

Impact Statement

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***Spread Your Wings*, 2024.**

Stained glass, 20 x 12 inches.

Palmetto Scholars Academy, North Charleston, SC

Unsung Hero: Jacob Valentine II

Jacob Valentine II was an environmental activist who helped preserve the Mississippi Sandhill Crane population. Born in the early 20th century, he spent a good portion of his childhood in the Great Depression. He was forced to be familiar with nature due to his family's living situation, and that was the beginning of his activism journey. As a young adult, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and traveled around the country doing what he was comfortable with: living in nature. He helped the environment in tremendous ways as he planted trees, cleaned up litter, etc. After World War II ended, he chose to continue this wildlife path and he joined the Fish and Wildlife Services. It was with this service that he discovered the Mississippi Sandhill Crane; he quickly recognized its small population, 35, and knew that the construction of I-10 would have a catastrophic impact on them. He fought in court against this construction, and he won, establishing over 2,000 acres as federally protected land. This became known as the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge and is now home to approximately 130 birds over 19,000 acres. I chose Valentine because of his unique story and his long-lasting impact on environmental activism. Despite retiring over 40 years ago, his efforts are still seen today, as well as his incredible precedent.

As I was researching Valentine, his story became incredibly inspirational to me. His story shows that the efforts of one person, while they may seem small, can have an enormous impact on the world, even over 50 years later. Because of this one person, there is now almost 20,000 acres of protected wildlife land. I love environmental preservation and sustainability, and his story has shown me what I can do for my community. I wanted my piece to focus on the long-term impact that Valentine had for the Gulf Coast's wildlife populations after 50 years.

The two Sandhill Cranes in my piece represent the balance between humans and nature. Valentine's mission was to keep the harmony between humans and the surrounding wildlife, rather than disrupting it. I chose to use two birds for this piece because the number two is often used to symbolize peace, balance, harmony, and duality--which was Valentine's idea. The focus of this piece is the large Sandhill Crane, which takes up most of the visual space. This bird is spreading its wings out and tilting its head back, which demonstrates a powerful stance. The portrayal of this bird and its stance represents the freedom that these birds were given due to Valentine. In the background, there is a bird soaring in the air. This bird's flight also represents the

freedom of the Sandhill Cranes due to the protected lands. I chose to use bright and vivid colors for the background to represent the natural beauty of the world and how important it is. Contrasting with these rich colors, the Sandhill Crane is made from more neutral colors that are more accurate to the natural colors of Sandhill Cranes. This contrast between the two colors really helps the birds stand out more to the eye. I chose to keep the solder lines silver rather than coloring them because silver really symbolizes the impact of humans. Rather than being colorful and bright, it represents the impact that the industrialization of the world has had on nature. In this piece, it is the binding force that holds the glass pieces together. This shows that there is a way to balance humans and nature together to create something beautiful if done with care and effort.

Through this process, I have learned so much both about Valentine's mission and myself. Researching Jacob Valentine II has really opened my eyes as to what impact I can have within my community and in the world--I don't have to wait for other people to join me, I can have an impact even by myself. This project also helped me overcome my fear of imperfection and failure. Throughout this process, there were many moments when I wanted to give up because something went wrong or didn't come out perfectly. However, by the end of this process, I realized that the imperfections were okay because I had at least dared to try; this has helped me grow tremendously as an artist to be the best version of myself that I can be.