

## Impact Statement

Mollie Probst, Grade 12.

**Bound Together**, 2016.

Cardboard, plaster, paint, and sheets of music, 23 x 18 Inches.

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Unsung Hero: Meva Mikusz

It is the summer of 1942 and World War II is well under way. Fifteen-year-old Meva Mikusz is living in the small town of Czortkow, Poland where Nazi forces had just established the Czortkow Ghetto, where thousands of Jews were forced to live. Among the families sent to this ghetto were the Hausers, a family that Meva had developed a relationship with at the beginning of the war. On August 27, military police were sent to bring the first group of Jews from the Czortkow Ghetto into a Belzec concentration camp. Terrified for her young daughter, Frieda Hauser got a message to Meva and her family, pleading for one of them to sneak two-year-old Inka out of the ghetto before she was sent to the camp. The only one small enough to make it through the narrow window in the wall of the ghetto was Meva. While most young teens would not dare risk their lives for a child they barely knew, Meva's compassion and bravery compelled her to attempt the unthinkable. After sundown, Meva crept through the small window and past Ukrainian guards to the other side. There she found Mr. Hauser waiting for her with Inka. Meva then took the young girl back into her home, where they had to hide in the basement for years to escape being caught. Selflessly giving up her youth, Meva's devotion to creating a childhood for Inka inspires me tremendously.

While reading about the bond that Meva and Inka shared, I could not help but think of my relationship with my niece. Although neither me nor my niece have gone through anything even near as traumatic as Meva and Inka did, complicated family situations have led me to spend a lot of time caring for her, trying to create joy for her during difficult circumstances. Now when I am frustrated by the things going on around me, I will think of Meva and be encouraged by her ceaseless self-sacrifice and the love and compassion that she was able to share with Inka everyday.

From the very beginning of this project, I knew that I wanted to work with various mediums. By choosing to work with mixed media, I felt that I could better convey the idea that although Meva and Inka's lives were difficult and messy, Meva was able to bring everything together and make a life for Inka. I also thought that working with multiple different mediums would allow me to include more symbolism than I would have if I chose to only use one. For instance, the hands in my project that represent Meva and Inka's are made out of a plaster mold of my nieces and I's hands so that I could represent one of the many reasons why Meva inspires me. During the years when Meva and Inka were living together, Meva taught Inka how to play the piano. For this reason, I used antique sheet music from 1942 (the year Meva took Inka into her home) to represent something that the two girls bonded over. I decided to use thread to connect the sheet music to symbolize how Meva created a childhood for Inka out of nothing, and how although the two girls came from different backgrounds, their lives would be forever sewn together. I decided to use red as an accent color in their dresses as well as in the thread to highlight that despite chaos and tragedy, Meva and Inka were able to find peace in the love that they shared. I chose

create an image of Meva and Inka running towards the light, with Meva pulling Inka to depict the way that Meva saved her from catastrophe.

I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to learn about and honor Meva Mikusz. The more I researched her and the incredible bravery and compassion that she had, the more connected I felt to her. The lessons I learned from her story are ones that I believe will last a lifetime.