https://buffalonews.com/opinion/article_a7d5b773-dc55-4321-baba-140e65e60e65.html

My View: What makes some people step forward when things get hard

Joe Kreuz

Mar 26, 2026

It happened slowly. I began to notice the same ideas resurfacing in thoughtful conversations, not as theories, but as lived truths. They all seemed to circle the same question: What makes some people step forward, quietly, without fanfare, when things get hard?

I've seen it while reading history, listening to people whose stories carried weight, and reflecting on my own life and work. At first, these ideas seemed unrelated. Only later did I realize they formed a quiet sequence: gallantry, crucible, and instinct — each revealing something about how character shows up when it matters.

Joe Kreuz admires those who do their duty without fanfare.

The word gallantry entered my thinking after a friend sent me an article that stayed with me . It wasn't about heroics or medals. It described something quieter: doing the right thing without announcement, restraint without

People are also reading...

1. **How the Buffalo Sabres chose a 41-year-old song to set the tone for a playoff chase**
2. **First stores expected to open in new Station Twelve buildings in October**
3. **For years, Buffalo Niagara was an affordable place to live. Now, that's changing**
4. **Analysis: Why Keon Coleman is an X factor for both the Bills' draft plans and 2026 season**

The idea of a crucible surfaced later while reading about Harry Truman. Historians often describe his World War I experience as the heat that forged his judgment and confidence, the moment that revealed who he would become. It was hardship that transformed.

Reading Truman alongside other leaders made something clear to me: the people we trust most were not shaped by ambition alone, but by pressure endured without surrendering principle. Progress is rarely driven by brilliance alone. It is often advanced by ordinary people who accepted responsibility and proved equal to it.

More recently, a younger friend introduced me to a word I hadn't heard of: conation. It describes our instinctive way of moving into action, how we naturally respond when faced with uncertainty. Some people organize. Some build. Some listen and steady others. Conation explains how we move.

That idea snapped into place with everything I'd been noticing. Conation explains the impulse. A crucible tests whether it holds under pressure. Gallantry determines what that movement does to the people around us.

My father was born in 1927 and my mother in 1931, growing up during the Great Depression on my grandfather's farms. Those years tested families quietly and relentlessly. Many farms failed; somehow, theirs endured. The people who carried the

heaviest responsibility were usually the least interested in talking about it.

My mother, still with us, recalls those years not with drama, but with perspective — how scarcity became normal, how responsibility came early, and how resilience was learned rather than taught. She met my father after World War II and came to understand, over time, his brief Navy service. The war ended shortly after he enlisted; his ship never made it to Japan. What he carried forward was a quiet sense that when called, you go, and when spared, you return to the work of living.

Similarly, my mother-in-law lived through wartime bombing as a German child, came to America in 1953, and later faced widowhood while her children were still young. She didn't make speeches about resilience. She practiced it.

Looking back, I'm struck by how often the most important people in our lives are not the loudest or most visible. They are the ones who step forward when something needs to be done and endure what life places in front of them without asking for attention. Relationships are built there — not in calm moments, but in how people behave when it matters most.