

## Impact Statement

Eileen Wang, Grade 10

***Among the Stars*, 2025**

Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 inches

The Overlake School, Redmond, WA

Teacher: Yumeka Soga, Independent Study

Unsung Hero: Gene Shoemaker

I first learned about Eugene “Gene” Shoemaker while reading through the Lowell Milken Center’s Unsung Heroes list. I was captivated by him, a man so passionate about astrogeology, a field he helped pioneer, that his ashes were honored by being sent to the Moon. That single detail was so profound it pulled me into learning more about who he was and why he mattered. What further solidified my decision to choose Gene Shoemaker as my Unsung Hero, though, was a quote of his: “If all the potentially threatening asteroids were discovered, however, the risk to Earth would no longer be a matter of chance. We would know whether a collision is imminent.” This revealed not only his scientific insight but also his empathy and sense of responsibility that translated into his research. That level of dedication and compassion deeply resonated with me. Shoemaker was a trailblazer in astrogeology, shown through how he challenged the prevailing scientific theories of his time. For example, when most believed that Arizona’s Barringer Crater was formed by volcanic activity, Shoemaker investigated even further and ultimately proved that it was created by a meteorite impact. This not only redefined the crater’s history but helped shape our understanding of planetary geology and impact events across the solar system, such as in relation to the creation of craters on the moon. Shoemaker also co-founded the field of planetary science and played a major role in training Apollo astronauts to recognize lunar geology. Later in life, he co-discovered Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 with his wife Carolyn and astronomer David Levy. When that comet collided with Jupiter in 1994, it gave the world a rare, real-time view of cosmic impact, emphasizing the importance of Shoemaker’s lifelong work.

In my painting, I chose to depict Gene Shoemaker surrounded by the universe he so passionately studied, and the stories he helped us uncover. In one palm, he holds a mock up of the Apollo 11 spacecraft, symbolizing his role in preparing humanity’s first Moon explorers, and in being the lunar geology principal investigator for Apollo missions eleven, twelve, and thirteen. The galaxy around him glows with the meteors that were at the heart of his research, reminding us of their complex and scientific beauty that Shoemaker was also inspired by. As I painted Shoemaker, I deliberately used blue shadows to echo the vastness of space and to evoke a quiet, contemplative tone. I chose to make his shirt a shade of purple, reminiscent of the galaxy, to symbolize his deep connection to the cosmos and his immense contributions to our understanding of it. This was to visually connect him to the universe that so clearly shaped his life’s work.

Researching and creating this art piece helped me further understand how passion and purpose can impact someone's life. Gene Shoemaker's story made me think differently about the way we approach our interests. He didn't just follow his curiosity, rather, he used it to contribute to something greater. That mindset towards having initiative has inspired me to pursue my own interests more boldly, and to ask how I, too, can make an impact with those interests. I hope that by sharing this piece, others will recognize the quiet yet monumental contributions of people like Shoemaker. Through this painting, I want viewers to feel wonder, respect, and maybe even a spark of curiosity about the universe and those who dedicate their lives to exploring it.