



***One Life* is a December, 2024 accession to the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.**

8 of a possible 20 points ** = a disappointing, sub-par film

**United Kingdom / Czech Republic 2023 color 109 minutes
live action feature drama See-Saw Films / MBK Productions / BBC Film
Producers: Katherine Bridle, Iain Canning, Nicky Earnshaw, Guy Heeley,
Mark Hubbard, Joanna Laurie, Emile Sherman**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: James Hawes**
- 0 Editing: Lucia Zucchetti**
- 1 Cinematography: Zac Nicholson, Martin Polach (Splinter DP)**
**Additional Photography: Joel Stokes, Richard Morgan, Alan MacFeeley,
Harry Meads, Kristina Yu**
- Still Photography: Peter Mountain and Julie Vrabelova**
- 1 Lighting: Mark Clayton, Joshua Lewis-Green and Filip Marek**
**Special Visual Effects: Ryan Spike Dauner, David Fowler, Robert Jewell,
Alisdair MacCuish, Menelaos Pampoukidis,
Kornelijus Tuzas**

- 1 Screenplay: Lucinda Coxon and Nick Drake based on a book by
Barbara Winton**
Script Supervision: Hannah Kenneally-Muir
Music Supervision: Catherine Grieves
Music Editing: Neil Stemp
Music Mixing: Daniel Kresco
**Music Recording: Ramon Gonzalez, Philipp Kaminsky, Alexander Nikoleit,
Ozan Tekin, Benedikt Wild, Lambert Windges,
Nick Wollage**
- 1 Music: Volker Bertelmann**
Orchestrations: Robert Ames and Matt James Hill
- 2 Production Design: Christina Moore**
**Art Direction: Jan Kalous, Aline Leonello (supervising), Jo White,
Suzanne Austin**
Set Decoration: Philippa Hart, Petra Vencelidesova (Cz.), Klara Zimova (Cz.)
Set Dressing: Anya Revell and Jamie Walton
Props: Shane Hartford (master) and Harry Meads (master)
Costume Design: Joanna Eatwell
**Makeup Design: Karen Hartley, Sula Loizou (supervising), Gabriela Polakova
(supervising), Lukas Vlcek (supervising)**
- 0 Sound**
Sound Editing Supervision: Stephen Griffiths and Andy Shelley
**Sound Effects: Stuart Bagshaw, Sophia Hardman, Juraj Mravec,
Jason Swanscott**
Dubbing Supervision: Carles Berot
Sound Mixing: Rashad Hall-Heinz and Alan MacFeely
- 1 Acting**
0 Creativity
8 total points

**Cast: Anthony Hopkins* (Nicky Winton), Lena Olin (Grete Winton), Johnny Flynn
(Young Nicky Winton), Helena Bonham Carter* (Babi Winton), Tim Steed
(Bernard), Matilda Thorpe (Nina), Daniel Brown (Frank), Alex Sharp
(Trevor Chadwick), Jirí Simek (Rudi), Romola Garai (Doreen Warriner),
Barbara Vachová (Monika Holub), Juliana Moska (Hana Hejdukova),**

