



Impact Statement

Amalee Rivera, Grade 9

Just Don't Give Up On Us, 2026

Ink on paper, 10 x 8 inches

LaVilla School of the Arts, Jacksonville, FL

Unsung Hero: Colonel Gail Halvorsen

It's not often you learn about someone nicknamed the "Candy Bomber." Colonel Gail S. Halvorsen gained this honor as a pilot in 1948 who dropped candy down to the children that were trapped in West Berlin during World War II. He grew up on small farms in Idaho & Utah dreamed of becoming a pilot. I chose this Unsung Hero because his story inspired me by how he treated the children and his love of being a pilot. If I were not an artist, I would most likely want to become a pilot. My dad is an aviation electronics mechanic who has shares a love of aircraft with me.

Colonel Gail Halvorsen was a part of the Royal Air Force then became a transport pilot in the US Army Air Corps. When World War II ended, he was sent back to Germany not to fight but to save lives. He would send food, water, and supplies to the people that were trapped in West Berlin due to the Soviet Union cutting off all road, rail, and canal routes in 1948. At first, he didn't know how he felt about helping people who had fought against America. Once he landed, he saw people crying with relief and that changed his perspective. In every type of weather, Halvorsen would fly to deliver the supplies needed. Part of this package included wiggling his wings when flying over children where he promised to drop candy, chocolate, and gum. It became a national initiative with handkerchief parachutes and tons of candy dropped. This selfless act boosted the morale of the children and people of West Berlin.

It didn't stop there! This became a worldwide endeavor where he completed several missions in countries such as Japan, Guam, Albania, Iraq and others. This story resonated with me because he brought kindness to people that he assumed were very different with small comforts that had a large impact. I appreciate that he changed his perspective and went out of his way to help people.

As I was drafting ideas, I wanted to ensure I gave Halvorsen the justice his acts deserved! I started by researching the plane he flew, a Douglas C-54 Skymaster, and spent time researching what it looked like from different angles so that I could include it as a main part of my composition. For the children, I used stars to represent how they brightened his day and inspired him to act. The parachutes carry hearts to signify the compassion he showed. This is finalized with a portrait of Colonel Gail Halvorsen himself, showing his vision to accomplish his mission. The colors I chose in pink to turquoise create a happy aura to show the love he put into his deliveries.

Gail Halvorsen's story inspired me to bring kindness and excitement to tough situations, even when it is difficult. In sharing this artwork, my hope is that we all take a step back to understand even when others may be perceived as "enemies" we can all use a little compassion and of course a lot of candy.