

WOMEN OF A CERTAIN COURAGE

EDITED BY BRON BATEMAN

ABOUT THE BOOK

Bron Bateman invited eighteen women to think of a time when they were asked to be courageous – and to tell the story of what courage felt like to them. Their responses of resilience, despair and hope will make you weep and wonder, and will ignite your spirit. And they will make you ask: How would I feel? What would I do if that were me? Featuring life stories from:

- Eliora Avrahami
- Penny Jane Burke
- Lisa Collyer
- Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon
- Averil Dean
- Cynthia Dearborn
- Jo Giles
- Anna Jacobson
- Megan Krakouer
- Paola Magni
- Shannon Meyerkort
- Esther Ottaway
- Reneé Pettitt-Schipp
- Nadia Rhook
- Sally Scott
- Shel Sweeney
- Andrea Thompson
- Annamaria Weldon

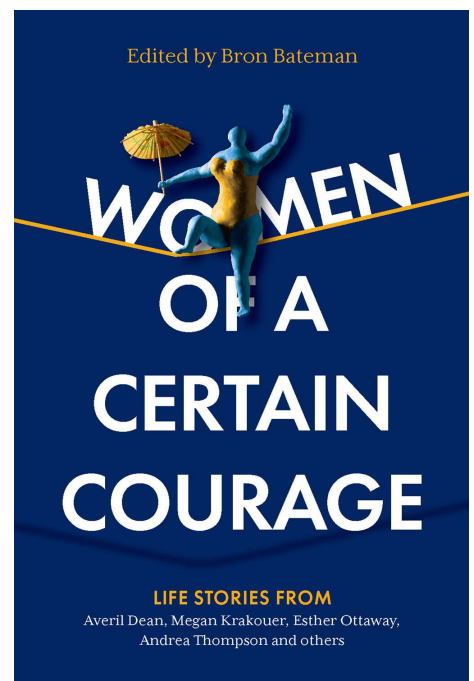
We encourage you to read and discuss Bron Bateman's introduction before diving in.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Bron Bateman is an award-winning queer crip poet, editor and educator from Boorloo (Perth). She has had three collections of poetry published: *People from Bones* (with Kelly Pilgrim, Ragged Raven Press, 2002), *Of Memory and Furniture* and *Blue Wren* (Fremantle Press, 2020 and 2022). She has been published in journals such as *Westerly*, *Southerly*, *Cordite* and *Bent Street* and has performed her work locally, nationally and internationally. She has just completed *Love Like This isn't Harmless*, her fourth poetry collection (Fremantle Press, 2025). *Women of a Certain Courage* is her first edited anthology, and she is honoured and privileged to have had the opportunity to work alongside such brilliant women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your definition of courage?
2. Do you think being courageous is something one can consciously choose?
3. Is it possible to behave bravely without feeling brave?
4. Is there a difference in courage born of active resistance versus one of simple endurance?
5. What story of courage in this collection resonated the most with you, and why?
6. Is there a story in this collection that made you think differently about what courage looks like?
7. If you were to write your own story of courage, what would it be about?
8. Bron Bateman says: *Courage is often gendered as a masculine experience, grounded in physicality and strength. Yet, even while writing these words, I am struck by how audacious and limiting that seems.* (p. 7). Do you think we define courage in gendered ways? Do you think this is limiting?
9. When it comes to lived experience, is there a universality of sisterhood? What are its parameters and what are its limits?



10. What kinds of stories do you think an anthology titled *Men of a Certain Courage* might contain – and who might contribute to it?
11. Do you agree with Bron's statement on the bottom of p.7: *Women endure the greatest of privations – and these are often embodied, often linked with our roles as parents or parents-to-be, attuned to our reproductive capacity, but also with our capacity to fight for what we believe in.*
12. Do you think there is a difference in the courage we need to summon to survive a long time of hardship and deprivation versus a much more immediate challenge?
13. Which of these stories do you think might have been told by women at any time in the last five hundred years?
14. Which feel like stories of *now*?
15. Can you see a logic or pattern in the way that Bron has ordered these stories?
16. Why do you think she chose to begin with Megan Krakouer's essay, and to end with Andrea Thompson's?
17. What are the common threads between them?
18. What did you learn from reading this collection?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

How did you go about creating the list of women you wanted to contribute to this collection? Were there certain kinds of stories you were hoping to receive?

