

Impact Statement

Julia Bhuiyan, Grade 10.
Crossing the Limits, 2019.
Mixed media, 19.5 x 15 Inches.
Plymouth High School, Canton, MI
Unsung Hero: Rosli Naf

Today, we honor a select few people as heroes and scatter their names throughout our calendars and history textbooks. However, many others are excluded; despite receiving little to no recognition, they still continue to take risks to make the world a better place. Although her name is not present in most history textbooks, Rosli Naf is one of these true heroes and deserves to be recognized throughout society. As a Swiss Red Cross nurse, Naf risked her life to save ninety Jewish children during the Holocaust. Her career began with the assignment to care for and protect one-hundred Jews at the Chateau de la Hille in Nazi-occupied France; when Nazi officers later demanded a list of the children and their ages to consider deportation, she hid the children. In August 1942, French police arrested forty-two teens under her care and took them to the LeVernet internment camp. Naf was infuriated and after bicycling to the transit camp, she demanded that the French officials let “her children” go, and therefore, they re-leased them the following week. In the following months, she and her colleagues helped several Jewish teens to escape from France to Switzerland. Consequently, French and German authorities complained that Naf was intervening with the Jewish children, and the Red Cross ordered her back to Switzerland and promptly fired her. She was referred to as a “smuggler” and was largely forgotten by the organization and her country. Still, as she lay dying alone in a Swiss nursing home in 1996, she said, “I should have tried harder. There were more children to save.”

While her other actions were incredible, her resilience and desire to help others is what I find to be most extraordinary about her. Despite receiving no recognition for her bravery, Naf continued to risk her life to save the lives of others. Although she recently received France’s highest medal in 2014, she deserves much more recognition for her intense devotion to saving the Jewish children. I wanted to reflect Rosli Naf’s story in my creative interpretation while also depicting her bravery and compassion in a unique way. By composing her figure out of newspaper articles about the Holocaust, the Red Cross, women’s rights, and helping children, I hoped to show that the events in her life and the actions she took in response to them played a significant role in defining her. I also painted several rust-red crosses on top of the canvas and on part of her portrait to demonstrate the effect that the Red Cross had on her life and how it stained her reputation after she was fired. Still, I portrayed Naf as confident because she was bold and defiant despite difficulties in her life. In the bottom right, I painted the Chateau de la Hille to show its significance in her life of the beginning her aide to Jewish children. By painting the crosses and the building transparently, the text underneath the paint remained unconcealed to demonstrate her unchanging passion; no matter the profession or the location, Naf always cared about saving lives. I used a largely monochromatic color scheme of sepia tones for this piece; however, I used red in the face and in the crosses to create contrast. By using a variety of newspapers of different tones, I was able to establish contrast between light and dark values; printing out black and white newspapers and then lightly washing over them with varying amounts of watercolor helped me to accomplish this. I painted the background as a mid-tone

with acrylic paint to create balance. By creating movement toward Naf's face, I placed the emphasis on it; the repetition of red crosses (glazed with acrylic paint) moves the viewer's eye down the canvas and toward the Chateau de la Hille, which then points up toward her. In addition, the red on Naf's cheeks and lips bring more attention to her face. By using an equal amount of light and dark values and limiting the color palette, I created balance throughout the piece and therefore an overall unity.

Social media has a considerable influence in our lives today and is an essential way to communicate with others; therefore, I plan to post my artwork of Rosli Naf with information of her impact on the world. My art account (https://www.instagram.com/artistic_tomato/?hl=en) on Instagram is where I post my artwork, and I have previously used it to spread awareness on various topics. For instance, I was able to share information about saving elephants with my elephant painting (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bo7Y16uBwoq/>); furthermore, this art was featured on The Elephant Pants® page (https://www.instagram.com/p/Bp7cNKilh_D/), which is a brand that donates money to helping elephants by selling its products.

By posting my artwork with a description of her heroism in the caption, I hope to successfully share Naf's story and to give her some of the recognition that she deserves. Creating this artwork has tremendously changed my outlook on life. From an artistic viewpoint, I would like to incorporate more symbolism in my paintings so that they have a more significant meaning and convey an important message. In addition, I've learned that actions that are taken for a good cause define a person more than the recognition that they receive; I hope to do what is right even if it is difficult or risks my reputation. While Rosli Naf is phenomenal for her courage in helping the Jewish children through risking her life, I find her especially striking for her desire to do what is right without expecting anything in return. Despite receiving only limited recognition and being condemned by her country, Naf persisted in her struggle to save the innocent because she believed that losing everything was worth it. Rosli Naf's incredible story of bravery and perseverance deserves to be shared with the world.