

Impact Statement

Eva Hammonds, Grade 11.

Rain of Hope, 2023.

Mixed media on paper, 9.5 x 14 inches.

Columbus High School, Columbus, GA

Unsung Hero: Gail Halvorsen

The world is filled with heroes, and I was pleased to find that it was relatively difficult to find one whose story had not been widely celebrated. So, for this project, I turned to the list very helpfully provided on the Center for Unsung Heroes' website. Several individuals leapt out at me, though one title really grabbed my attention- the candy bomber. I remember laughing in confusion before I vaguely recalled hearing something about candy drops during the Berlin airlift. Being an army kid and loving the idea of flying, I felt a connection to Gail Halvorsen in that I had often considered entering the military as a pilot. It was a job a lot more appealing than being a foot soldier- I could never look someone in the eye and shoot them. But bringing supplies to needy people was a truly noble task. Halvorsen took meeting people's physical needs much further when he was moved by the spark of resilience and understanding in the children of Berlin, who once told him, "Don't worry about us. We can get by on little food, but if we lose our freedom, we may never get it back." He decided to reward this hope with what could seem like a little act of kindness compared to the stories of other unsung heroes. However, that reciprocation of that bravery is the perfect example of how heroism can multiply- one brave, good act can catalyze another and inspire.

In my clawing through the recesses of the internet for research, I enjoyed getting a sense of my hero's personality. Halvorsen was courageous and inventive in an almost childlike way in all accounts of him. He gained the nickname "Uncle Wiggly Wings" by rocking his plane's wings to signal that his plane was dropping the sweets. The candies were held aloft by tiny makeshift handkerchief parachutes, which struck me as particularly creative, like a science fair project. In every picture I've seen of him, even the most recent ones where he is wrinkled with age, he has a youthful smile which became the focus of my painting. The perspective of the piece came from pictures I found of kids standing in the ruins of Berlin, heads tilted up towards the sky, watching for planes. I wanted to capture that perspective of hopefully anticipating the planes swooping over the damaged city. Another picture I found, a monochrome picture I found of Halvorsen holding up one of the parachutes with the candy on the end, was the inspiration for the lollipops in the painting. To make the candies stand out and give them a sense of glowing hope, I turned them vibrant red, a color both the American and German flags have in common. Halvorsen was certainly generous, as sweets couldn't have been cheap right after the conclusion of a World War. I filled my work with parachutes to emphasize that point. The whole painting was designed to show the glow of hope that Halverson showered onto Berlin through his consideration.

Immediately after choosing my unsung hero, my mind was filled with ideas. Most prominent was the idea of doing a view of the parachutes falling down onto the city from the plane, or a view of the candy drifting down into the city from above, as if from the perspective of one of the children. I went with the latter. I didn't want the perspective of the painting to suggest a sort of worshipful

view of Halvorsen; he was never meant to be the sole focus of the piece. I wanted to emphasize instead his role in healing the rift between America and Germany after the war and providing hope to the children of Berlin. So, I incorporated the patterns of the US and German flags into several of the parachutes, leaving the rest Army green, to signify the military's role in the airlift. The candy bomber himself took center stage, but I made sure to keep his silhouette small enough that it didn't draw all the attention away from the surrounding details- the slight damage to one of the buildings on the left, the soot on the hands of the children, suggesting that they were digging through the ashes to help repair their city. The sky was meant to look somewhere between sunrise and sunset- the dusk of an old era and the dawn of a new one, ushered in by the heroes of the airlift.

The biggest insights I took away from this project were the importance of perspective and the great work a little amount of good can do when used creatively. Halvorsen didn't have much to brighten the kid's lives, but understanding how a kid thinks, he gave up his candy stash to brighten their days and started a whole new sub-operation in Operation Vittles. By this logic, even a Junior with no job, an irrational fear of cars, and a scrappy sense of purpose can combine her resources and do some good in the world as well. Perspective is not just important in art, where it can make boring things look interesting through a dynamic angle, though I have learned a lot about drawing structures from one, two, and three-point perspectives. It's also valuable to have perspective in life, like the children of Berlin did. Hard circumstances are inevitable and can be depressing. But we just need to look at them from a dynamic angle; get creative and find something to enjoy when things get difficult. I want to share this message wherever I can, starting with my school, where my art teacher has awesomely managed to display my work in exhibitions such as the Muscogee County Youth Art Month exhibition. I also never tire of telling people the bizarre and inspirational story of "Uncle Wiggly Wings." I hope that it can be a Rain of Hope to whoever hears it. Sometimes a hero just needs to empower others to make a difference.