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Mark Curnutte, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* 10:14 p.m. EST November 9, 2014

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Reunion honors stockbroker who saved 669 children

Mark Curnutte, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* 10:14 p.m. EST November 9, 2014



(Photo: Provided by Renata Laxova)

CINCINNATI — Monday night at Xavier University, a reunion will take place — testament to the power that one person had for good and that many believe lies within each person.

The meeting on Xavier's Evanston campus of two women, Barbara Winton, the daughter of a British stockbroker, and a Czech physician named Renata Laxova, has roots in horrific events of 76 years ago.

On the night of Nov. 9, 1938, and into the next morning, the Night of Broken Glass — Kristallnacht — swept across Germany and Austria. In those two days, 250 synagogues burned, 7,000 Jewish businesses were looted and countless Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools and homes were destroyed. Fire brigades stood by and watched buildings go up in flames. Dozens of Jewish people were killed, and after dawn broke 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps.

Still, across Europe and in the United States, many political leaders and their citizenry considered Hitler a buffoon, cartoonish and incapable of carrying out his plan to annihilate Europe's Jews.



[USA TODAY](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/12/kindertransport-wwii-75th-anniversary/4003339/) Kindertransport saved this man's life 75 years ago*video on and related story/link about Alexander Wilde -
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/12/kindertransport-wwii-75th-anniversary/4003339/>

In England, Barbara Winton's stockbroker father took Hitler seriously. Nicholas Winton had read Hitler's two-volume biographical manifesto, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). He had Jewish relatives who'd fled Germany. He read newspaper reports about Kristallnacht. He was convinced he had to act to get the children of Hitler's enemies to England.

He would set up his own immigration and child service agencies, resorting to forgery to get children out as war approached. He raised money and recruited foster parents in England for each child. His efforts saved 669 Jewish children — Renata Laxova among them — from certain death in Hitler's ovens.



Nicholas Winton shares a moment with his daughter, Barbara Winton. She wrote a biography of her father, "If It's Not Impossible," published in April 2014. (Photo: *The Cincinnati Enquirer*)

Barbara Winton and Dr. Laxova will share their stories Monday night as part of Xavier's "Touching History" series. A documentary film about Winton's daring rescue, Nicky's Family, also will be shown.

Sir Nicholas Winton is still living, but "is sinking" at 105, his daughter said in an interview from England with The Enquirer. He recently returned to England from the Czech Republic, where he received that nation's highest citation, the Order of the White Lion.

Winton's heroic story came to light only after a half-century of silence. Now, CBS News' *60 Minutes* has profiled him. Barbara Winton wrote a book, *If It's Not Impossible*, which published in April.

"It is the first time I am talking about his life," Barbara Winton said. "What he did was not just an idealist thought. He had the right skills. He needed all of them to make it happen."

A man who wanted to save thousands

In December 1938, less than a month after Kristallnacht, Jewish and Christian agencies began rescuing Jewish children from Germany and Austria under the name Operation Kindertransport. No group existed in Prague to get children out of Hitler's encroaching path, though, and so Winton established his own, working first out of a Prague hotel room and eventually setting up shop back in England.

Word of Winton's agency, which he called the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, Children's Section, spread among Jewish parents. He contacted several nations in search of homes for Jewish children. Only his native England and Sweden opened their doors. The United States did not.

"He had a bloody, single-minded tenacity," Barbara Winton, 61, said of her father. "He didn't care what he had to do. He just did it, whatever it took."

He had circulated photographs of the Jewish children in newsletters and newspapers throughout England in an effort to secure foster homes.

On March 14, 1939, the first transport plane left Prague for Britain. Nicholas Winton organized seven more transports, all leaving from Prague's Wilson Railway Station. The final train left Aug. 2. World War II broke out in Europe Sept. 1.

Renata Laxova, now 83, was on one of those trains. She was just 8 when she left her native land. The only child of Jewish parents, she was not allowed to attend second grade in public school in the fall of 1938. She no longer could swim in public pools because of her parents' faith.

"I was excited at first. I had learned English," Laxova said in an interview from Madison, Wis., where she is emeritus professor of genetics at the Departments of Pediatrics and Medical Genetics.

Her parents left their home with her at 10 p.m. The train was scheduled to leave at midnight. As the hour approached, the reality of separating from her parents set in.

"I was begging them to take me home," she said. "I was promising to always eat spinach. I had always refused, which had been a significant issue in our home. My parents told me the truth. They said, 'We are sending you away. There is nothing more we want than to have you with us. But we want you to learn in school and be safe. We will do what we can to follow you. If we can't follow you, we will come and get you when this occupation is over.'"



