting rampage. Because of Prof. Librescu's actions, all of his students, except one, survived the massacre.

Simon Deng – Simon Deng was nine years old when he was kidnapped from his village in southern Sudan and given as a slave to an Arab family in the north. He endured three years of brutality and terror, refusing conversion from Christianity to Islam in order to save himself, before escaping. He learned to swim from a Muslim friend and became the national swimming champion of Sudan. When the Sudanese government launched a campaign to “cleanse” its cities of Christians, Simon used his position to free hundreds of people from prisons in the capital of Khartoum. Today, Simon Deng is an American citizen and dedicates his life to fighting slavery and genocide in the Sudan.

Nadia Murad was born and raised in a small village of farmers and shepherds in northern Iraq. A member of the Yazidi community, she and her brothers and sisters lived a quiet life. Nadia had dreams of becoming a history teacher or opening her own beauty salon. On August 15th, 2014, when Nadia was just 21 years old, this life ended. Islamic State militants massacred the people of her village, executing men who refused to convert to Islam and women too old to become sex slaves. Six of Nadia's brothers were killed, and her mother soon after, their bodies swept into mass graves. Nadia was taken to Mosul and forced, along with thousands of other Yazidi girls, into the ISIS slave trade. Nadia would be held captive by several militants and repeatedly raped and beaten. Finally, she managed a narrow escape through the streets of Mosul, finding shelter in the home of a Sunni Muslim family whose eldest son risked his life to smuggle her to safety. Today, Nadia's story—as a witness to the Islamic State's brutality, a survivor of rape, a refugee, a Yazidi—has forced the world to pay attention to an ongoing genocide. It is a call to action, a testament to the human will to survive, and a love letter to a lost country, a fragile community, and a family torn apart by war. Nadia is the founder of Nadia's Initiative, an organization dedicated to "helping women and children victimized by genocide, mass atrocities and human trafficking to heal and rebuild their lives and communities". In 2018, she and Denis Mukwege were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict." She is the first Iraqi and Yazidi to be awarded a Nobel Prize.