

Impact Statement

Loren Franke, Grade 12.

Making Kindness a Reality, 2020.

Digital art, 12 x 18 Inches.

Harrison High School, Kennesaw, GA

Unsung Hero: Kendall Reinhardt

I discovered the hero, Kendall Reinhardt, through the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes website. As I scrolled through the list of unsung heroes, Reinhardt stuck out to me, because of the courage he possessed at such a young age. High school is a time when you are developing into who you want to be with influences from your educators and your peers. As a senior in high school during a period of racial tension, Kendall decided who he wanted to be by standing outside of the crowd and showing kindness to those who needed it the most.

In 1957, the peak of America's Civil Rights movement, nine African American students were enrolled in Little Rock Central High School, an all-white school in Arkansas. Despite the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, which declared segregation in schools unconstitutional, segregationists were not in favor of the news and rallied for change. The Little Rock Nine struggled to make it through those doors, and once they did, they faced verbal and physical abuse from their white peers. However, one white student in particular chose to value morality over popularity: Kendall Reinhardt. Ken became a loyal friend to the Little Rock Nine, including Elizabeth Eckford. As he walked in the light, he faced bullies and threats along with his father who received vile phone calls from those that held hatred for Ken's empathy. No matter what he came across, Kendall stuck to his beliefs and tried his best to create a more welcoming atmosphere for the Little Rock Nine in school. As I read more and more about his story, I thought about how I could bring that bravery into a piece of artwork. I chose to illustrate a hallway of Little Rock Central High School, in which in the center Kendall Reinhardt walks with Elizabeth Eckford and another one of the Little Rock Nine. On the outskirts of the canvas, stand several white peers staring at the three with angry expressions. The hallway is sketched, and the peers are all-white cartoon figures, because of their belief in the absence of color. In the middle, bright colors burst from the three who are painted realistically, originating from the audacity and authenticity Kendall possesses. In a sea of white, he dives with the mindset to make a difference, treating those hated with enduring kindness. His courage shall always be remembered.

Through this project, I have learned how important it is to celebrate heroes, even if they are not recognized in the books. Heroes not only create a positive impact in the past or in the present, but in the future as well. Their legacy shall carry on through generations, as they provide an example of what it means to be selfless and courageous. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to meet the hero, Kendall Reinhardt, by learning about his story. It would bring me pleasure to share this experience with family, friends, and the community, so that they may have a chance to do the same. I decided to have this artwork resemble a mixture of retro and modern style, because Ken went through something back then that is still present to this day. His true character has the power to influence students and others to treat each other as equals with kindness, no matter the color of their skin. Kindness is a form of love that is essential in our

world, because it unites us and has the strength to create positive change. I hope to bring this project to people's attention through social media, sparking inspiration for them to honor our unsung heroes.

Creating this type of artwork was something I had not done before, so it was truly an exciting experience. From now on, I hope to continue learning about heroes and expressing their stories through art, so that they may be recognized for what they have done for us all. Thankfully, The Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes has built a platform which provides us with information about unsung heroes of whom we can celebrate. Thanks to this project, I will always remember Kendall Reinhardt, for he carried a light and was not afraid to let it shine.