

Impact Statement

Bhargavi Ladekar, Grade 9

***An Angel in the Fire*, 2025**

Acrylic, modeling paste and metallic paints on canvas, 24 x 36 inches

Alpharetta High School, Alpharetta, GA

Unsung Hero: Jane Kendeigh

When I was younger, I always pictured heroes as mighty warriors who courageously fought battles and emerged victorious. However, as I grew older, I started to realize that heroism extends beyond physical combat and strength. True heroism is displayed through compassionate and selfless actions. Jane Kendeigh is someone who completely transformed my perspective of true heroism. Her role as the first U.S. Navy flight nurse on World War II frontlines demonstrated a rare kind of heroism that extends beyond combat through her exceptional courage and compassionate care. She provided healing comfort and offered hope amidst the horrors of war and was just as heroic as any soldier on the battlefield.

I chose Jane because she represents the kind of heroism that often goes unnoticed. She didn't fight with weapons; she fought with healing hands and boundless empathy. Even in the most dangerous of circumstances, her commitment to her patients reminds me that heroism can be quiet but powerful. Jane's story isn't just about courage, rather it's about showing up for others in their most vulnerable moments. Jane Kendeigh's legacy is remarkable not only because of the lives she saved but because of the way she redefined what it means to be a hero. At the age of just 22 years, she volunteered to be part of the first group of Navy flight nurses. She did her best to defy enemy fire during the Battle of Iwo Jima to care for wounded soldiers. She treated patients in a moving plane—thousands of feet above ground—offering critical care while they were transported to safety, and her work helped shape modern medevac practices. In my painting, I wanted to capture Jane not just as a historical figure, but as a symbol of resilience. I gave her golden, glowing wings to represent the hope and healing that she brought. The red cross behind her is more than a medical symbol; it represents her sacrifice and unwavering dedication.

Outside the plane window, I painted the chaos of war. The smoke, injured soldiers, and the darkness in my painting reiterate WWII. In contrast, I included a dove flying through the sky outside the second window, representing peace and hope. It's a reminder that even in the midst of destruction, there's always a possibility for healing, compassion, and light.

I blended acrylics inside the plane to create a sense of calm and safety, while contrasting it with sharper and darker strokes outside the window, illustrating the

confusion of the battlefield. Through my research on WWII medevac procedures and photos of flight nurses, I tried to remain true to the historical aspects of Jane's work, while also incorporating symbolic elements, such as the angelic golden wings that speak to the larger story of her heroism.

Learning about Jane Kendeigh has reshaped my understanding of heroism. Being a hero is not always loud or celebrated; sometimes, it's quiet, and full of heart. Her story inspires me to be braver in my own life, even when the impact of my actions goes unnoticed. Moreover, I admire how Jane Kendeigh didn't expect recognition or rewards for her actions. She simply did what needed to be done, day after day, without seeking praise. Her selflessness and unwavering commitment to her patients show what true heroism is.

I hope this painting will honor Jane's legacy and inspire others to see the everyday unnoticed heroes around them. Those whose acts of kindness and bravery might not always make the headlines, but whose impact is just as profound. I plan to display the artwork in my community, in honor of the nurses, first responders, and Unsung Heroes who continue Jane's work today. Through this project, I've learned that even small acts of care, done with courage, can ripple out and change the world.