When I was creating the list of contributors for this collection, I had some stories in mind that I wanted to receive. I wanted the stories to be inclusive and diverse. I knew that I wanted queer stories but also stories that would broaden our understanding of what queer means, and that included seeking stories from trans and gender-diverse women.

I wanted to include Indigenous essay writers and, in particular, people who were actively involved in bettering their communities, who perhaps may not have had the opportunity to explore and unpack their experiences of courage, and how it was practised as a direct action – and of what courage meant to them.

As a crip woman, I also wanted to explore the idea of the courage to be crip, not in the kind of way that is foregrounded as being somehow superhuman, but that explored the daily courage needed to live in a crip body.

I also wanted there to be geographical diversity among contributors so that the reader could experience stories from all around Australia.

Which story surprised you the most? And which made you think about the world in a different way?

I did experience one expected surprise in the selection process. When I thought of a person to invite, that association would suggest another person, and so on. And when the pieces were written, I found that the connections that appeared between the stories were not necessarily ones I was expecting, and that there were resonances across the different diversities of stories that were shared.

The particular story that surprised me most was Shannon Meyerkort's bushfire story. I had anticipated that she would submit a certain story but instead what she wrote was a haunting, gothic evocation of the Australian landscape – a place in which she had once experienced grave danger. I was affected by her descriptions of the damage wrought upon the landscape by global warming and the infiltration of suburbia on bushland when a fire sweeps through. And even though I knew (because she was writing it) that Shannon herself had survived the threat, it was still a powerful story about a young person who suddenly has to become an adult in an adult world.

The two pieces that made me think about the world in the different way were Megan Krakouer's and Andrea Thompson's – the stories that begin and end the collection. I think of myself as educated to a degree about issues affecting Indigenous Australians, and those affecting gender-diverse people, but the personal stories of

Megan and Andrea opened my eyes to a world of difficulty and suffering, and an inkling of the incredible courage it takes for these women to create change in their communities and their own lives. I read their stories, and I was changed by them.

Do you see yourself as a courageous person?

Thanks to this anthology, yes, I do, because I live my life as a queer and crip woman, and those are marginalised groups that, by definition, require a daily focus and deliberate action in order for their subjects to not be oppressed by the worlds that lie within the margins, and which create conditions that require a subject to live bravely and with intentionality.

In fact, I find all of the stories in this collection so powerful in their intentionality: I only hope to walk alongside these women who have shared their stories and for my story to be yet another voice of a courageous woman.

The collection that came before this was called Women of a Certain Rage. Do you think anger has a place in courage, and vice versa?

Absolutely. There is a saying that *if you are not angry, you are not taking notice*. I think there is so much about being a woman that we have to be angry about, and that we *need* to be angry about if we are to bring about change for ourselves, for our communities, our families and our children.

Many of the stories in this collection are manifestations of the powerful force of courage and anger. I think of Cynthia Dearborn's story about her life as an activist and risking her personal freedom to bring about environmental change. I think of Megan Krakouer's excoriating essay about institutional racism and the oppression of Indigenous families, and what it takes to resist these powerful negative forces. I think of Shel Sweeney's story about the Lismore floods and her finding the courage to rebuild her physical life, along with the emotional and psychological lives of her community. I think of Penny Jane Burke's essay about surviving domestic violence and about how she used her experience to enhance her education and undertake research that benefits women who also experience domestic violence.

I think about the kinds of institutions that make survival a difficult thing, and of how the world of mental and physical health treatments can be oppressive and difficult to manoeuvre, and how one needs resilience, patience and endurance to fight to find a way clear to live healthily and be well. These are things that are not just readily bestowed upon women. Women need to be able to articulate their desires and what they require. In a patriarchal society that can be a very difficult thing to do. And so I think there is a place for courage, and the rage that can be found in courage is a result of that need to be resistant for so long.

What is next for Bron Bateman?

I have my fourth poetry collection coming out mid-2025 with Fremantle Press. It is titled *Love Like This Isn't Harmless*. Many of the poems I've written have been inspired by the stories of these *women of a certain courage*, whose own bravery pushed the boundaries of what I had previously been prepared to share. They gave me a greater liberty to explore issues and they gave me the compulsion to write about them.

I am also doing some workshops at the end of 2024 on themes in my poetry, performance of that poetry, and also on journal writing. I am also looking forward to having the chance to do more editing, because it was such an honour and a privilege to go through that process with these women. I loved the profound element of creation and would welcome the chance to do that again.



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