Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

Impact Statement

Shannon Raasch, Grade 11
The Gift of Time, 2026
Graphite on paper, 14 x 11 inches
St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School, Austin, TX
Unsung Hero: Dr. Helen B. Taussig

Before I ever understood the science behind it, I was already living in the world that Dr. Helen Taussig helped build. I chose Dr. Taussig because her work is directly connected to my experience as a pediatric cardiology patient with congenital heart conditions. As the pioneer of pediatric cardiology, Dr. Taussig devoted her life to improving the outcomes and possibilities for children like me. Her story inspires me because she was one of the first to do what she did, and she preserved through challenges and the limits of medicine at the time.

Dr. Helen Taussig defied the odds, pushing past major obstacles in both medicine and her personal life. From a young age, she showed remarkable perseverance; at 11 years old, she lost her mother to tuberculosis, and she also struggled with dyslexia and progressive hearing loss throughout her life. Despite these challenges, she continued to move forward with admirable determination, supported by her father's encouragement. She went on to study at Johns Hopkins University at a time when Harvard Medical School refused to grant medical degrees to women. Even in a male dominated field that limited opportunities for women, she refused to be discouraged. At a children's heart clinic, Dr. Taussig pushed past yet another barrier. Her hearing loss made it difficult to use a stethoscope, impacting her ability to hear children's heartbeats. Instead, Dr. Taussig learned to feel the vibrations with her hands.

Her most impactful contribution came from her work with blue baby syndrome, a condition in which infants were born with heart defects that limited the amount of blood going to their lungs. Dr. Taussig helped identify a surgical solution and worked with surgeons to develop the Blalock-Thomas-Taussig shunt, a procedure that redirected blood flow to increase oxygen levels. This innovation improved survival rates and gave thousands of children, who previously would have been sent home to die, a chance to live, while paving the way for innovation in open heart surgery. Additionally, Dr. Taussig advocated for public health. Thalidomide is a drug that was commonly used to treat morning sickness but caused severe birth defects. Dr. Taussig fought diligently for the regulation of the drug, contributing to its ban in the 1960s. Through her perseverance and innovation, Dr. Taussig left a lasting impact on medicine and the lives of children with heart defects.

My creative interpretation of Dr. Helen Taussig's story is intended to reflect both her character and her contributions to medicine. In the foreground of my artwork, Dr. Taussig is shown treating a child, her expression showing the compassion and care that were central to her work throughout her career. In the background the anatomical heart and heartbeat lines symbolize

her contributions to the field of cardiology and her innovations in pediatric heart treatment. Inside the heart, I included the silhouette of two children playing to represent how her work gave children the chance to grow up and experience a full childhood that otherwise may have been taken from them. I used pencils to contribute to the tone of the artwork and create a cohesive image.

Dr. Helen Taussig's story has influenced the way I view perseverance, and the impact one person can have on others. Learning about her determination to improve the lives of children with heart conditions has made me more aware of how important it is to recognize the people behind medical advancements. Through my artwork, I hope to share her story with others who, like me, may unknowingly be impacted by her contributions today. I plan to share my artwork online and within my school community to help spread awareness of her impact. I hope this project encourages appreciation for unsung heroes like Dr. Taussig and inspires perseverance and compassion in those who hear her story.

References:

"Helen Taussig." National Women's History Museum, 2024, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/helen-taussig.J

Van Robays. "Helen B. Taussig (1898-1986)." Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn, vol. 8, no. 3, 5 Dec. 2016, p. 183, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5172576/.

Williamson, Laura. "Dr. Helen Taussig's Work Saved "Blue Babies" and Made Her the Mother of Pediatric Cardiology." Www.heart.org, 28 Mar. 2024, www.heart.org/en/news/2024/03/28/dr-helen-taussigs-work-saved-blue-babies.