



Impact Statement

Josephine Aylor, Grade 8

Pride and Resistance: The Heroic Story of Frieda Belinfante, 2026

Textile with cotton fabric, ribbon, grommets, graphite on paper, watercolor on fabric, and EVA foam, 60 x 18 x 12 inches

Ballyshannon Middle School, Union, KY

Unsung Hero: Frieda Belinfante

When searching for an Unsung Hero, finding someone part of the LGBTQIA+ community was important to me because in the climate of our world today, this community is frowned upon and discriminated against, much like it was in the twentieth century, especially during the Holocaust when they were targeted by the Nazis. In my research, Frieda Belinfante's story stood out; she was not only part of the LGBTQIA+ community, but her work during the Holocaust had saved hundreds if not thousands of lives. Still, her name isn't widely known. Her identity and story represent what it was like to be part of a community disliked by many yet still having the courage not to let it stop you.

This courage she showed throughout the Holocaust I find to be one of the most inspiring things about her. She didn't have to help others during the Holocaust, she was already at risk herself not only by her presence in the LGBTQIA+ community, but also her religious heritage as being half Jewish. Despite this, she refused to be a bystander, instead joining the Dutch resistance and doing everything she could to preserve Jews and the Jewish culture, up until she was forced into hiding.

Her story is one of courage, making her an even more inspiring role model not only for myself, but for the many others who fear that because of who they are, they can't make a difference in the lives of others.

Born in Amsterdam to a half-Jewish household, Belinfante lived as a semi-open lesbian throughout her life, creating a successful career in the music industry prior to the Holocaust. When the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, Belinfante was quick to put her music career on hold and join the Dutch resistance. There she worked primarily forging IDs and participating in the planning of open resistance movements, one of the best known being the bombing of the Amsterdam population registry. While only partially successful, this plan did succeed in destroying the records of hundreds of Jews, preventing their deportation, but the resistance was betrayed after the bombing, forcing Belinfante into hiding. At this time, she disguised herself as a man until she escaped to Switzerland where she resided in refugee camps until immigrating to the United States. She continued her career in music, growing in the industry once again until the discrimination she had fought against during the Holocaust found her again. In 1962, she was dismissed from her orchestra due to her sexuality and gender. Despite all she had gone through, the courage she showed during the Holocaust never wavered and she continued

teaching music until her death in 1995. It is unclear how many Frieda Belinfante saved, but it is estimated to have been hundreds if not thousands, all thanks to her courage that never once wavered.

The silhouette of this dress is inspired by that of 1930s and 1940s formal wear, the fashion of the few who refused to be bystanders and saved their neighbors, having known them or not. The pattern I followed was self-created. In addition to the style and pattern, there are two major components of the dress that tell Frieda's story.

Along the neckline of the dress, a gradient rainbow has been painted in between a layer of ruffles. This rainbow symbolizes the LGBTQIA+ community, including Frieda and the many others who worked tirelessly to save others during the Holocaust. The placement of the rainbow being in between the ruffles instead of the entirety of the ruffles represents how so many could not be open about who they were to the world, yet just because they could not be open, didn't mean that their place in the community changed.

Down the left side of the dress, there are multiple layers of ruffles gathered behind a layer of brighter, foam pages depicting Frieda's story. These ruffles are meant to represent the stories of those Frieda saved, not known to her but survived due to her courage and bravery. The top, brighter layer of pages, meant to stand out against the rest of the dress, depict different time stages of Frieda's story. Most of these pages depict the outlines of fake ID's, which was one of the major jobs Frieda had in the Dutch resistance and the reason hundreds if not thousands were saved from the Holocaust. Amongst these though are three hand-drawn images of Frieda, the first (top) being an image of her in her teens playing the cello, representing what she loved doing and how her life was as complex as any other before the Holocaust. The image below the first is of Frieda disguised as a man, which is how she hid after the resistance was outed and until she escaped from the Netherlands to Switzerland. The final image is of her later in her life, after she immigrated to the US and continued her career in music, not having let the Holocaust put an end to what she loved.

At the end of the day, I want my art to be a reminder of the courage that can save lives, if we are willing to let it. The Holocaust was a tragedy, taking too many lives, all because of power and hatred. But what prevented it from taking more was the courage of those who stood up for their neighbors, refusing to be bystanders as humanity tore itself apart. To this day, power and hatred still tear apart humanity, feeding on those who the powerful deem powerless. Like this dress, humanity itself is held together only by the thin threads of those who believe that humanity can be better and have the courage to try and make it so. Frieda Belinfante's story is just one of thousands of others who didn't let others break the foundation of their courage. This not only inspires me and my actions, but could inspire others and their actions, leading humanity to a state in which unity drowns out hatred and light drowns out darkness.