Stockbroker Nicholas Winton holds a young boy during a visit to Prague in 1939. (Photo: Courtesy Barbara Winton)

Laxova made it out on the second-to-last transport organized by Nicholas Winton. He had one more scheduled. It would have been the largest, with 250 children aboard, but the train, which would have pulled out of Prague on Sept. 1, never moved from the station. When war was declared, Germany closed its borders and those of the territories — including Czechoslovakia — it occupied.

In earlier interviews in England, Nicholas Winton said he still laments the loss of that last transport. "Within hours of the announcement (that war had started), the train disappeared," he said. "None of 250 people aboard was seen again.

"We had 250 families waiting at Liverpool Street that day in vain. If the train had been a day earlier, it would have come through. Not a single one of those children was heard of again, which is an awful feeling."

"He had grand designs," Barbara Winton said of her father. "He wanted to rescue thousands, not just hundreds."

A story meant to inspire good works

After the war, Winton told no one what he had done in 1939 in Prague.

In 1988, his wife, Grete, found a scrapbook from 1939 in the attic of their home in Maidenhead, England. The scrapbook and other of Winton's papers are now housed in Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel. In 2002, Winton received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II for his service to humanity.

Winton has said in interviews that he didn't keep his exploits secret. He just didn't talk about them.

So why now? "Young people respond quite positively to the story," Barbara Winton said, "and some have told us that they are moved by my father's efforts to do good in their own lives."

Yet the rescue of 669 children is not entertainment, she said.

"For some people who watch the story, it is quite uncomfortable," Barbara Winton said. "For other people, the fact that it occurred 75 years ago creates enough distance for them that they are comfortable and not challenged to do something to help humanity. My father believes that even the most seemingly mundane acts of compassion and kindness are quite important."

For Rabbi Abie Ingber, executive director of Xavier's Center for Interfaith Community Engagement, Monday night's event is meant to inspire. "Nicholas Winton was in the middle of this historic period, and we know that he not only heard the sound of shattered lives but he acted. Against all odds his creative heart and hands gave life to 669 children," said Ingber, who organized the event.



Renata Laxova, now 83, was just 8 when she made it out of Prague on the second-to-last transport organized by Nicholas Winton. (Photo: *The Cincinnati Enquirer*)

"The presence of his daughter, Barbara, at Xavier is a clarion call to hear the breaking of glass in our generation. Her reunion with Renata Laxova, one of those children, gives our eyes the impetus to see goodness in our lives, and gives our hearts reason to rejoice."

About 6,000 people alive across the globe today owe their lives to Nicholas Winton. They are the descendants of refugee children rescued by him from the Nazi threat in 1939.

Renata Laxova once briefly met Winton in 2009, the 70th anniversary of the rescue. She remembers the scene being a crowded one, with dozens of people pressing to get near him. Laxova reached his hand and kissed it. She had prepared a gift for him, a wooden plaque featuring a rendering of a train steaming across a map of Europe, fleeing danger in the East and heading toward safety in the West. She could not get the plaque into his hands.

"I admire him greatly," she said. "He not only saved the lives of 669 children, he changed their thinking. He changed the hearts and minds of their descendants. I am very convinced. I believe there is not one of us who don't want to do something good to change the world."

Unlike most of Winton's saved children, whose parents died in Hitler's Final Solution, Laxova was reunited with her parents after the war.

Some of the children managed to give Winton a gift, a ring he wears to this day. The inscription is a line from the Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism. It reads: "Save one life, save the world."

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/12/kindertransport-wwii-75th-anniversary/4003339/> - (stories of Alexander Wilde, Oscar Findley and Herbert Levy)

Alexander Wilde, a Jewish teenager in Vienna saved by the Kindertransport program before the start of WWII, remembers what it was like to live in terror under the Nazis. Glenn Russell, The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press

Tim Johnson, The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press 7:12 p.m. EST December 12, 2013

His father had been taken to Dachau but wrote to tell his mother 'to get the child out.'



Alexander Wilde (Photo: Glenn Russell, The Burlington Vt. Free Press)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Before the war, his mother was a doctor, his father a lawyer in Austria**
 - **By mid-April 1938, any Jewish students and teachers were not allowed to go to school**
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- **His mother was able to get him on the first Kindertransport train from Vienna, 75 years ago this week**

Then his family was kicked out of their home, he watched soldiers take his father away, his mother put him on a train to safety and he was unsure whether he would ever see her again.

All of this happened to Alexander Wilde in Vienna because his family was Jewish. He was 15, and the year was 1938, after the *Anschluss*, when the German army annexed Austria and the Holocaust began.

Wilde is 90 now, retired and living in this town of about 8,700 people 45 miles from the Canadian border. He remembers these events vividly.

