

Impact Statement

Jewel Feng, Grade 11.

Sir Nicholas Winton - The Man with 6,000 Descendants, 2024.

Watercolor on paper, 30 x 22 inches.

Jericho High School, Jericho, NY

Unsung Hero: Sir Nicholas Winton

In 1938, 29-year-old Nicholas Winton, an ordinary British stock trader, was about to go on a Christmas vacation to Switzerland. A phone call from a friend sends him on a mission he seems to have nothing to do with. He traveled to Prague, where the Nazis were about to extend their grip, and at the hotel where he stayed, he immediately began to plan a diversion that ultimately saved the lives of hundreds of Jewish children.

Legend has it that he hid his act of kindness for fifty years, even from his wife and children. It was not until he was nearly eighty years old that his wife Grete found a dusty briefcase in the attic. Inside the briefcase were full details of his Prague rescue and a list of Jewish children. It was then that she realized that her normally quiet husband was a true hero.

Not long after this information became public, Winton was invited to appear on a well-known British talk show. During the recording, the host suddenly told Winton that the woman sitting next to him, Vera Gissing, was the child he had rescued. Vera was not yet eleven years old at that time. Winton was a bit shocked to see Vera, who was over sixty years old. The host said, "Mr. Winton has saved many children in his time. If there is anyone else in the audience that he has saved, would you please stand up?" Mr. Winton, who was sitting in the first row of the audience, did not expect that dozens of people behind him would stand up. He rose slowly and turned to the children he had put on the train and nodded. He thought of the parents who had entrusted him with their children, and of the photos he had glued, and the names he had copied. His eyes can't help but fill with tears.

Winton's first rescue train came from Prague across Germany, through the Netherlands and across the sea to England on March 14, 1939. He had organized eight trains in six months with unbelievable efficiency, saving 669 children. The ninth train was scheduled to leave on September 1, 1939, but because Germany invaded Poland on that day and therefore sealed the border, the last train with 250 children did not leave. Winton's greatest regret was that all these children lost their lives in the war. He always blamed himself: "If only that train had left a day earlier, it would have arrived safely."

When I was a child, my grandfather told me about the war he experienced in China. As an exiled student, he left his parents at an early age and followed his school on a constant migration, fleeing areas that were bombed by the Japanese or occupied by the Chinese Communists. Along the way he witnessed the suffering of many children his age and even younger. Eventually my grandfather joined the army and followed the defeated KMT government to the island of Taiwan. As a soldier, he spoke of the upheaval with a lightness of touch that struck me. But I thought the war was only for my grandfather's generation until I saw the shocking photo of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned when he was

fleeing with his family in an overloaded rubber inflatable boat. I couldn't determine how far away I and my sister, also three at the time, were from a life of turmoil, much less imagine a life separated from my parents. As I grew older, I saw more human conflicts and more heartbreaking photos of war zones and refugee children on the Internet. My empathy for children who have lost their support in war grows.

I am inspired by Sir Nicholas Winton's courage in choosing what is good and holding onto it - that is, to be more active in expressing your beliefs in action during your lifetime. He said, "Don't be content in your life just to do no wrong, be prepared every day to try and do some good." He also said, "There is a difference between passive good works and active good works. The former require only sympathy and empathy, while the latter require action and sacrifice." So, I decided to express my tribute to him beginning with a brush.

In the painting, the gray-haired Winton is standing in front of a Winton train traveling from Prague to London. In front of him are the "Winton's Children" of the year under the time lapse. In reality, 2019 coincides with the 70th anniversary of the Winton Train, and more 'Winton's Children' brought their children and grandchildren to pay tribute to Winton. Now, these families branch out unfolding to nearly six thousand people. The Queen of England knighted Winton in 2003, and in 2014 the President of the Czech Republic awarded him the highest honor, the Order of the White Lion. In the doorway of the first carriage of the train in my painting, it is a young Winton who is depicted standing. Could he have imagined at the time that he has lived a fulfilled life?

Winton said, "Every child saved with my help is the justification of my existence on this Earth, and not a title to glory." On July 1, 2015, Winton passed away at the age of 106 years.

Because of Winton, I realized that true heroes do not mention their heroic deeds out of modesty. They are true practitioners of the Bodhisattva-warrior. They prefer not to be heroes because it means the world is not in hell. What the world sees as heroic deeds, in the hearts of heroes are more regrets, regrets that they are not able to save more sentient beings!