

Case Study 5: Nicholas Winton

Nicholas Winton was born to Jewish parents in 1909, although he adopted an English name and was baptised into the Church of England. He was a **socialist** with links to many Labour politicians and family contacts abroad, giving him an insight into the persecution of Europe's Jews by the Nazis.



In December 1938, Winton was a 29-year-old **stockbroker**. He had been planning to take a skiing holiday. Just before he left, he received a letter from his friend Martin Blake, who had already travelled to Prague on behalf of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia. It contained an invitation: *'I have a most interesting assignment and I need your help. Don't bother bringing your skis.'* In Prague, Winton saw for himself the full scale of the problem facing Jews in the German-occupied Sudetenland. Refugee camps were filling with families forced from their homes. Occupants were struggling to survive the harsh European winter. Winton was struck by the appalling conditions and his greatest concern was for the children. As a British citizen with contacts, Winton was convinced he could arrange the evacuation of young refugees to England. Winton and his colleagues Martin Blake and Doreen Warriner set up a makeshift headquarters in a hotel in Prague and began taking the names of families who wished to send their children to safety.

Transporting hundreds of young refugees across Europe required careful planning. Winton returned to London and a mountain of paperwork. The British government was only willing to let vulnerable children enter the country if strict conditions were met. Winton had to arrange a foster family for every refugee who left Czechoslovakia. A few children had relatives waiting in Britain. But in most cases, Winton had to persuade complete strangers to take the children in. He placed ads in newspapers calling for volunteers. Fortunately, the British government had already begun plans to evacuate British children from city centres in the event of war so the British public were familiar with the idea of opening their homes to those in need. In 1939 those organised trains out of Prague 669 Jewish children were brought safe passage from Czechoslovakia to England at the dawn of World War II.



The evacuees, later known as "Winton's Children", knew little about their rescuer until the 1980s, when his work finally came to light. He was knighted in 2003 and died on July 1, 2015, at the age of 106.

Case Study 4: Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak was born Henryk Goldszmit in 1878 in Poland. An acclaimed writer, broadcaster, doctor and teacher, Korczak was highly respected within Polish society for his dedication to children, particularly forward thinking regards children's rights.

Korczak ran an orphanage. Once former child, Itzhack Belfer, in the orphanage recalls his life there



“Life was wonderful. It was full of drawing, sports and music – there was even a grand piano in the home- and we were always well fed and smartly dressed. It may be difficult to grasp, but life was the exact opposite of a typical orphanage. We experienced security, love and warmth.

Korczak even set up a children's court in the home, comprising of five child judges and an adult secretary (with no decision-making power) to discipline those who broke the rules. This even applied to Korczak himself- when he was caught sliding down the banister, he was in trouble!”

In October 1940, the Jews of Warsaw were ordered to move into the newly created ghetto. In response, Korczak relocated his orphans to within the ghetto walls. Despite the terrible conditions of disease and starvation, and the constant fear of being sent to their deaths, Korczak managed keep the children safe, often going without food so that they could eat. Moreover, he was able to maintain the educational principles that characterised the 'little republic'. The orphanage inside the ghetto did not give up its humanitarian principles.

Korczak was prepared to go to his death rather than betray his beliefs. In 1942, when the Nazi authorities decided to kill everyone within the Warsaw ghetto, including all the orphans, Korczak refused to accept offers from outside the ghetto to help him escape. Rather than abandon the orphans he chose to remain with them, and he died alongside them in Treblinka in 1942.



Case Study 3: Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga

Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga were Muslims living in **Sarajevo** at the time when the Nazis seized the city, in 1941 following their invasion of Yugoslavia. The Nazis looted the old **synagogue**, and 400-year-old Torah scrolls were burned. Since the **Gestapo** office was just across the street from the home of the Hardaga family, they were able to hear the screams of prisoners being tortured in Gestapo jail cells at night. This photograph (Zejneba on the far right, along with her sister-in-law on far left) shows them walking the wartime

streets with their friends, Rivka Kalb (a Jewish woman) and her children. Zejneba covered the yellow Star of David Rivka and her fellow Jews were ordered to wear, on their left arms, with her veil in order to protect them.

