

President Obama certainly seems to be living up to expectations with his visit to Egypt and proclamations about a Palestinian state. What a brave man. As if being the first black American president is not risky enough, he is putting himself at increasing risk of revenge by any number of fanatics.

I would never be so brave. Anyone foolish enough to seek my company at a theme park or fairground will soon find out how little it takes to scare me. I do wonder, though, what it is that makes some people braver than others. I am sure that experience and circumstances can make heroes out of some. Children of war zones are probably more inclined to walk into a street that is under fire, than a child of Wester Ross. They have had to learn to be brave just to be able to survive.

John Sneddon might never have had a chance to be brave if he hadn't gone for a break at Glasgow Airport in the middle of a terrorist attack. But of course another person in the same place as he was on that day could well have reacted in a different way. Footage of the incident showed plenty of other people watching what was unfolding without any of them showing the bravery he did.

Susan Boyle was apparently used to singing in public before she entered the talent contest that made her so famous. I find the thought of singing in front of one other person so terrifying, that it renders me unable to push out a single note (of course I sing like an angel when I am alone with only a mirror and a hairbrush for company). After all the fuss and pressure put on Susan Boyle in the week running up to the final, it showed enormous courage for her to get up on stage and sing as she did. In the coming weeks she will need to continue to be brave whether she continues her new-found career or even just to go out to her local pub.

Apparently President Obama has invited her to sing at the celebrations for their Independence Day. Moray Firth Radio had a phone-in inviting suggestions of what she should sing. The winning

song was, amazingly, Sweet Home Alabama. Yes, a great song but not best suited to her voice, and wholly inappropriate given Alabama's history of treating its black people. It would be foolish rather than brave to sing that song to the first black president I think.

When does bravery become foolishness? If John Sneddon had been blown up and killed that day in Glasgow, would we have thought differently of his actions? When adventurers die leaving behind families do we wonder at their selfishness, where but for a chance slip we might have been admiring them instead?

I was at the Highland Diversity Awards this week in Inverness. We were very well looked after, and I met some interesting and inspiring people. The winner of the personal award demonstrated a level of bravery that has amazed those who knew her. She suffers from depression and found it a struggle to leave the house to perform the most basic tasks like taking her son to school and visiting her local shop. With help she found and held a job with a local firm, transforming her life. I imagine that a year ago she would never have imagined having a job, never mind being able to go up on stage in front of over a hundred people and accept an award to rapturous applause.

Being brave can mean different things to different people. For some bravery means doing or saying something that others wouldn't hesitate to do. Telling a colleague that something is their responsibility and not yours. Going out of your depth for the first time or jumping off the pier. Auditioning for a part in the local play. Dumping your job and going self-employed.

We don't all need to go on to the stage in front of hundreds or millions to be brave. We don't need to risk our lives to be brave. Our attempt might not work out, but just think how good it would feel if it did. Barack Obama may or may not achieve peace in the Middle East. Maybe you'll get the part of the ugly sister instead of the fetching lead. But at least you tried.