



**NICKY'S FAMILY** is a September, 2015 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stouppe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

**Czech Republic / Slovak Republic / United Kingdom 2011 color 96 minutes live action feature docudrama in English The Slovak Audiovisual Fund / Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic / RWE / Czech Railways / Trigon Productions / J & T / Czech Television / Slovak Television / Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic Producers: Patrik Päss, Matej Minac**

**11 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- Direction: Matej Minac**
- 1 Editing: Alena Spustova, Patrik Päss**
- 1 Camera: Dodo Simoncic, Peter Zubai, Antonin Danhel, Martin Kubala**
- 0 Lighting**
- 1 Screenplay: Matej Minac, Patrik Päss**
- 2 Music: Janusz Stoklisa\***
- 1 Locations**
- Costume Design: Jarmila Konecna**
- 1 Sound: Peter Németh, Igor Vrarec**
- Narrator: Joe Schlesinger**
- Casting (Slovakia): Veronika Machova, Vladimira Otahelova**
- 1 Cast (Interviews): Nicholas Winton, Elie Wiesel, Dalai Lama, Michal Slany, Maria Richterova, Aneta Fatlova**
- 1 Creativity**

## 2 Insightfulness

11 total points

**NICKY'S FAMILY** documents the courageous efforts of stockbroker Nicholas Winton in 1939 to save the lives of hundreds of endangered Jewish children in Czechoslovakia. It's a powerful testament to the difference one determined individual can make in the world.

In December of 1938 Englishman Nicholas Winton prepared to take a ski vacation in the Swiss Alps. This plan got sidetracked when he received a telephone call from Martin Blake, requesting him to come instead to Prague and see for himself the predicament of Jewish refugees from the Sudetenland of northern Moravia. These German-speaking borderlands south of Germany had recently been annexed by the Nazis. Jews were unwanted there.

Winton accepted the invitation to visit refugee camps hastily established in southern Czechoslovakia. He was appalled by conditions observed in them and quickly decided to take action. Nicholas felt compassion for the children, who had no idea why such a calamity had befallen them. It seemed essential and humane to remove dispossessed innocents with all possible speed from miserable surroundings.

Letters asking for normal immigration quotas to be temporarily set aside were sent to various governments, including those of Great Britain and the United States. Only Britain and Sweden were willing to accept unaccompanied Jewish children from Middle Europe. No other western state wished to antagonize Berlin. A few months later they learned to their horror that Hitler and his policy-makers did not care to reciprocate.

In the interim, Winton established a makeshift office in the dining room of Prague's Europa hotel. From there he typed entreaties to anyone considered a potential accomplice in transport of Jewish children west to his native soil.

According to this film, Nazi agents sought to derail his efforts by recruiting a German nurse working for the Swiss Red Cross. She was supposed to entice him into revealing names and addresses of Jews seeking exit permits. The attractive decoy ultimately flew off to Sweden with twenty-five children, doing her own bit to rescue targeted victims from Hitler's Holocaust. This is not substantiated by any other source, though all agree one to two dozen were brought by air to Sweden.

Still, over two thousand required evacuation. According to [www.telegraph.co.U.K.](http://www.telegraph.co.U.K.), Winton's eventual total list reached six thousand names.

Those selected would have to board trains in Prague and travel north through the lion's den of Germany itself to reach the Netherlands, a country which had officially closed its borders to Jewish refugees in the aftermath of Kristallnacht. Intricate negotiations were conducted with both Dutch authorities and Nazi officials, with an exit fee rising as it became more obvious to the Protectorate's Teutonic bosses that Winton's scheme was succeeding.

Meanwhile, an irate boss back in England demanded his employee stop interviewing displaced people in Czechoslovakia and return home at once. Winton found that interference intolerable. But after three weeks in Prague, he did return to shore up the British end of his operation.

Working at the London Stock Exchange by day and in a temporary refugee crisis center in Hampstead Heath each night, he turned his attention to the vital need for English sponsors of incoming minors.

His government stipulated a host family must be found for each Czechoslovakian emigrant child. Someone must also put up a guarantor payment of fifty pounds against the newcomer's overextending an emergency relief stay. This money was to be sent the Home Office, which would use it to finance temporary Czechoslovakian visitors.

By advertising in the Picture Post, magazines, church bulletins, churches, and synagogues, Winton managed to achieve the nearly impossible, unearthing guardians for foreign waifs. Working out of a single room with just himself, his mother, and a secretary, the young novice philanthropist not only matched prospective surrogate parents with underage aliens, but also negotiated rail and sea transportation for the latter through four different countries.

