

Impact Statement

Tiffany Conrad, Grade 11.

The Thiamine Curer, 2018.

Acrylic, paper collage, watercolor on paper, 16 x 20 Inches.

Burlington Community High School, Burlington, IA

Unsung Hero: Robert R. Williams

In India, 1886, was born Robert R. Williams. As a missionary kid growing up, he was surrounded by people infected with Beriberi. Beriberi is a condition that occurs when the body does not get enough vitamin B1. Side effects like a fast heart rate, shortness of breath and leg swelling, and numbness can occur, even to the point where people could not move or walk. He witnessed the pain others went through which motivated him. Even after getting a job with Western Electric Company after the war, he was still persistent in discovering a way to heal. Williams helped cure many nutritional deficiencies around the world. It inspires me because he was not forced to take on this case but was affected by it and decided himself that it was important to do good for others and devoted many years of his life. He is inspirational, not only because of his high quality in knowledge, but his perseverance and interest in finding a cure for Beriberi.

On my piece, Robert is painted center and is drawing the diagram of thiamine on the chalkboard. On the bottom of the board is a before and after drawing of a rat before they were injected with thiamine. An unhealthy rat, then an “anti” healthy rat not infected anymore after being injected. Under the board is a quote by him. The collage to the left side of the piece is mixed media giving a little background about his life. The map of Nellore, India is where he grew up as a missionary kid where he saw the disease take over. The person to the left of him is infected with Beriberi, showing weakness and having a hard time standing, which understanding Beriberi means “I can’t I can’t.” I can’t walk. Underneath him are the two colleges he went to. Graduating high school at age 14, he went to Ottawa University of Kansas. Two years later he transferred to Chicago University, ending with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry. He moved to the Philippines to work as a chemist where he was assigned by Edward Vedder to find the cure for Beriberi. This was the start of a mission that he would continue for years.

As I was working on my project, I carried it around while in progress. I asked people for ideas, but also some asked what it is about. It was an experience to have because I not only shared what my idea for the artwork was, but also got to tell the story of this incredible unsung hero. Every time I was able to tell the story of his accomplishments and hard work, I went back to learn even more about his success, so I am able to express more clearly how his dedication turned into advances and lifelong efficiencies. Robert R. Williams is a success and has helped thousands of people with his findings to heal nutritional deficiencies. He is an inspiration to many and has paved a way for new findings in the future, helping to educate anticipation for what has to come in the scientific world.