He escaped on a train that carried hundreds of other children beyond the Nazis' reach, but his adventure continued. He was confined in his initial country of refuge, England, during a Nazi spy scare in 1940.

Many of his relatives in Austria and Central Europe were killed during World War II, victims of Germany's campaign of Jewish extermination. But his immediate family had a happier fate, and Wilde has the *Kindertransport* program to thank for that. Kindertransport, Children's Transport, was a rescue operation that brought about 10,000 child refugees, most of them Jewish, to England without their parents.

The campaign, which had multidenominational and parliamentary support, began in earnest after *Kristallnacht*, the notorious, organized attacks on Jews that swept Germany and Austria on Nov. 9 and 10, 1938. The name, Night of Broken Glass, derives from the glass fragments of smashed windows in Jewish businesses, homes and synagogues, many of which were burned.

The children — ages 3 to 15 and mostly from Berlin, Vienna and Prague — rode trains to Holland and Belgium and then were ferried to England under the supervision of adults whom the German authorities required to return. (A film, *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*, won the Academy Award for best documentary feature in 2000.)

Wilde was in the first group from Vienna. Mindful of many watershed dates in his life, he regarded Tuesday with special significance: 4 p.m. ET, 10 p.m. Central European Time in Vienna, marked the 75th anniversary of when he said goodbye to his mother in the Vienna train station.

She was barred from seeing him off on the platform.

Uprooted

Growing up, Wilde led a comfortable life with his parents in Vienna. His mother was a physician with an office in their home, and his father was a lawyer who worked in a bank. The city had a large Jewish population, and it wasn't until the *Anschluss* that many members began to feel seriously imperiled.

Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, and the following month the new regime began cracking down on schools.

Wilde attended a "gymnasium," an academic secondary school. One day in mid-April, all the Jewish students and teachers in his school were given a half hour's notice to get out — for good.

"We became the first victims of the Nazi terror. I was 15. A child takes those events with maybe not as great anxiety as adults would, but it was a shock to me."

Alexander Wilde, Williston, Vt.

"We became the first victims of the Nazi terror," he said. "I was 15. A child takes those events with maybe not as great anxiety as adults would, but it was a shock to me."

"Soon thereafter, my mother was notified that she was no longer permitted to be practicing physician," he said. "And my dad was thrown out of the bank. ... Life became very restrictive."

With an eye to emigration, his family applied for passports. He still has his — issued in October 1938 — and the cover page is stamped with a large red "J." His parents applied for visas from seven countries, including the United States, but quota systems meant years of waiting.

"On Oct. 4, 1938, which was Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement, we had just come home from the evening service at the synagogue and were ready to go to bed, and there was loud pounding on our door," Wilde said. "Nazi storm troopers announced, 'You have half an hour to get out of your home. You can pack up one suitcase, and there is a train waiting at the station to take you to an undisclosed place.' "

His parents dutifully packed a suitcase, but his father led them out a back door. They walked a block, hailed a cab, and went to stay with relatives across town.

"As it all turned out, there were no trains really waiting," Wilde said. "This was subterfuge the Nazis were using." It was a way to oust Jewish occupants from residences the Nazis wanted to take over.

His parents rented a one-bedroom apartment in the city's Second District, a predominantly Jewish section. His father found a part-time job at a shoe store.

During the *Kristallnacht* mayhem, as synagogues were burning and as Jewish men were being rounded up, Wilde and his mother were looking out the window, waiting for his father to return from work when they saw storm troopers seize him, put him in a truck and drive away.

His father was taken to Dachau concentration camp in Germany. Every other week, he was allowed to write a letter home. His first letter urged his wife to "make every effort to get the child out."

His mother managed to arrange passage for him on the first Kindertransport train from Vienna. He was one of about 500 children on the train, most of them younger than 10.

Did he think he'd ever see his mother again?

"In the beginning, you thought this was a separation that was going to last a while," he said.

After 10,000 refugee children had arrived in England without their parents, Kindertransport ended Sept. 1, 1939, with Germany's invasion of Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany after that invasion.

Until then, Wilde said, "People were still hoping they would get together. As it turned out, of 10,000, less than 500 parents survived the war and were able to get together."

Among them were Wilde's mother and father. Fortuitously, Kindertransport helped save them, too.

British transit

When Wilde reached England, he and the other children initially were housed in what he calls "a holiday camp" — an aggregation of unheated cottages that summer vacationers normally used. He remembers that winter as a cold one. Each child received a comforter and, in the evening, a hot-water bottle.

"If the hot-water bottle fell on the floor at night," he said, "it was frozen in the morning."

