

## Impact Statement

Oana Popescu, Grade 10.  
***The Hero Within Us***, 2016.  
Colored pencil on paper, 27.5 x 19.5 Inches.  
Liceul de Arte, Buzau, Romania  
Unsung Hero: Meva Mikusz

As my personal unsung hero I chose Meva Mikusz. She didn't only save a life – she risked her own life when she was nothing more but a 15 years old child. She had her whole life ahead but she chose to go off the deep end in order to rescue a Inka, a 2 years old child, from a ghetto in WWII. And with unbelievable strength of character, she did –without hesitation, despite the menace: she can be considered a true young savior. I'm a year older and I can't imagine to have already saved someone from imminent death –but she did it. I have the feeling that if she were able, she would've saved each poor soul from the terrifying Nazi treatments.

Some think that saving only a person doesn't make you entitled to be considered a true hero. But I say it matters as much as if she saved thousands, because that one child represents the future, a reason to fight for, and a whole nation, the disadvantaged Jewish people. This woman saved another person because everybody deserves to live. Meva gave freedom to the little girl, it gave her the wings she needed to let the war and racism in her past, aiming for a brighter and kinder world. And this is what I wanted to convey in my drawing: that people helping others are true heroes, how a person can change someone's life for the better even if the whole world is against them.

Meva and Inka's story had a huge impact on me and I tried to illustrate it as good as I could, balancing the turn the little girl's life took with Meva's help: in the left, the road to the Holocaust built by discrimination and superiority, in the right the endless sky which we all deserve, a chance to fly in the world and live, learn without fear. Between those two there is a stone wall – it's cracked, because even the hardest obstacles may be jumped over...and if they can't be overcome, then you have to find a solution, just like Meva did: she managed to use a tiny window for the little child's salvation. The window frames a seagull floating into the sky's immensity, free, just like Inka now. Under the sky, there's the sea, representing the present, where Inka is living her life, in California.

Meva used her wings to bring the little one to freedom, to a new life, to hope, to the right, after Inka's wings have been cut by the Nazi. She didn't only take her away from a horrible death, but she flew with her into what the real life means, free and uncaged, like the seagull between the sea and the sky.

Meva didn't only impress me with her big heart as much as with her courage and strength. She stucked with her, she took the little one under her wing, willing to spare her life and give the best out of her to Inka: she took care of her body and her soul, showing her the beautiful parts of life, when outside hell was unleashed. She offered Inka a family, offered her a safe home and education, teaching her to write and read and play piano. And I drew Inka after the photograph in which she was playing the piano; she looked accomplished and happy, all thanks to the ones surrounding her.

I tried to see Meva through the little one's eyes: and I realized that she became the world for her, just like she once said: "Meva was my playmate, my confidante, my everything." I could see the hope she meant for Inka's family then and the power she signifies for Inka now, after all these years she built her life by her side. She's dressed in white, like an angel. I can't imagine how grateful Inka may be and how proud we are all of Meva. Whether she remains an unsung hero or not, she will always be Inka's lucky star to shine into the darkest days. That's the reason I added the Jewish star of David on her upper arm - because that's where it has all started, crawling in the ghetto with the star on her arm, and the shining star in her hair- because that's how it will end, as another star in our hearts.

I represented Mr. Mikusz young and smiling, because that's how she shall be reminded of. She kept her pure and juvenile soul untouched by the world cruelty, not even by WWII and spread its love to every single body. She's a survivor and through her benignity she showed others how to live on. Meva offered the child kindness, a lesson for life. And, along with her, she taught us too how compassion is the most precious virtue. Whether our skin is tanner or whiter, whether we believe in one or another, dance or sing or neither, we are still people and we live together. One human can change the whole world, and that's what she did through her actions. Not only she saved one person's life, but she still continues to do so, obviating discrimination, prejudices, lack of interest or lack of knowledge.

I believe her nickname Meva, 'seagull' in Polish, had a strong meaning in this story: like a bird she hid her cub into her soft feathers, keeping it away from the danger, and flew away with it, heading towards a new life. Meva, for me, means hope for humankind. That no matter how small or big we are, we can still change something for the better, and that each action has its impact, something we often forget. Meva is the hero we can find within us all.