

## Impact Statement

Peyton Chrismer, Grade 12

**LIFE**, 2025

Acrylic, graphite, pen, paper on wood panel, 16 x 12 inches

Hillsboro Highschool, Hillsboro, MO

Unsung Hero: Therese Frare

Therese Frare is known for changing the face of AIDs with a series of pictures. She was a photographer and gay-rights activist when she met David Kirby; a man who was suffering from AIDs. His mother asked Frare to photograph the family's final goodbye with her son. I find Frare inspiring because with her art, she was able to change the way people viewed AIDs. AIDs, at the time, was ignored and not well understood by the public, even while it took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Frare was an activist; she saw past all of the social stigma and fought to bring the devastating nature of AIDs into the public's light. She was also selfless: she complied with David's wishes to not be used for profit. She donated every cent made from her life-changing pictures to an AIDs research charity.

It is said that over one billion people have seen Therese's pictures. She made AIDs human, she showed the reality. The images are haunting, looking into the last moments of a man who is thin and sickly. She helped educate millions of people who were blind to what AIDs looked like and what it did to a human. She showed a man who had loved ones, who could have been your neighbor, son, or brother. In an era when LGBTQ people were met with fear and prejudice, her courage and compassion during the AIDS crisis helped shift hearts and change the world. While she donated all profits to a charity to help with finding a cure for AIDs, she most importantly changed the hearts and minds of millions of people. At the time AIDs had a very heavy stigma about it, to the point that David's nurse wouldn't even give him the menu for meals and would instead read it to him in the doorway of his room. People with AIDs were treated like they were inhuman.

The vision behind my artwork was to show the story of the pictures that changed AIDs. Frare is the center of the work done in a vibrant acrylic paint, making her stand out in the background. She's holding her camera, about to take a photo. I wanted to capture the important moment before she took the photos; to shine a light onto the artist who put so much care into shining a light on the downtrodden. She's behind her camera because I wanted to put more focus on her art and what she created as a photographer. Her impact wasn't based on her but instead on her art. Below her in the piece are real newspaper headlines from the time. This represents the feeling of hopelessness, the fear of the stigma and death sentence that was AIDs. Behind her is a handful of the photographs she took. I intended to do justice to her work and further spread the images she took. The logo for Life magazine is above her. This has multiple meanings;

it pays respect to the magazine that published her photos, but also contrasts with the images of death. “LIFE” describes something precious and solidifies what the men—David Kirby and Peta—lost. I can only imagine what it would have felt like to be in that room taking those pictures; I wanted to show the strength someone would need to take such a stand.

After creating this piece and learning about Frare’s story, I’ve become inspired to incorporate activism and important messages into my art. Frare saw through the stigma and chose to see people instead. I hope to be able to do the same in my daily life. I plan to spread my art and the message behind it on my art Instagram account, @myartaccount. I also hope to post it on my school's official website and show it to the community.

#### References:

Cosgrove, B. (2020, January 15). *World AIDS Day: The photo that changed the face of HIV/AIDS*. LIFE. <https://www.life.com/history/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/>