

Impact Statement

Claire Fallon, Grade 12.

A Valentine Trompe l'oeil, 2017.

Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 Inches.

Washburn Rural High School, Topeka, KS

Unsung Hero: Jacob Valentine

My painting is an attempt to capture the essence of wildlife service member Jake Valentine. It is a trompe-l'oeil painting or a painting that uses realism to trick the eye into thinking the objects exist in a three-dimensional space. It aims to include influential aspects of Valentine's life. For example, his teacher at Wisconsin University, his time spent in the 32nd division infantry in WWII, a medal from WWII, and his later career in Wildlife Services. Jake's early life in the Civilian Conservation Corp as well as his actions in WWII reflect his character and that character would one day help him to save a species.

Valentine was born to a poor Danish family in Racine, Wisconsin during the Great Depression. The family's financial struggle eventually resulted in homelessness and relocation to an island off of Lake Michigan. It is here that Valentine's love for nature most likely started and would soon lead to a job that reflected his interests. He joined President Roosevelt's "Tree Army", also known as the Civilian Conservation Corps.

When World War II struck the nation, Jake was one of thousands to enlist in the United States Army. He was deployed as a telecommunicator for a battalion in the Pacific. As shown in my painting, he was a part of the 32nd infantry division. One day, unexpectedly, his division came under Japanese fire. Most soldiers lacked the ability to swim, however, Valentine's past of living on an island allowed him and another soldier to take turns swimming their fellow soldiers to safety.

His act of bravery earned Valentine a Silver Star, as shown in my painting, but Valentine's honorable character would not end with the war. After the war, he attended the University of Wisconsin where he majored in environmental biology and wildlife conservation. One of his teachers named Aldo Leopold, depicted in the painting on the Wisconsin flier, inspired him to focus on wildlife preservation and environmental conservation. Valentine's feeling of inspiration would lead him to achieve a master's in zoology and after graduation, join the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as represented by the badge in my painting. After being assigned to several locations all over the country, he became the regional wildlife biologist for the Gulf Coast.

While being on the Gulf, Jake discovered a love for the sandhill crane. The crane produces very few offspring and is still endangered due to hunting and habitat loss. Valentine again proved his character when his beloved cranes came under threat. At the time, Interstate 10 was designed to run through the savannah which would cause the remaining 35 sandhill cranes to go extinct. Valentine exemplified bravery and fought for the cranes as well as researched a better solution. This included speaking, writing articles, and giving testimonies for the cranes. His efforts finally paid off when his case went to court with Lanes vs. Cranes which inhibited the I 10 construction. Valentine was then able to create a conservation for the cranes known as the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is symbolized, as it is today, in the form of a

map. There is also a wooden sign that labels the refuge and is depicted as being tacked to the right of the 32nd infantry paper. My painting also includes origami cranes that represent the birds Valentine was able to save through his valent act. The pictures of Valentine show him in his later years, still with his binoculars looking at his beloved birds in their happy place, the wild.