



Impact Statement

Philip Jeong, Grade 11

Unbreakable Hope, 2026

Graphite, charcoal on paper, 21 x 18.5 inches

Hongik Art, Suwanee, GA

Unsung Hero: Emma Darling Cushman

The history of humanitarian aid is defined by individuals who prioritize others' safety over their own survival. This principle of selfless service drives my work with ACORN4All, a 501(c)(3) organization I founded, dedicated to providing creative healing for children in the forgotten regions of the world. To date, I have facilitated 4,750 art programs for children in rural Africa, individuals with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness. During my research for the Unsung Hero project, I stumbled upon a photograph of Emma Darling Cushman standing among a group of children. This image created an immediate connection to my own mission and led me to investigate her role as a protector of the innocent. As I studied her history, I learned about her courage during the Armenian Genocide, a period when the Ottoman government killed 1.5 million people. Despite the threat of death, Cushman, remaining steadfast at her post, transformed an American hospital into a sanctuary and saved over a thousand orphans from execution. Her life demonstrates the power of individual resolve and provides an inspirational blueprint for humanitarian work.

Emma Darling Cushman was a nurse and ambassador whose decisive actions saved thousands of lives during World War I and its aftermath. She worked as a missionary nurse in the Ottoman Empire and refused to leave her post when war broke out. During the Armenian Genocide, she sheltered her patients, who were mostly Armenian children, to protect them from systematic arrest and execution. She took direct action by hiding over a thousand orphans within her hospital and various safe houses. In 1926, the Greek government recognized her bravery by awarding her the Gold Cross of the Saviour. After the war, she joined the Near East Relief agency and the League of Nations to help children who had been forced into Turkish households reclaim their Armenian identity. Although she was a hero, her story remained unknown to the general public for decades. Her decision to protect children, even at the risk of her own life, changed the lives of thousands of people.

The visual interpretation of Cushman's story requires a technical approach that balances historical accuracy with a focus on her protective nature. I designed this artwork to show the facts of Cushman's life and her specific achievements. I drew her with a firm expression to show her courage. In the drawing, she holds the American hospital building in her hands to show how she protected the orphans. I placed a white light inside the building to represent the safety she provided. Outside of this light, I drew the reality of the genocide, including the displacement of orphans and the forced marches into the desert. Additionally, I chose to draw excavated bones instead of graphic violence because I want to comfort Armenian viewers rather than cause them

new pain. Moreover, I used graphite as my primary material because it is darker than a standard pencil and harder than conté. These qualities allowed me to draw small details clearly while creating a monochromatic tone that links the artwork to the past.

Ultimately, the goal of this project is to transform a forgotten history into a source of encouragement and awareness. I want to show marginalized communities that people remember their history and honor their protectors. I will send photos of my artwork to the Armenian government and the Armenian Genocide Museum to tell the Armenian people that the world recognizes their loss. I plan to share this story to encourage others to take action in their own communities. This summer, I will return to Africa to lead more art programs for children in need, continuing the tradition of service established by Cushman. Her life taught me that quiet workers are often the most important pillars of history, and I will continue to use art to help forgotten children, ensuring that no child faces difficulty alone.

References:

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