

# AUDACIOUS WOMEN FESTIVAL

## AUDACIART WEEKLY

### The Courage to Stand Up

17 July 2020





## AudaciArt – The Courage to Stand Up

This week's theme, *The Courage to Stand Up* is inspired by a quotation from J K Rowling (said by Hogwarts Headmaster, Dumbledore, about Neville Longbottom in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.)

**“There are all kinds of courage,” said Dumbledore, smiling. “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”**

### AudaciArt

Hallo Everybody

Here is the 15<sup>th</sup> AudaciArt publication. We started it in response to lockdown, and now that is coming to an end (of sorts) we will also wind down. So there'll just be another couple of editions, for now at least.

If you've been thinking about making a contribution and haven't yet, you've still got time. The theme for next week is, coincidentally, very appropriate.

As ever, we welcome contributions in any medium or genre that are inspired by the theme.

Many thanks to all our contributors and to the Audacious Women Collective Members and volunteers who helped to make this possible.

The theme for Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July @ noon is: Wait not a Single Moment

And for the following, 31<sup>st</sup> July: The Most Difficult Thing



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**J. K. Rowling**  
**Shereen Benjamin**

“It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”

So says Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, of nervous, awkward 12-year-old Neville Longbottom. His words are spoken in the first of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, after Neville has defied the powerful eponymous hero, Harry, and Harry’s friends Ron and Hermione. It is the series’ creator, Edinburgh-based Joanne (J.K.) Rowling, who has inspired this week’s theme.

Neville is one of my favourite characters in Joanne’s magical world. A shy and rather bumbling boy, he lacks confidence, he is often the butt of bullying, and he finds it hard to make friends. He doesn’t excel at much, and he’s easily overlooked. But he is also loyal and steadfast, refusing to back down in order to please those whose friendship he is desperate to win and retain. He is scared of holding his ground when challenged by the golden trio of Harry, Hermione and Ron, and without any other friends, he has much to lose. But despite being scared, and knowing the possible costs of speaking out, he remains true to his beliefs and refuses to back down.

What of his creator? Joanne was born in 1965. She grew up in Gloucestershire and then in Wales, and went on to university in Exeter. After university she moved to London where she worked briefly for Amnesty International. She says of her time there:

I read hastily scribbled letters smuggled out of totalitarian regimes by men and women who were risking imprisonment to inform the outside world of what was happening to them... My small participation in that process was one of the most humbling and inspiring experiences of my life.

Joanne then moved to Portugal to teach English as a foreign language. There she met Jorge Arantes who was to become her husband in 1992, and in 1993 their daughter was born. While in Portugal and teaching in the evenings, Joanne worked during the daytime on the ideas and plots that were to be the basis of the Harry Potter series. There has long been speculation that the marriage was abusive, but the intensely private Joanne only confirmed this recently, saying in an essay published in June of this year:

I’ve been in the public eye now for over twenty years and have never talked publicly about being a domestic abuse and sexual assault survivor... I managed to escape my first violent marriage with some difficulty, but I’m now married to a truly good and principled man, safe and secure in ways I never in a million years expected to be. However, the scars left by violence and sexual



assault don't disappear, no matter how loved you are, and no matter how much money you've made.

Returning from Portugal, Joanne settled in Edinburgh where she lived as a single parent on benefits. With the full Harry Potter series sketched out in notes, she began working on the first of the novels in earnest, famously writing in cafes while her little daughter slept. In 1995 she completed the manuscript of the first novel, and enrolled on a postgraduate teacher training course at what was then Moray House Institute of Education, now part of the University of Edinburgh. After qualifying, she taught in schools across the city, but continued to write in every spare moment.

The publication of the first Harry Potter novel got off to a slow start. Having secured a literary agent, the manuscript was to be rejected by 12 publishing houses, before being accepted by Bloomsbury. I've often wondered what the commissioning editors of the 12 other firms later thought of their decisions. Bloomsbury believed the book would have greater appeal to its target audience of boys if its author were not obviously female, so at their request Joanne used the initials J.K. (K standing for Kathleen, her grandmother).

Once the series was on its way, momentum quickly gathered. The Harry Potter books became hugely popular, winning prestigious awards, and consecutively breaking all previous sales records. In 2001 the first title was released as a feature film, followed by the rest of the series. Harry Potter is now a globally-recognised brand: Edinburgh and many other cities boast at least one Harry Potter shop dedicated to selling Harry Potter merchandise, there are Harry Potter sections in theme parks across the world, and Harry Potter tours will take the visitor to sites mentioned in the series.

All of this has made Joanne an extraordinarily successful, recognisable and wealthy woman, and in 2011 she made it onto the Forbes annual list of billionaires. Her appearance on the list was to be short-lived; partly because (unlike most of the super-rich) she pays her UK taxes in full, and partly because of her very significant charitable donations. In 2010 she donated £10million to the University of Edinburgh to set up a centre for research into multiple sclerosis, named after her mother, Anne Rowling, who had died from the condition in her 40s, and 2019 she donated a further £15.3million to the centre. Her charitable trust, Volant, supports a number of causes, and she is perhaps best known in the charity world as founder and president of the non-profit organisation Lumos, which seeks to end the institutionalisation of children worldwide. In May of this year, and to mark the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Hogwarts where good finally triumphs over evil in her wizarding world, Joanne announced that:

Too many people are losing loved ones in the real world... As ever in a crisis of this sort, the poorest and most vulnerable are hit hardest, so in honour of the Battle of Hogwarts, I'll be making a donation of £1m, half of which will go to Crisis, who're helping the homeless during the pandemic, and half of which



will go to Refuge, because we know that domestic abuse has, sadly, increased hugely during the lockdown.

