

Impact Statement

Minjae Kim, Grade 11.

A Hero Holding A Syringe Not A Gun, 2024.

Watercolor and graphite on paper, 10 x 16 inches.

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Unsung Hero: Eugene Lazowski

Dr. Eugene Lazowski (1913-2006) was a Polish medical doctor who dispersed false-positive cases of Typhus among Jews. With the Nazis' invasion of Poland during WWII in 1939, Jews experienced suffering under Nazi oppression. Hoping to evade Nazi persecution and the warfront, Jews wanted to escape their reality. Amidst the widespread of Typhus (approximately 750 deaths per day), Lazowski, joining the Polish Red Cross, treated Jewish patients by administering vaccines containing dead strains of Proteus OX 19 bacteria, resulting in positive Typhus tests, under lethal dose. The common use of this vaccine led to the confirmation of numerous false-positive cases, mimicking Nazi authorities that a Typhus epidemic had occurred, hence quarantining suspected Jewish individuals. Eventually, Lazowski's intelligent actions saved over 8,000 lives during this period of WWII. My artwork reflects upon this historical background, highlighting Dr. Eugene Lazowski's disobedience and resistance against Nazi control, his manipulation of the Typhus outbreak and his pioneering vaccine.

Among the research of countless unsung heroes throughout history, Dr. Eugene Lazowski's story deeply resonated with me. Particularly as I pursued my high school education under the history course, of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program I took, I've spent months delving into the history of Nazi Germany and WWII, which acquainted me with the horrors of the Polish invasion and the atrocities inflicted upon the Jews. Lazowski's heroism, bound by the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, underscored the acute sense of duty inherent in his medical profession as a physician, inspiring me to strive for similar acts of altruism and courage. It not only aligned with my academic interests but also prompted reflections on the essence of heroism and genuine acts of kindness. These contemplations deeply inspired me, ultimately compelling me to select Lazowski as the unsung hero worthy of my further study and artistic exploration.

In my artwork honouring Dr. Eugene Lazowski, I chose a 10 x 16 inches watercolour paper as my canvas, utilising both pencil and watercolour paint. My intention was to craft a collage-like composition, incorporating key elements of the environment at that time—such as Hitler and Nazi Germany, the Typhus outbreak and the vaccine treatment—into each of the circled pieces. This approach not only has capturing effects, highlighting each component, but also resonates with the thematic depth I sought to convey. Using black and white pencil drawings serves two purposes: it evokes the era in which Lazowski operated (20th century), while also underlining the importance of his story. On the left side, I deliberately introduced a subtle contrast to the busy scenes depicted on the right. By juxtaposing an article from a period newsletter detailing the Typhus outbreak against the background, I aimed to evoke a sense of discordance, underscoring the urgency and complexity of Lazowski's endeavours. Texture had a crucial role in capturing the essence of old paper, achieved through layered applications of watercolour paint. Placing Lazowski at the centre of the composition, I drew him with careful, accurate detail,

employing warm hues and smooth lines to portray his face with a sense of liveliness and distinction against the background. This choice calls attention to his status as a heroic figure, standing in definite contrast to the cold, monochromatic surroundings. Furthermore, Lazowski is placed larger relative to other figures, notably Hitler, and serves as a visual testament to his unsung heroism. While surface-level observations may grab attention towards the historical context of WWII and the Typhus epidemic, my aim was to underscore the paramount importance of recognising Lazowski's role in shaping history. Basically, my artwork serves as a reminder regarding war and disease, it is individuals like Lazowski who emerge as beacons of hope and resilience, deserving of our unwavering admiration and remembrance.

Through my research into Dr. Eugene Lazowski's endeavours and the historical context surrounding them, my perception of kindness underwent a transformation. Initially, I believed that acts of genuine kindness should always supersede any other actions of kind consideration. I thought it was controversial, actually inhumane to spread bacteria with the purpose of deceiving one side, risking people's lives. Nonetheless, the realisation that the true purpose was to save mistreated Jews from death, and Lazowski's actions ultimately saved thousands of lives, challenged my preconceptions. It illuminated the notion that sometimes, to effect long-term positive change, one must be willing to embrace risk and uncertainty for a greater size of benefit. This altered perspective imprinted in me a sense of conviction to prioritise the greater good over personal comfort or conventional norms. It is my hope that my artwork serves as a testament to the existence of countless unsung heroes and underscores the capacity for ordinary individuals to enact extraordinary change. True heroism transcends superhuman abilities; it lies in the willingness to take bold action and extend a helping hand to those in need. In an era increasingly preoccupied with individual pursuits and self-interest, I aspire for our society to cultivate a culture of selflessness and compassion, where acts of kindness are regarded as paramount. I hope my artwork acts as a stepping-stone for this change and impact in our community.