

Impact Statement

Katelyn Kim, Grade 11

The Heartbeat of Resilience, 2024.

Watercolor on paper, 14 x 17 inches.

Harvard-Westlake School, Los Angeles, CA

Unsung Hero: Dr. Helen Brooke Taussig

Medicine is a broad and diverse field, and many great people have made significant contributions, though not all of their stories are as well-known as others. Fascinated by the world of medicine and inspired by the unsung heroes within it, I came across the remarkable story of Dr. Helen B. Taussig, a pioneer in pediatric cardiology. In the early 20th century, a male-dominated medical field, Dr. Taussig's journey unfolded during the time of immense challenges faced by women in STEM. Throughout her career, gender biases and societal norms hindered women's progress in medicine, relegating them to subordinate roles despite their capabilities. Dr. Taussig, however, defied these constraints with her relentless pursuit of knowledge and her unwavering commitment to improving pediatric cardiology, particularly in the treatment of congenital heart defects. Dr. Taussig's unwavering drive to understand and treat congenital heart defects in children, initially working in isolation and then collaborating with others, caught my attention. I felt the need to pay tribute to her legacy and passion through my artwork, *The Heartbeat of Resilience*. Dr. Taussig's empathy and profound compassion lay at the basis of life-saving surgical procedures, the treatment of the "blue baby syndrome," in which a baby's skin turns blue due to deficiencies in oxygen in the blood. This procedure saved thousands of young patients. Her relentless pursuit of knowledge and her commitment to improving the well-being of her young charges are qualities that I find truly admirable and worthy of recognition. As I delved deeper into Dr. Taussig's story, I was struck by the profound impact she had on the field of medicine, and I felt a strong desire to share her remarkable achievements with others. Through my artwork, I hope to shed light on her remarkable contributions and inspire others to explore the rich medical history, where unsung heroes like Dr. Taussig have left an influential impact.

Dr. Helen B. Taussig's work is invaluable, as she was not only an excellent researcher but also a deeply compassionate doctor who went beyond the limitations of her era. From the research I have read, Dr. Taussig's character was defined by an iron will and unwavering compassion, which are two essential qualities that enabled her to thrive in the 19th century, a time when women were often denied opportunities in STEM fields. Despite these challenges, Dr. Taussig strode ahead in the field of cardiology. Her research and development of the Blalock-Taussig shunt revolutionized the field of cardiology. In reading her biography, "Helen B. Taussig: The Lady with the Lamp," I learned that the core of Dr. Taussig's character was an unwavering commitment to her patients and, by extension, a pioneering spirit as a woman in science. Her seminal work

with Dr. Alfred Blalock and Vivien Thomas resulted in the development of the Blalock-Taussig shunt, a procedure that has saved thousands of lives by enhancing oxygenation in children with tetralogy of Fallot, a congenital heart condition. This was a shining example of hope in a period when the diagnosis was often a death sentence. Dr. Taussig's tenacity in the face of adversity, her pioneering spirit as a woman in a male-dominated field, and her powerful impact on pediatric cardiology are what I sought to encapsulate in my artistic representation. Her story shows that resilience and the power to influence, however difficult it may be, are the hallmarks of those who dare to challenge the status quo.

My watercolor, *The Heartbeat of Resilience*, depicts Dr. Taussig's tender, professional care for her infant patients. Warm, earthy tones convey the earthiness and warmth of her personality, while soothing blue hues in the background symbolize the comfort and stillness she provided to anxious parents. I incorporated her X-ray images that characterized her work. On the left, a shining heart adorned with vines and flowers symbolizes the nurturing and beauty of her care, depicting how she helped young hearts to flourish against all odds. The vibrant, colorful heart in the background represents the hallmark of the precious lives she was able to save, with the vines and flowers growing out of it symbolizing the growth and vitality of these saved lives.

This tribute to Dr. Helen B. Taussig has been a profound learning experience for me, as it has opened my eyes to the fragility of life and the immense value of determination. Working on this artwork has deepened my personal appreciation for those who dedicate their lives to healing others and has truly inspired me to strive for a similar level of compassion and commitment in my own pursuits. Dr. Taussig's unwavering drive to understand and treat congenital heart defects, even in the face of the limitations of her era, is truly awe-inspiring to me. As I've delved into her story, I've come to recognize on a deeper level the importance of determination and the transformative power of one person's passion. This project has fundamentally changed the way I view the world, instilling in me a strong sense of responsibility to seek out and celebrate the hidden heroes of history. Moving forward, I am wholeheartedly committed to sharing Dr. Taussig's inspiring story more widely. I will showcase my watercolor piece, *The Heartbeat of Resilience*, and her story across my social media platforms and nonprofit website, with the sincere hope of inspiring others to follow in her footsteps and pursue their dreams with that same unwavering dedication, and to make a tangible difference in the lives of those around them.

References:

- Alexander, S. (1987). Helen B. Taussig: The Lady with the Lamp. *Pediatrics*, 79(6), 889-890.
- Baldwin, H. S. (2013). The History of Pediatric Cardiology. *Pediatric Research*, 74(3), 354-362.