

# Brit who saved Jewish kids from death camps responds to letters from local students

By Benjamin Ray  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

In 1938, a 29-year-old London stockbroker named Nicholas Winton witnessed firsthand the freezing refugee camps of Jews trying to escape Nazi occupation.

The refugees had settled just outside of Prague in what was then Czechoslovakia, and on a side trip there Winton learned about parents who wanted to get their children to safety before Germany took over that country as well. Instead of returning to his home, Winton took action.

Back in London, he wrote to governments around the world pleading for an open door for the 669 children who would otherwise have been sent to Nazi concentration camps.

British newspapers published Winton's pleas for safety for these foster children, and in March 1939 these children boarded ships and trains, saying goodbye to their parents, some seeing them for the last time.

Now, Sir Nicholas Winton is 97 and still not well known for his actions, as he never sought any recognition for it until his wife stumbled across a scrapbook in 1988. But Hillsdale College senior Ben Stafford is interested in the story and tries to bring it to as many people as possible.

That includes Gier Elementary School students, who wrote letters to Winton thanking him for saving the children from camps. And in a surprise move, Winton wrote back.



Ben Stafford, right, has been telling the world about the actions of Sir Nicholas Winton, left, who helped save 669 Jewish children trapped in Czechoslovakia in 1938. A class from Gier Elementary School wrote Winton and he sent a reply.

"This World War II generation of heroes is dying off," said Stafford, who co-wrote a mini-biography on Winton after visiting him in 2006. "This seemed like a great opportunity to talk about a hero."

Stafford, 23, volunteers with Junior Achievement, which

includes teaching local children about business and entrepreneurship. As Winton was an entrepreneur, Stafford saw a way to tell the story to Denise McCosh's fifth-grade class.

He also urged them to write the letters, and on Feb. 18

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Winton wrote back, thanking each student by name.

"I would ask you to thank (the students) for their interesting letters," he wrote. "I am (glad) my story has been of help."

A few of the students were surprised they received a response.

"Most old people don't write back unless they're your grandpa or grandma," said Kenzie Osmun.

Victoria Stevens and Jessica Scharlow, meanwhile, said they

enjoyed writing to someone who worked to help people their age.

"He saved all these children," Scharlow said. "I feel really bad for them ... This guy's pretty cool."

The letters were similar, with students telling how old they were, what they liked doing and thanking Winton for his actions.

"Ben told us about what you did. I respect that," wrote Allie Hanning, 10, in one of the sample letters. "If I was one of them I would have kept thanking you over and over again."

Stafford said the students wrote the letters on their own

without being told what to say. McCosh said the students will write to him again as part of an upcoming assignment.

A native of Parma, Stafford hopes to work at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy upon graduation. He and the Center's president, Lawrence Reed, co-wrote a mini-biography of Winton after visiting his home in summer 2006.

After his story was told, Winton began receiving honors, a knighthood and an essay from President George W. Bush thanking him for his "courage and compassion."