

Impact Statement

Lily Liu, Grade 10

The Blessing for Blue Babies, 2025

Colored pencil, marker, graphite on paper, 14 x 17 inches

Palo Alto High School, Palo Alto, CA

Teacher: Yunhua Fang, Independent Study

Unsung Hero: Helen B. Taussig

Imagine being denied admission into Harvard Medical School solely based on your gender, or being dyslexic and nearly deaf, yet still becoming one of the most influential doctors in history. That was the reality of Dr. Helen B. Taussig, an unyielding pioneer who transformed the world of pediatric cardiology. After being rerouted to Johns Hopkins, her unwavering determination led her to develop a groundbreaking treatment for Tetralogy of Fallot, which is a congenital heart defect in infants. This heart defect killed thousands of babies since their blood couldn't carry enough oxygen, and as a result, they were named "blue babies". However, she was able to co-develop the Blalock-Taussig shunt, allowing these "blue babies" to live prosperous, long, and healthy lives.

When I first came across her name and short blurb, I was instantly mesmerized and deeply moved by her resilience, compassion, and persistence in the face of numerous obstacles thrown her way. As a child, I battled with life-threatening blood cancer, and it's only thanks to dedicated doctors like Dr. Taussig that I am here today, typing this essay and bringing my drawings to life. Dr. Taussig's impact on pediatric medicine has saved an unfathomably large number of lives, similar to mine. Her story touched me on a personal level, and through my art, I wanted to honor both her achievements and the benevolence that shines through her. As I first flipped open my sketchbook, ready to brainstorm composition ideas for this piece, I instantly knew exactly how I would portray her. Although Dr. Taussig unfortunately passed nearly half a century ago, it felt fitting to depict her as an angel with wings, tenderly caring for a child, since she's undoubtedly saved countless lives throughout her career. Following the solidification of the centerpiece of my design, I decided to incorporate the red heart disease ribbon, which also helped split up the paper into four sections. Finally, with the foundations put in place, I dove into researching her career and achievements, discovering that she became the first female president of the American Heart Association, breaking prior gender barriers. The logo of this nonprofit, slightly hidden behind another portrait of Dr. Taussig and used as a heart for the ribcage and heartbeat, became a part of the second section. Next, I chose to feature a vibrant heart with flowers sprouting out of it, symbolizing the revival of all her patients' lives under her care and procedures. Lastly, her story and inventions made headlines and made history, inspiring me to add a newspaper with a picture of a surgery operation in the bottom right-hand corner.

Although there was the major challenge of mainly black and white reference photos, I still made the choice to fully flesh out the majority of my piece using a combination of color pencils and markers, aside from the newspaper, which felt appropriate to keep monochrome.

Dr. Helen Taussig's story has inspired me to hit life head on and push through any barriers or challenges I may encounter, channeling her perseverance in a field that requires both intelligence and empathy. From a young age, I've always wanted to become a doctor and study pediatrics, helping other children that had an upbringing similar to mine. I plan to share my artwork beyond this competition, including in an art exhibit, raise awareness of her merit and brilliance. I aspire to commemorate not just her scientific achievements, but the lasting legacy of hope and healing she's brought. I want others to see what I saw in her; a hero whose work will continue to save and inspire young hearts for generations to come.