

Impact Statement

Kaiden Keys, Grade 11.

The Photo of Change, 2022.

Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 Inches.

Pocono Mountain West Highschool, Pocono Summit, PA

Unsung Hero: Therese Frare

As an LGBTQ+ adolescent, student, and artist, I wanted to depict an unsung hero who would help me shed light on the history of gay rights activism and the heroes who helped expand acceptance within our society. I found my hero, Therese Frare, through the provided pre-approved topics list. During my initial research, I discovered a crucial photograph she took that was published in LIFE Magazine in 1990. By depicting the humanity of David Kirby, her subject, along with his loved ones, she helped to spread awareness of the AIDS and HIV crisis that shook the LGBTQ+ community. Seeing into the lives of other people through the lens of art helps people understand and fear "others" less. Those who struggled with this illness are people, people who were loved and cared for. Her photograph showed their humanity to a broad segment of the population.

Therese was able to create change by exposing a wide audience to an intimate moment through the publication of her photography. As a photojournalism student at the University of Ohio, she began researching the rising AIDS crisis and wanted to spread awareness. During her research, she met David Kirby, a man admitted to the Pater Noster AIDS hospice in Columbus, Ohio. She listened to his story and was moved. His mother requested Therese capture the image of David's family surrounding him during his final moments. Therese later described the experience as "truly incredible", something heartbreaking yet amazing was unfolding before her eyes. A man, 32 years young, lay dying surrounded by love on an April morning in 1990. She captured these last moments of David's story on film. A few months later, with the Kirby family's permission and David's consent granted before his death, the image Therese Frare took began to spread across the country, magazine to magazine. The republished image gave a face to the tragedy that was the AIDS epidemic. Displaying human tragedy, the image brought a new perspective to the American people that few had seen before, slowly diminishing the stigma that surrounded AIDS and HIV.

While this photo made an impact at the time, little is known today about both Therese and David. On social media there are no hashtags for Therese Frare, when it came to David, there was limited content on him as well. When looking for reference photos to paint Therese's portrait, very few images could be found on the internet. As an artist who also tells stories to help foster understanding, I'm moved by this story and want to increase acknowledgment of Therese's work. I wanted to show David's life through film frames, depicting flashing moments of his life that were portrayed through Therese's art and displaying how a single picture can mean so much. In the film, there are images of David that Therese had taken while volunteering at the hospice. In the upper left corner is the logo for LIFE magazine, the publishing company which jump-started the awareness of the photograph. The pride flags seen in both the upper left and lower right-hand corners show Therese's allyship and representation of David Kirby as a gay

man. The symbol for AIDs, the red ribbon, can be seen within the lens Therese is holding. I depicted Therese in the center of the composition as the artist who told the story.

In my artwork, I am interested in exploring gender identity and other LGBTQ+ issues. I am planning and researching for a mural I intend to paint during my senior year of high school that depicts LGBTQ+ history in my local community and other LGBTQ+ activists. I am interested in being knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ history. The fear of the public losing this understanding of the AIDS crisis truly impacted me. I want to share this story with as many people as I can, it shouldn't get pushed aside and forgotten. This inspiring person is an example of the type of people I wish I had known existed when I was younger. During the planning and creation of this painting, I was able to share Therese's story with my friends, classmates, and family. I documented my progress by posting about it on social media. Since completing the oil painting depicting this unsung hero, I have been sharing Therese and David's story. My painting has been displayed multiple times. The first display of the portrait and accompanying artist statement was in an exhibit that took place at my high school on April 7, 2022, at an event called Coffee House. It is an annual music and arts event that showcases the many talents of our largely diverse student body. The painting is also being featured this April in a student art showcase at local businesses across my community. The chance at being a finalist or winner in this art competition will open up more opportunities for me to share this story of how artists can cause social change through the impact of their hard work.

I see Therese as a true Unsung Hero. Artists dare to delve into difficult concepts. Therese stepped out of the box, defying expectations, and was able to do something that others wouldn't have dared to do. Some people may have viewed David and other victims of the AIDS crisis as "monsters." Therese saw David as a person, a person with a story, a person with a life, a person worth acknowledging. Her picture, a single frame Therese took, was able to change the view of so many people by simply showing them a moment in a life that they had not imagined could be so similar to their own. Therese shone a light on the AIDS crisis in a way no one had seen before changed many Americans' perceptions. She created this artwork from the good of her heart and as David Kirby requested before his death, gained no monetary benefit from the image being published, instead she inspired a provocative change of perspective across the country.