The children gradually were placed in foster homes, and Wilde was sent to Edinburgh, Scotland, to live with a retired roofing contractor named Christian Ettrupe, a Danish Quaker who was a widower without children. Ettrupe arranged for Wilde to attend school to learn English, and he set about trying to find a way to get Wilde's father out of Dachau.



Alexander Wilde was born Alexander Wildholz in Austria but because of the Anschluss his first passport came from Germany, stamped with a large orange "J" for Jude, Jew in German. (Photo: Glenn Russell, *The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press*)

Ettrupe learned that Wilde's parents could get visas to China without a wait. He then spent the equivalent of about \$1,500 for two shipping passages to Shanghai from England. A travel agent pledged that Wilde's parents would get the visas as soon as they arrived in a British port.

When Wilde's mother presented all this documentation to the German authorities, Wilde's father was released. His parents came straight to England, where they immediately requested and were granted political asylum.

Once they were settled in Birmingham, the country's second most populous city, Wilde said, "My parents asked Mr. Ettrupe if he would mind returning their son to them, which he gladly did."

"Mr. Ettrupe actually passed away before the end of the war," Wilde said. "But he will be enshrined in our hearts as long as we live for the generosity and kindness he showed. He was not obligated; he was not even asked. He volunteered to help rescue my dad from a concentration camp."

Nazi-spy-scare hysteria in Britain interrupted their family life in Birmingham. German-speaking male adult refugees were rounded up and confined indefinitely without being charged — Wilde at a racetrack in York, his father on the Isle of Wight.

"We were very well treated, well fed," Wilde said. "We got mail, could listen to the radio."

Meanwhile, his mother learned that their visas to the United States had been approved. Because they had escaped, the family had an advantage over visa applicants who remained stuck behind German lines. Wilde and his father were released from the internment camps on the pledge that they would ship out right away.

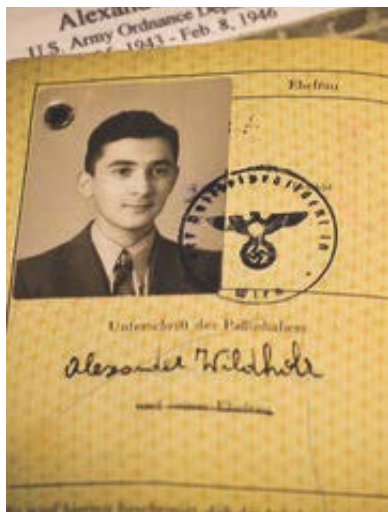
The family was reunited again in Liverpool the day before they were scheduled to embark, but that night the city was under bombardment by the German air force. Instead of the hotel room that Wilde's mother had booked, they spent their last night in England in an air-raid shelter.

American postscript

Wilde has told his survival story many times before, to high school and college students, to church groups and synagogues. It comes with an uplifting sequel:

His family arrived Oct. 12, 1940, in New York.

"The same day Columbus discovered America, so did we," Wilde said.



Another page in Alexander Wildholz's passport issued in October 1938 before he emigrated to England. He changed his surname to Wilde, is now 90 years old and lives in Williston, Vt. (Photo: Glenn Russell, *The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press*)

They settled initially in Indiana and later in Chicago. Wilde held a series of jobs, then volunteered for military induction — prompted in part because of letters from relatives describing the grim situation in Europe.

After he joined the Army, he became a U.S. citizen, and in a spur-of-the-moment decision he later regretted, changed his surname from Wildholz, which often was misspelled and mispronounced, to Wilde.

Wilde thought his fluency in German might prove useful to the Army, but as he put it, "The Army doesn't figure that way, and I wound up being sent to the Aleutian Islands."

After the war, he attended college, received a master's degree from the University of Chicago and spent a 39-year career in Chicago with Blue Cross Blue Shield insurance. In retirement, he and his wife, Barbara Wilde, moved to Maine, and more recently here, to be near a daughter.

The Kindertransport made it all possible.

"If I wouldn't have been placed on that train," he said, "I never would have been able to get to this country. I would have surely perished with my parents in Auschwitz or one of the other camps."

Wilde cautioned that anti-Semitism has not died. Economic conditions in Europe have renewed the prominence of far-right political parties, many openly anti-Semitic.



Protests and violence in Germany, Austria and elsewhere "are increasing in the last couple of years rather than disappearing," he said. "So this is a constant vigil."

At the bottom of the article there is additional link to a 1.43 minute video telling the stories of Oscar Findley and Herbert Levy



Seventy-five years ago this week, some 10,000 children traveled to England without their parents on the Kindertransport to escape Nazi persecution before the outbreak of World War II. (Dec. 2) AP Oscar Findley – oldest of "Nicky's Family"



Herbert Levy



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