

Impact Statement

Caitlyn Cameron, Grade 12.

The Angel of the Ghetto, 2016.

Mixed media on paper, 20 x 15 Inches.

Independence High School, Thompsons Station, TN

Unsung Hero: Irena Sendler

I've been intrigued by the Holocaust ever since I was a child and read a biography about Anne Frank. When it came time to choose our Unsung Heroes, I was immediately drawn to Irena Sendler and her story. The more I read about her and the heroic acts she performed, the more fascinated I became with her. Her bravery was the most emphasized point in all of the articles and stories I read about her, but what struck me most was her never ending kindness. Even when she was captured and tortured by the Nazis, she refused to give up the names of the people who helped her or the children she had saved. She is one of the bravest people I have ever read about, and it was an honor to create a piece based on her life. At the beginning of the project, I made it my mission to not only draw her portrait, but to also commemorate her and her amazing journey.

Throughout World War II, Irena rescued two thousand five hundred children from the Warsaw ghettos in Poland. Even though she was Catholic and the Jews were the people being persecuted, Irena did not let religious differences sway her from her mission to help people in need. In her words, "I believe a person must be rescued when drowning, regardless of religion or nationality". The bulk of the piece is done in ballpoint pen, with layers of shading replicating the values in pictures from the time period. I chose to depict her as a guardian angel because she was commonly referred to as "The Angel of the Ghetto" by the people living in the ghettos. Taking inspiration from Raphael and his Madonna paintings, I composed Irena to appear as the epitome of the nurturing and loving figure she was. I compiled several images of children from the 1940's to create the two in the piece. Although they represent no one in particular, they're symbolic of the innocence she saved during her years as a social worker. The child in her arms is holding a jar with rolled up paper inside because Irena wrote the names of every single child she saved on thin tissue paper and put them in jars and buried them underneath an apple tree in her neighbor's backyard. In the background are the names of both victims and survivors from Treblinka, the death camp in Poland where the children were destined to meet their fate if Irena had not rescued them. Both the names and the stars on the children's clothes have been painted in gold liquid acrylic which represents courage and compassion, the qualities Irena exuded her entire life.

From start to finish, this project was an emotional rollercoaster. I was determined the entire way through to make it the best project I've ever made, solely because I did not want to damage Irena's memory and the legacy she left behind. Every new detail I learned about her drew me in more and gave me a new emotion to add to the project and my overall view of her story. Anger, for the Nazis who tortured her, happiness and pride for her endless amounts of kindness and her acceptance of others, and sadness that she didn't consider herself a hero and always believed she could have done more. Her story has caused me to take a step back and reflect on my own life and how I should be more like her. After reading about her, I am more motivated to

perform random acts of kindness without recognition or asking for anything in return. I want to be as selfless and as kind as her, but I also want to continue to educate others on her story and how wonderful she was. She will forever be an inspiration to all who read her story and I am so glad I chose her as my Unsung Hero.