

Impact Statement

Caroline Van Allen, Grade 11.

Berlin Candy Bomber, 2018.

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20 Inches.

Green Mountain High School, Lakewood, CO

Unsung Hero: Gail Halvorsen

Some people make grand gestures in an attempt to make a positive impact on the world and receive praise for doing so. Then there are others that do what they believe is right, and never receive recognition for their efforts. Those silent servants and do-gooders are the backbone and moral compass within a world so darkened by hate. Gail Halvorsen, a colonel in the US Army, was one of those unsung heroes that did what was moral without expecting a reward or thanks. After WW2, many Americans felt that Germans needed to suffer for their role during the war. Gail felt the same until he saw the men, women, and children that were hungry, cold, and struggling to live day to day. The broken lives left behind after war raged through the world, were a stark reminder that we are all humans trying to live life on the home we call Earth. Empathy chilled his veins when he saw children that were starving, and that were humble enough not to ask for food or candy. They simply requested that America not give up on them. Gail decided that they deserved much more than just hope. Just maybe, he could take it upon himself to bring light to their shattered world, and remind them of their childhood. As he searched his heart to find a solution to his desire to help the children, the somewhat outlandish notion flashed into his mind that he could drop confectionaries and candies from his plane. As soon as the major sweets factories in America caught wind of his delightful idea, they all donated large sums of product to his cause. Hershey's chocolate and Wrigley gum were just two of the many that lent Gail a hand with dropping parachutes of hope and happiness to the children of the broken Berlin.

While sorting through the many inspirational stories on the list of unsung heroes, I wanted to find an individual that I could feel particularly personally connected to. The story of Gail Halvorsen immediately caught my attention. It initially drew me in because of his raw, selfless kindness. In a moment of luck, during the same time that I was researching my un-sung hero, I was learning about the Berlin Blockade in my history class. I felt so connected and hungry to learn more. The possibility of connecting my education, passion for art, and inspiration from the amazing Gail Halvorsen was so exciting, and the ideas began flooding through my mind of all the ways I could celebrate him. I couldn't keep it to myself. I discussed my ideas with my art teacher, history teacher, family, and class. All that I told were in awe of the selflessness of the man who brought joy to so many young, downtrodden youths.

Not only did Gail Halvorsen's story impact me as a person by showing that not all people are driven by self-gain, but it also impacted my perspective on the visual arts. I realized that it did not exclusively have to be taught in an art class. Its creative and expressive viewpoint could also be taught throughout all classes so that individuals with many varieties of learning styles could feel more tangibly connected to the past. My history teacher requested that I give him a print of my final piece upon completion because it could teach students in a visual way. At this request I was over-joyed. What began as an art competition, turned into an amazing opportunity

to share inspiring stories and become a more active member of my community. I now have an integral part in showing my peers the impact that random kindness makes on others through the lens of art and history.

As I began the task of creating my art piece, I imagined as he flew over Berlin and wiggled his wings to signal that candy was about to rain. I could see his smile. There is not one photo of Gail Halvorson where he was not smiling brightly. Therefore, I placed him in the left third of the painting, watching the happy children and soaking in the fruits of his effort; smiling, almost as if his ghost was there with them. During the actual event, the parachutes were made out of white napkins, however, I chose to paint them in color to represent the joy the goodies had brought. I rendered the rest of the art piece in black and white because it showed the devastation that war had brought to the people and landscape. My main goal was to emphasize Gail's satisfaction with the task he had done, and the feeling of a light amongst darkness.

Gail Halvorson could have went back to the United States, after WW2, and declared he had done enough. However, he choose to continue to sacrifice for the betterment of others. Just one person gave so many the courage to keep living. His actions gave much more than just candy to people, he gave hope. Hope not just for the children in Berlin, Germany, but for anyone who heard of his story. He inspired a future of freedom, happiness, and humanity. War rises humanity's faults to the surface, yet it also makes kindness shine brighter than a warm summer sky, and gives individuals the chance to rise above hate.