Jolana Jirotková (j) (gap-toothed girl), Michal Skach (Jan Slonek), Samuel Himal (j) (Karel Slonek), Matej Karas (j) (Petr Slonek), Ella Novakova (j) (Lenka), Martin Bednar (j) (Vaclav Slonek), Petr Jenista (Communist BCRC volunteer), Samuel Finzi* (Rabbi Hertz), Michael Rones (refugee camp guide), Darren Clarke (home office clerk), Katerina Jebavá (German mother), Nick Blakeley (junior civil servant), Kiana Klysch (young mother), Sean Brodeur (father), Frantiska Polokova (j) (young Vera Diamontova), Alzbeta Cerna (j) (Eva Diamontova), Dan Vynohradnyk (j) (Tommy), Max Vynohradnyk (j) (Honza), Antonie Formonova (j) (Marta Diamontova), Rút Schmidtova (Mrs. Diamantova), Tom Glenister (William Hughes), Michael Gould (Leadbetter), Ziggy Heath (young Martin Blake), Beáta Mikusová (j) (frightened girl), Janusz Hummel (father at train window), Michaela Hráská (mother at train window), Jiri Vales (lone father), Katerina Kocichová (shocked mother), Milan Ligac (Czech military), Adrian Rawlins (Geoff), Samantha Spiro (Esther Rantzen), Stuart Ramsay (Gavin Campbell), Matilda Bedford (restaurant hostess), Jonathan Pryce (Martin Blake), Charles Armstrong (wine waiter), Angus Kennedy (*New Statesman* reporter), Lukás Král* (reluctant father), Vilma Frantová (weeping mother), Ales Bílík (officer on train), Jaromíra Milová (Vera's foster mother), Simon Thorp (Mr. Hart), Liam Smith (railway official), Marie-Claire Wood (Betty's assistant), Marthe Keller (Betty Maxwell), Eliska Jechova (panicked mother), Justin Svoboda (angry father), Joe Weintraub (Gestapo officer), Barbara Cerná (mother of gap-toothed girl), Ffion Jolly (Barbara Winton), Richard Pople (Steve Watson), Emily Laing (BBC researcher), Henrietta Garden (Vera Gissing), Anna Darvas (Lady Milena Grenfell-Baines), Jonathan Tafler (Hanus Snabl), Alma Salomon (j) (Vera's granddaughter), Henrihs Ahmadejevs (Clive Gissing), John Bain (part of *That's Life* audience), Allan Cook (BBC floor manager), Anna Datiashvili (Mrs. Beck), Daniel Charles Doherty (chaperone), Joel Edwards (Nick, telegram boy), Anna Eliseeva (Vera's daughter), Valerie Hazan (audience member), Alara-Star Khan (j) (Eva refugee), Agnes Móricz (Jewish refugee mother), Queen Elizabeth II (Queen Elizabeth II), Kemal Shah (diner), Edward Terry (working class passenger), Bitu Thomas (Tamil refugee lady), Michael van Koetsveld (BBC cameraman), Alan West (*That's Life* audience member / Maidenhead passerby), Julia Westcott-Hutton (lady smoking in bar), Stuart Whelan (audience member), Nicolas Winton

(Nicolas Winton)

With Anthony Hopkins headlining its cast, *One Life* promised to be a memorable, life-affirming movie release. Unfortunately, that proved not to be the case. Faulty structural and editing choices capsized it. Trying to squeeze a tale of epic proportions into a compact telefilm budget wasn't a brilliant idea.

The drama opens long after the most exciting action has ended, hinting right off the bat at mistakes in narrative options. It should have started *in media res* with scenes of chaotic refugee camps in southern Czechoslovakia. While these eventually show up, too much time is squandered on assuring audiences Nicolas Winton was just an ordinary British citizen. Which happens to be untrue, anyway.

Scenes of Winton family domestic scenes decades removed from World War II's gathering glooms constitute a languid introduction to the core crisis which stimulated stockbroker Winton and his politically engaged mother into action. It's actually quite unimportant for audiences at the beginning of this exposition to become acquainted with the hero's wife and children. They play no part in rescue operations that generated Winton's latter-day fame. Conversely, familiarizing viewers with his mom and their pre-war family background is most helpful in clarifying why the Winton family mobilized to save lives of foreign Jewish children.

At the end of September, 1938 an ill-designed compact was reached in Munich by officials from Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. It removed the Sudetenland section of Czechoslovakia from Czech administrative control, passing it over to Nazi Deutschland.

A feeding frenzy for Czech land followed promptly. Hungary insisted on carving out a section of the country where the native population was overwhelmingly Hungarian. On November 2, 1938 it obtained what was demanded. Four weeks later, Poland succeeded in adding the Spis and Orava regions to its possessions. Jewish and Romany natives fled in panic south to what remained of their country, well aware persecutions would overtake them if they didn't.

By March 1, 1939, an estimated one hundred fifty thousand displaced refugees, mostly Jewish, were temporarily sheltering in southern Czechoslovakia. About the same time, German troops moved south from

Sudetenland, beginning a campaign that would conclude six months later with establishment of a Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This coincided with the official start of World War II.

Do these political tactics sound familiar?

As Christmas, 1938 approached, Marie Schmolka, Doreen Warriner, and Trevor Chadwick were serving as volunteers assisting politically endangered Czech, Austrian, German, and Polish Jews in Prague. Someone aware of their work made a phone call for aid to London Stock Exchange broker Nicholas Winton requesting him to come at once to what was left of free Czechoslovakia. Could he help expedite registration of outgoing children and their families?

Those placed on a list for potential emigration would need to have receiving sponsors in Great Britain, as well as a surety pledge covering the cost of returning them to their home nation. Fifty pounds per child, roughly the equivalent then of one hundred twenty-four dollars a head, was demanded by the English government. That sum would have to come from the travelers themselves. Or else from a Jewish assistance agency in their prospective host country.

