

Impact Statement

Melissa Arechiga, Grade 11.

Frances Kelsey: Guardian Angel, 2023.

Digital Art, 11.5 x 16.5 inches.

Summer Creek High, Houston, TX

Unsung Hero: Frances Kelsey

I found my Unsung Hero, Frances Kelsey, from a list provided by the organization. I chose Frances Kelsey because I had never known about the potential thalidomide crisis that could have happened in America. As I delved deeper into Kelsey's story, I found that the most interesting about her was her stubbornness in the thalidomide case. It is incredibly brave to stand your ground on your belief amidst hard opposition, therefore it inspired me when social pressure was not enough for Kelsey to submit to the demands or thoughts of others.

Apart from the short description found on the provided list, I furthered my research by combing through the Internet. I used multiple sources, such as The National Institute of Health's website for Kelsey's biography (<https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov>) for the main topic and used Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances_Oldham_Kelsey) to discover more of Kelsey's life and accomplishments. During my research, I learned that Kelsey had extensive knowledge of how drugs could produce side effects, and that some even permeated through the placenta during pregnancy. It was due to this knowledge that Kelsey was so skeptical of the drug, since very little tests had been run on it to deem it safe for everyone's consumption. I also learned that the manufacturing companies and pharmacies kept trying to convince her to change her mind by pushing her and sending papers that were supposed tests of the drug's safety. My research led me to discover that Frances Kelsey was a strong and courageous woman, who fought not only against thalidomide but for better management and scrutiny of drug production and distribution, only retiring after 45 years of working and leaving behind a better FDA.

In my drawing, I depict Kelsey as an angel with wings and a sword, a destroyed pill bottle at her feet and her with a healthy baby at her head. This is meant to represent her fighting spirit, how her desire to protect others and a confidence in herself led to her to destroying what would have been a major catastrophic event. Like a guardian angel, she kept overlooking the safety of others beyond the thalidomide scare, hovering over the FDA and leading it into a responsible and dedicated organization to safety. Surrounding her are newspaper pages with falsified test results and other negative words, the condescending representation of the production companies breathing down her neck to approve their drug along with judgement from peers. On the contrast, surrounding her and the baby are newspaper pages showing the real outcome of her actions, the two showing what could have been a potential victim of the drug now safe and sound in the arms of its protector. Lastly, the inscription of the word knowledge on the blade of her sword represents Kelsey fighting using her knowledge of the harm that that drugs can bring. Overall, my vision is to show people of Kelsey's bravery and somewhat grand stature, one that led to the most innocent thing on earth becoming safe from something it had no way of fighting against by itself.

As I was developing my art work, I kept thinking of how, had Frances Kelsey let herself be pushed into a corner and approved the mass consumption and distribution of the drug, millions of people would not have existed today while millions more would have felt the profound loss of a generation, a calamity that was thankfully avoided. It made me understand that defiance in what one believes is right can go a long way to help protect what is dear and what is true, especially when one has been given the power to change things like Frances did when she went to the FDA. I realize that Frances' story should be shared so that others can know of her courage and be as moved as I was when I first came to know her story and her good deed. As such, I will be posting my drawing and a summary of her part in the Thalidomide crisis on my Instagram, tagging the Lowell Milken Center so that others can discover more people like Frances Kelsey (Instagram name: @dat_hot_potato). In the end, I have come to enjoy the process of drawing for my unsung hero, having learned more about someone who changed the world, and realize that I have the power to stand up for what I believe in, both through my actions and my art.