

“Helen Could See the Same Stars”

*2016. Mixed media wall construction, collage, and antique toy car.
27" w x 21¾" h x 5" d.*

David Feinberg and Beth Andrews, with contributions from Storyteller Esther Winthrop and from artists Michelle Englund, Tessa Loeffler, Kimchi Hoang, and Peter Lommen.

Esther and her family lived in a large house in Athens that they had to abandon when the German Nazis invaded Greece during World War II. Esther drew the floor plan of her house on the bottom right hand side of the painting. Below that is her drawing of the street where she and her friends played “5 zockos” or “5 jacks” before the war began.

Esther's father supported his family by working as a cab driver in Greece. When the Nazi's arrived, the family worried that the Germans would confiscate the taxicab. They removed the wheels and hid the vehicle in an abandoned structure, covering it with hay. After the war was over, they put the vehicle back together. The artwork contains a broken cast iron cab toy (circa 1930's) with its wheels removed. It is partially hidden behind the curved structure to evoke this period of Esther's life.

The Nazis told the Jewish people in Athens that if they turned themselves in, they would be protected. Esther's Uncle Maki Vitali, and his wife Jonla, believed what they heard, and went with their infant son to the Nazi offices. A few days later, all three were murdered by the Germans. A picture of these three family members appears in the bottom right-hand corner.

Esther's family decided instead to go into hiding. In the upper right portion of the painting appears a picture of adolescent Esther in her school clothing just before going into hiding. Behind her is a photo of the family's hiding place—an abandoned cellar with one small window. The family piled junk in front of that window, climbing on it like a ladder to get in and out of the hiding place. Esther remembers her mother going out for food every now and then. Esther would sit and wait for her mom, terrified that she would be captured and never come back.

After the war, Esther immigrated to the United States. Although she missed her best friend terribly, Esther would be comforted when looking at the stars in the night sky, knowing Helen could see the same stars. The V2V team painted stars and two constellations chosen by Esther in several locations on the artwork.