So, is that the end of the rags-to-riches story? The tale of a woman from an ordinary background who went through some tough times before a combination of talent, hard work, luck and acumen made her fantastically successful? Someone who had the audacity to create a whole magical world, and who went on to enjoy the fruits of her labours in comfort, peace and security?

Not quite. If you've heard Joanne's name recently, it's probably been in connection with what's sometimes called the 'transgender row'. In 2019 Joanne entered what might more properly be called a discussion, albeit an extremely heated one, about women's rights. She tweeted her support for tax consultant Maya Forstater whose contract of employment had not been renewed after she said that biological sex is fixed and immutable. In the following months Joanne went on to post further tweets in support of women's sex-based rights, and then, in June, she [published an essay](#) explaining why she believes that being born biologically female is so significant that women require protections and provisions in law and policy (as currently enshrined in law). In a careful and detailed explanation of why women's rights matter, and why she felt compelled to speak out publicly, Joanne wrote:

I've read all the arguments about femaleness not residing in the sexed body, and the assertions that biological women don't have common experiences, and I find them... deeply misogynistic and regressive. It's also clear that one of the objectives of denying the importance of sex is to erode what some seem to see as the cruelly segregationist idea of women having their own biological realities, or – just as threatening – unifying realities that make them a cohesive political class. The hundreds of emails I've received in the last few days prove this erosion concerns many others just as much.

The response to her tweets and to her essay was predictable to anyone who has spoken in support of women's sex-based rights and experienced the consequences, and to those who've followed as the issue has unfolded. Joanne was targeted with an avalanche of abuse, name-calling, hyperbolic accusations about the harm she was doing to trans people, and calls for her to be "cancelled". Clearly, it is impossible to cancel someone with Joanne's public standing. In some ways she has little to lose: with her wealth and the power that comes with it, she is unlikely to suffer materially. But being on the receiving end of so much venom must surely be taking its toll. And it must have been hurtful that amongst those lining up to condemn her were some of the young actors who owe their fame and fortune to her.

"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends."

Incredible as it would have seemed just a couple of years ago, speaking out about women's sex-based rights, and calling for respectful, evidence-based discussion, is now an act of extraordinary audacity. It would have been so much easier for Joanne to hold herself aloof, knowing that to speak out would put her in the eye of a media



and social media storm. Instead, like her creation Neville, she has stood up for what she believes to be right, in full knowledge of the costs.

I've long been a fan of the Harry Potter series. But I'm not especially interested in celebrity culture, so I haven't (until now) taken a great deal of interest in its creator. However, as one of thousands – possibly tens or even hundreds of thousands – of women who are passionately committed to defending women's rights, I am full of admiration for what Joanne has done, and the dignity with which she has done it.

So I am very pleased to write this introduction to this week's *Audaciart*, inspired as it is by the words and deeds of the writer, creator of worlds and above all, audacious woman, Joanne Rowling.

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**Standing Up**  
**Sally Freedman**



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## The Courage NOT to Stand Up Hilery Williams

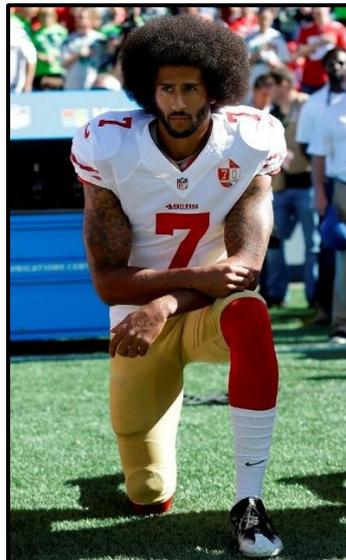
Jen Reid



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*I wanted to give George Floyd power, I wanted to give power to black people like me who have suffered injustices and inequality. A surge of power out to them all.*

Colin Kaepernick



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*There are bodies in the street and there are people getting away with murder.*

*When there is significant change and this country is representing people the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand.*

65 years before the statue of Jen Reid was (temporarily) erected on the site of a slaver's plinth, 40 years before Kaepernick's silent testimony at a football match, a



small black woman refused to stand. It was the legacy of Rosa Park's valour that has inspired so many.



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*What do you want with an education when I'm so poorly?* quavered her grandmother.

*Why don't you stay in the kitchen?* the civil rights leader sneered.

*What do you need a vote for?* challenged 3 registrars.

*Why don't you stand up?* the bus driver snarled.

She said:

*I did a lot of walking in Montgomery, as the white students sped by in their buses. until (in Martin Luther King's words) her cup of endurance ran over and she could take it no longer.*

*People always say I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically. I was not old. No. the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.*

*I sit down for Freedom, declared Rosa Parks. It was just time.*

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