Transport of minors had top priority for Marie, Doreen, and their associates, who were operating from makeshift offices in a downtown Prague hotel.

Meanwhile, panicked fugitives awaiting bureaucratic approval subsisted as well as they could on handouts from international charities and any donations from the non-Jewish local populace. Starvation, communicable disease, occasional suicide, and depression slowly thinned the ranks of long-term migrants. But new arrivals kept coming to replace those dead.

This was the situation confronting Nicholas Winton when he cancelled a planned ski trip in the Alps and instead journeyed to Czechoslovakia's capital, then inundated with homeless persons of all ages. He soon discovered the most vulnerable victims of Nazi policies were boys and girls too young to vote, work in factories, or serve in any army. Being himself a child of Jewish refugee parents, the Wertheims, who had converted to Christianity and Anglicized their name sometime after arriving in Great Britain, Nicholas plunged into a novel role of intermediary between Czech Jews and British aid volunteers, despite being unacquainted with the Czech language. *One Life* at its best shows hardships and obstacles that entailed.

Yet by concentrating overwhelmingly on his movements, worries, frustrations, and tactics, filmmakers left largely uninvestigated individual stories of uprootedness and discrimination. What was it like to be thrust for incomprehensible reasons into a mass exodus from the security of native soil and habitual routines? To find yourself almost overnight reduced to beggary, mocked by soldiers, rejected by Aryan playmates, deprived of beds, medicine, possibly even hope? These questions are only superficially dealt with by a screenplay geared to Humanitarian-of-the-Week idolizing of its main character.

Substantial screen time is devoted to conversation between retiree Winton and a wealthy female philanthropist with great publicity connections. Their discussion seems to lead nowhere. It could have been profitably omitted.

More to the point are scenes of Winton's mother battling emotionally distanced Whitehall bureaucracy. To enter Albion visas were needed. These official documents emerged with maddening slowness. Gatekeepers in London were simply inattentive to how rapidly and efficiently the Nazi SS and its array of collaborators were busily compiling an alternate list of future political internees.

The door of escape would soon be closed. Though not before one planeload and eight trains of children passed through it to safety.

Anti-Semitic police brutality receives mild treatment in this picture. Realism gets sacrificed to launder savageries sufficiently to insure a tasteful television presentation unlikely to offend anyone except confirmed Holocaust-deniers.

A Bergmanesque touch is added when Winton admits to repeated nightmares about siblings and orphans he was unable to preserve from the Shoah. Haunting recriminations stemmed as well from perusing fading photographs of child emigration candidates that didn't win a spot on eight successful convoys across the Channel. The less visually appealing perished. More photogenic cases won second families for themselves.

One of the positive aspects here is information conveyed about Nicolas Winton's postwar charity work for organizations in the Maidenhead, Kent area.

Popular revival of interest in his prewar humanitarianism was aroused by a British television program titled *That's Life*. It provided a forum for public reunion with some of the children whose lives he saved.

One Life concludes with heartwarming shots of grandchildren and great-grandchildren of 1939's aged survivors frolicking in Winton's yards, home, and pool.

Outclassed by prior forays into this subject matter by the 2011 documentary *Nicky's Family* and the family-centered 1999 drama *All My Loved Ones*, both directed by Matej Minac, *One Life* is buoyed by accomplished acting from Anthony Hopkins as a retired older version of Nicholas Winton and Helena Bonham Carter as his mother, Babi. Samuel Finzi's Rabbi Hertz and Lukás Král's distraught Semitic father who initially resists turning his offspring over to Nicholas only to change his mind when danger presses closer also merit praise.

Other thespians furnish adequate support.

Sound recording and mixing leave a fair amount to be desired.

A highly subjective screenplay suffices, lacking treasurable remarks or penetrating insights into character. At least it avoids pitfalls of nostalgia and anachronistic dialogue.

Lighting is of a quality to be expected in a made-for-television product.

Worthier is art direction representing several different time periods and two quite dissimilar national environments quite effectively. Set decoration, costumes, and set dressing all strongly reinforce atmosphere and receive a passing grade as convincingly authentic copies of reality.

Accompanying music is acceptable. It has no special aesthetic distinction.

Cinematography too often lacks dramatic impact, settling for commonplace framings rather than striking compositions.

As introduction to Nicholas Winton and his group's prewar work, *One Life* is acceptable viewing for teens and adults disinclined to pursue its subject matter in a more profound and passionate format, such as those of the two earlier works cited above.

This Bleecker Street dvd release is now available to borrow from the Hugh Stoupe Library.