



Impact Statement

Bhargavi Ladekar, Grade 10

Where Silence Carries Strength, 2026

Acrylic painting on stretched canvas, 24 x 36 inches

Alpharetta High School, Alpharetta, GA

Unsung Hero: Bela Ya'ari Hazan

There are moments when something ordinary suddenly feels heavier than it should. I experienced this same feeling when I was standing in a crowded train station early in the morning. People moved quickly past one another as some were carrying bags, checking their phones, or simply all focused on getting to their destination. It felt ordinary. Just another day. Almost forgettable. But as I stood there, I began to think about how easily movement, identity, and freedom were taken for granted. A moment this simple started to feel heavy. This moment stuck with me, and it was what led me to discover Bela Ya'ari Hazan, a woman for whom every train station, every document, and every interaction could mean life or death. Bela Hazan's story immediately stood out to me because she existed in those same ordinary spaces as the ones in my memory, but under completely different circumstances. She lived a double life under the identity of a Polish woman to survive. What I admire the most about her is her ability to remain calm, composed and brave in situations where a single mistake could cost everything such that life or death. She carried messages, weapons, and money between resistance groups, while fully being aware that she was constantly being monitored.

Bela Hazan served as a courier for the Jewish resistance during World War II. She traveled between cities such as Vilna, Grodno, and Warsaw. Bronislawa Limanowska was the name she used to forge identity papers as she navigated these Nazi controlled territories. Additionally, she even worked as an interpreter for the Gestapo and secretly used that position to gather information and steal materials for forging her documents. Her work allowed resistance networks to remain connected, which was essential for survival and coordination. Unfortunately, she was later arrested and endured imprisonment, torture, and forced labor in concentration camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Despite these conditions, she continued to support the underground efforts with a brave facade. Her survival till 2004 and her commitment to telling the stories of those who did not survive showed how much her work impacted everyone.

My artwork portrays this bravery into a painting of the situation back then. I chose to place Bela Hazan prominently on the left half of the canvas to show her as someone grounded in reality and bravery. Her expression is a peaceful facade which hides her real identity and the constant tension that comes along with it. Inside her coat, I included her fake identity documents to symbolize her dual role. In the background, the "Warszawa" train station represents the dangerous challenges and cities she visited. Several guards and silhouettes of men capture the threat of surveillance. A quiet exchange of a letter between the two figures on the right side of

the canvas captures the subtly acts of resistance she carried out. Additionally, the group of three people gathered around dim light represents the network she helped sustain through her work.

My use of color reinforces these ideas. Cooler tones dominate the environment, which emphasizes the cold nature of fear and uncertainty, while warmer light highlights moments of connection, support and resistance. I worked with acrylic paint to capture details and try to make the piece seem realistic. Details such as the identity papers labeled “Bronislaw Limanowska” help viewers better connect to her experience of being a courier.

Furthermore, this project changed how I think about courage in my own life. Before, I connected bravery to visible, bold and dramatic actions. However, after learning about Bela Hazan made me realize that courage is not always loud and noticeable. Rather sometimes it is quiet and subtle. It exists in choices that may never be recognized by others. As I painted, I kept returning to the idea of that train station, about how something so ordinary for me represented constant risk of life or death for her. It made me reflect on how I respond to difficult situations and whether I am willing to take action when it matters. Her story challenges me to be more aware, more responsible, and more willing to stand up for others, even in small ways. It made me realize that everyone has their own story and background in the same situation.

I plan to share this artwork within my school and community through possibly through art exhibitions and presentations at our local art gallery. I will also share it digitally through social media platforms and encourage others to learn about the true Unsung Heroes like Bela Hazan. By presenting her story visually, I hope to make others curious, so they connect with it on a personal level and truly acknowledge the quiet, but brave unsung hero.

Ultimately, this piece is about honoring Bela Ya’ari Hazan and changing how we define heroism. Through both my research and my artwork, I have concluded that some of the most important contributions in history come from those who remain unseen. Through this painting, I hope that her courage is not forgotten and it continues to influence how we see the world today.

References:

“Bela Ya’ari Hazan | about the Hero.” Lowell Milken Center, 30 Dec. 2024, www.lowellmilkencenter.org/programs/projects/view/bela-hazan/hero.

“Bela Ya’ari Hazan.” Jewish Women’s Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/hazan-bela-yaari>

“Hidden Heroes: How Young Jewish Women Fought the Nazis.” *The Jerusalem Post* JPost.com, www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-694854.