All this was masterminded in a few short months. It had to be, because on September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, Great Britain declared war against the aggressor. Germany's international borders were sealed. A final transport, the largest up to that time, was left stranded in Prague's Wilson Station, its occupants ultimately taken off the train. Most, if not all, were destined for death camps.

Several key facts about Nicholas Winton do not appear in this docudrama. First, his father and mother were German Jewish immigrants who came to London in 1907. Their family name of Wertheim was changed to Winton in 1937. Second, the family converted to Christianity, with Nicholas attending an Anglican school in Buckinghamshire as a teen. Third, that institution had a Latin motto he seemed to take completely to heart: "Persto et Praesto." Its English translation is "I stand firm and I stand first." Fourth, fellow socialist Trevor Chadwick actually supervised the organizing and escorting of children onto trains in Prague, activities Nicholas asserted were far more dangerous than what he was simultaneously doing across the Channel. Fifth, the Czech travel agency Cedok assisted in making travel arrangements. Sixth, an initial air flight of Jewish child refugees from the Czechoslovak capital was sponsored by the Barbican Mission with the avowed aim of converting the rescued to Christianity. That operation was opposed by Prague's leading Orthodox rabbi. Seventh, while Winton was laboring away at Hampstead Heath, it was Trevor Chadwick and Bill Barazetti who passed out questionnaires to parents and registered evacuees for transport.

So frantic did Nicholas become about unrushed processing of entry permits by the Home Office that he and colleagues forged documents to speed things up, freely applying a rubber stamp themselves.

To expedite alignment of wards with guardians, Winton created individual cards. Each of them contained six to eight photographs of registered children. These were handed to visitors seeking custody of one or more youngsters, providing vital statistics and a tempting face.

Winton's great regret was that he could not save occupants of the doomed eighth transport, largest of all, with two hundred fifty-one children aboard. Offsetting that are the six hundred and sixty plus youths he did save and the five thousand, seven hundred people living in 2011 whose existence was made possible by his interventions.

In a BBC Hardtalk interview, Nicholas Winton asserted "I believe in ethics, and if everybody believed in ethics we'd have no problems at all. That's the only way out; forget the religious side." He disclaimed religious motivation for his deeds. His sole intent in 1939 was saving young human lives, irrespective of church affiliation.

Sources of information for the above summary of film contents are Wikipedia's biographical article on Nicholas Winton, Julia Biagi's blog about Winton at [www.juliabiagi.com](http://www.juliabiagi.com), [www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/10/Sir](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/10/Sir), [www.jewishvisuallibrary](http://www.jewishvisuallibrary), and the Washington Post's obituary tribute of July, 2015.

Director Matej Minac has made a career out of Winton's story, using it as backbone for a 1999 drama titled in English ALL MY LOVED ONES and an Emmy-winning 2002 documentary called NICHOLAS WINTON: THE POWER OF GOOD. He has also written a book titled in English NICHOLAS WINTON'S LOTTERY OF LIFE.

In the present film, newsreel archival footage combines with home movies and live action dramatization of key events to unfold a story of generosity and compassion. Minac doesn't end the tale with war's outbreak. Instead, he follows subsequent occurrences in his protagonist's career and the tremendous ramifications of his 1939 work.

An understated music theme by Janusz Stoklisa, interviews with transport survivors, and tributes by individuals ranging from Elie Wiesel and the Dalai Lama to Canadian film producer Joe Schlesinger flesh out the film, giving it range and resonance. Some clips are marred by unrestored visual erosion, but that is more than compensated for by compelling human interest dialogues. Re-enactment personnel add moving, finely shaded performances in the roles of Winton, a picky adoptive couple, and a mother racked by indecision about whether to let her younger child leave their homeland.

Editing is judicious, cutting in timely fashion before any one speaker becomes tiresome. Integration of historical and current material is handled splendidly, creating a unified life story of Winton from age twenty-nine to his approaching centenary milestone. It is quite apparent Nicholas's zeal for life and concern for others hasn't been vitiated by age or replaced with cynicism.

This film is suitable for teens and adults. NICKY'S FAMILY is very highly recommended for any individual within those age groups desiring confirmation of a basic human instinct to do

the right thing at the opportune moment. Inspiring, maddening, powerfully suggestive, NICKY'S FAMILY is as fine a call to social action as anything likely to be encountered on screen.