Amid the brutality, Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga decided to take in their Jewish friend and business partner, Yosef Kabiljo, and his wife and daughter. Their home had been destroyed during a Nazi bombing raid. When the Gestapo officers came in Hardaga's home to check documents Yosef and his family were hiding in the back of a walk-in closet. The Germans were only ten meters away from them but they didn't find them. The Kabiljo family stayed in Mustafa's home until they were able to move to Mostar, a Bosnian city that was under Italian rule. Unfortunately, Yosef had to stay behind and liquidate his business and he was eventually caught and imprisoned and forced into slave labour. When Zejneba Hardaga discovered where he was working she went there and brought him food. Yosef eventually managed to escape and he returned to his hiding place in the Hardaga home. The Nazis eventually found out that the Hardaga family was helping Jews. They executed Ahmed Sadik, a member of the family who helped to forge documents with Christian names for Jewish families like the Kabiljos. The Kabiljo family was rescued and made their way to Jerusalem.

In 1992, the war in Yugoslavia started and Bosnia was at the center of it. Serbian troops were surrounding Sarajevo. People were dying in the streets, houses were burned, and snipers targeted people leaving their houses. The Hardaga family were hiding in their basement. They lost all hope that they would survive before receiving a message from an Israeli journalist covering the war. The Kabiljo family in Jerusalem didn't know if their friends and saviour's were alive in Sarajevo. They contacted an Israeli journalist who was covering the war. The journalist passed a message to a local community that the Kabiljo family was searching for Zejneba Hardaga. Another message was sent to Jerusalem that Zejneba, then 76, and her youngest daughter Sara, were still in Sarajevo. The families were divided by faith, but were united by war again some fifty years later.

After the Kabiljos learned that Zejneba was alive, they contacted the officials to organize a rescue. The Kabiljos managed to get the case all the way to Yitzhak Rabin, the then Israeli Prime Minister. Zejneba and her daughter were rescued from the violence, and invited to seek refuge in Jerusalem.

Case Study 2: Irene Sendler

Irene Sendler was a Polish nurse, humanitarian, and social worker who served in the Polish Underground during World War II in German-occupied Warsaw, and was head of the children's section of **Żegota**, the Polish Council to Aid Jews (Polish *Rada Pomocy Żydom*), which was active from 1942 to 1945.



Assisted by some two-dozen other **Żegota** members, Sendler smuggled approximately 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw Ghetto and then provided them with false identity documents and shelter, outside the Ghetto, saving those children from the Holocaust. With the exception of diplomats who issued visas to help Jews flee Nazi occupied Europe, Sendler saved more Jews than any other individual during the Holocaust.

The German occupiers eventually discovered her activities, and she was arrested by the **Gestapo**, interrogated and sentenced to death, but managed to evade execution and survive the war. During this period she was tortured, and yet she continued her activities. In 1965, Sendler was recognised by the State of Israel as **Righteous among the Nations**. Late in life, she was awarded the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest honour, for her wartime humanitarian efforts.

Case Study 1: Le Chambon – the village that took a stand

All over Europe, a small number of individuals tried to save Jews. But in Le Chambon, a village in southern France, the entire community became involved in rescue. Le Chambon was a Protestant village in a predominantly Roman Catholic region, which before and even during the war was a center of tourism. Its residents turned their tiny mountain village into a hiding place for Jews from every part of Europe. Between 1940 and 1944, Le Chambon and other nearby villages provided refuge for more than 5,000 people fleeing Nazi persecution, about 3,500 of whom were Jews. Magda Trocmé, the wife of the local minister who played a leading role in the rescue operation, explained how it began:



Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done—nothing more complicated. It was not decided from one day to the next what we would have to do. There were many people in the village who needed help. How could we refuse them? A person doesn't sit down and say I'm going to do this and this and that. We had no time to think. When a problem came, we had to solve it immediately. Sometimes people ask me, "How did you make a decision?" There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help

Almost everyone in the community of 5,000 took part in the effort. Even the children were involved. When a Nazi official tried to organize a Hitler Youth camp in the village, the students told him that they *"make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. It is contrary to Gospel teaching."* The majority of the Jewish refugees were children. The villagers provided them with food, shelter, and fake identity papers. They also made sure that those they sheltered were involved as much as possible in the life of the town, in part to avoid arousing suspicion from other visitors. Whenever residents of Le Chambon learned of an upcoming police raid, they hid those they were protecting in the surrounding countryside. André Trocmé, concluded his sermons with the words, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself. Go practice it."*

In February 1943, the police arrested André Trocmé and his assistant, Edouard Theis. Although they were released after 28 days, the Gestapo continued to monitor their activities. In summer 1943, the Gestapo offered a reward for André Trocmé's capture, forcing him into hiding for ten months. Many knew where he was, but no one turned him in.

