

Impact Statement

Mackenzie Winchell, Grade 12

Ometz, 2024.

Stained glass, 20 x 33 inches.

On Track Academy, Spokane WA

Unsung Hero: Carla Peperzak

The title of my piece, “*Ometz*,” is the Hebrew word for courage.

Criteria 1: The Unsung Hero that inspired this piece was Spokane’s Carla Peperzak, who was a member of the Dutch resistance and helped save several of her family members as well as find hiding places for Jews throughout the war. For over 50 years, she didn’t even talk about what she did. I find Carla inspirational because at the time of her actions she was the same age as me. As I read about the lives she saved and how she did it, I had to ask myself if I could be that brave in the same situation. It’s hard to be brave and do the right thing, especially when you are still young and figuring out how the world works. Let alone when doing the right thing means standing up to Nazis. Carla lives in the same city as me and one of our newest schools was named for her.

Criteria 2 and 3: The center of my piece is a bridge in Amsterdam, which is a popular symbol of the region. Carla skated in the canals as a girl and made memories there. The water underneath flows and inspires hope, and the currents are as strong as the bravery it took to stand up against the Nazis and hide family members in farmhouses. Hidden in the water are roses which symbolize hope and growth—as in learning from horrible mistakes. In my research I also saw that the Hebrew bible refers to the Jews as roses. My design has roses hidden in the waves of the water, but some have hints of purple, which represents awe and change for the better. All are symbolic of Carla and her actions. It can be hard to do the right thing, let alone as heroic as standing up to Nazis, especially when you are young. The actions of Carla directly resulted in generations of more young people who both survived and exist today because of her bravery, and people who are inspired to do the right thing after learning of Carla’s actions. The rays of color beaming out of the bridge represent those generations. They also inspire hope, and in the case of Carla Peperzak, generations of students who will be inspired by her story over and over as they walk the halls of the school named for her and her bravery here in Spokane, Washington. I’ve seen coverage in the news of students at the school that has her name, and she is like a rockstar there. Students ask her to sign their lunchboxes and want to hug her. For generations, students will learn of her bravery that was unsung for so long and be inspired to do the same.

Criteria 4: Creating this piece made me think about what teenagers during Carla’s time were going through compared to what teenagers today go through. It gave me

perspective. As I made design decisions and chose colors, I thought about what Carla went through and it made my problems a little easier to bear. I wonder if I would be brave enough to do what Carla did to help save her family and others. Carla is 100 years old. We share the same city we call home. One of our newest middle schools is named for her. Creating this piece inspires me to give back the way she has in our city—which is why I chose to give a copy of piece to the middle school that shares her name. Carla inspires the students so much at that school—when she came for her 100th birthday they treated her like a celebrity. It is my hope that they see my piece and think of her and the bravery she inspires. Studying the Holocaust is important because we must never forget. I know this and creating this piece gave me a chance to be a part of helping others to not forget.

Criteria 5: I will share my artwork and experience learning about Carla by donating a copy of my stained-glass window panel to Peperzak Middle School here in Spokane, Washington—as a colorful, hopeful reminder that being brave enough to do the right thing makes anyone a hero, and in honor of Carla’s 100th birthday year. The school is new just this year and was named in her honor. This is also something I kept in mind as I designed and chose the warm and cool colors—I wanted it to represent the hope heroes create, as well as be mindful of the loss that came out of the Holocaust. It will be displayed at one of our city’s libraries for the month of May, and my teacher is in charge of social media for my school, and we will also put word out to the community about the piece and how they can see it.