

HOLOCAUST & HUMAN RIGHTS

ART & WRITING CONTEST 2023

MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY

FIRST PLACE

AADHYA VIJIL

## Nicholas Winton : A Hero

“What hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander.” This quote by Elie Wiesel highlights the importance of being an upstander. Our most powerful tool is having the courage to voice our opinions on right and wrong. In an era where violence and prejudiced views are unfortunately becoming more common, the importance of upstanders in society is only increasing. It is our responsibility—and our burden—to fight for justice, as our future is dependent on our ability to take action at this moment.

Motivated by Nazi Germany’s antisemitic ideology, the holocaust or the genocide of European Jews led to the deaths of over six million Jews from 1933 to 1945. It became increasingly difficult for Jewish families to live normal lives as new laws were passed which restricted everything they could do. Many families tried all they could to escape Germany and flee to safer countries but it was extremely difficult to do so, and the repercussions of getting caught were extreme. And yet, there were a few people who were willing to oppose the Nazi regime.

Nicholas Winton was one such upstander. From 1938-1939 a programme known as the Kindertransport allowed a limited number of children from Germany and Austria to immigrate to Britain. However, Winton asked the British government for permission to permit Czech children to come into the UK as well. The government agreed under the conditions that each child would be assigned a family who would care for them until 18, and their families were required to pay a fee of £50. Winton worked with his mother and many volunteers to ensure each child could abide by these conditions. He made sure each child was matched with a host family and raised funds to cover travel expenses. His heroic efforts were able to save around 669 children.

Despite this, he had always rejected the idea his actions were monumental, and he didn't think he would ever see most of those kids again. That is until his wife, Grete, found a scrapbook in which Winton had recorded the names, birthdates, addresses, and photographs of these children at the time. Together they tracked down some of the children he'd saved, and upon meeting them, he learned just how much his actions meant to them. "He is a national hero here in the Czech Republic. He did a kind act and never told anybody." Said Vera Egermayer, a holocaust survivor and one of the children Winton had saved.

In order to build a better, more ethical future, we must look in the footprints of our past mistakes. The Holocaust was a heartbreaking, treacherous time for mankind, which makes it all the more important to remember and recognize. However, recognizing isn't enough. With that knowledge we must act—we must fight for justice and use our voice, for it is the most powerful asset we have.

#### Sources

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MIDDLE SCHOOL ESSAY

SECOND PLACE

CHANAKYA NAYUDU

## **Chiune Sugihara: An Upstander's Courage in the Face of Adversity**

“Do what is right because it is right; and leave it alone”. This influential quote by Chiune Sugihara reminds us that one must always do what is right, regardless of the outcome and how people judge you. By doing the right thing, it makes us upstanders, instead of bystanders. As global citizens, we must strive to be upstanding citizens in our community and schools. Our world needs more upstanders, and if we don't become upstanders, who will?

The Holocaust is a potent illustration of why the world needed more upstanders. It began in 1941 in Germany and endured for years until 1945. In concentration camps, where innocent people were starved, tormented, and eventually murdered in cold blood, humanity was at stake. Sadly, many bystanders permitted this inhuman act to occur. Chiune Sugihara was not among these individuals.

Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat who was one of the extraordinary upstanders of the Holocaust. He defied his government's order and saved over 5,500 Jewish lives by granting them transit visas and letting them travel through Japanese territory. His selfless act of courage and humanity saved lives of thousands of people and has become a symbol of the power of individual actions to make a difference in the face of adversity.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from Sugihara is the impact of standing up for what is right, even when it goes against the prevailing social or political norms or expectation. During a time when Japan was allied with Nazi Germany and actively participating in the war effort, Sugihara recognized the plight of the Jewish people and took it upon himself to assist them, despite the risk to his career and safety.

Furthermore, Sugihara teaches us the significance of empathy and compassion in the face of human suffering. Even though he had no personal ties to the Jewish community he aided, he was able to discern the plight and provide them with a lifeline at great personal cost. His actions serve as a reminder that we are all members of the same human family and that we have a duty to assist one another in time of need.

Ultimately, Sugihara's tale illustrates the significance of perseverance and resilience. His determination and courage are an inspiration to us all, reminding us that we can make a difference even in the darkest of times if we remain faithful to our values and beliefs.

My sister and I attended a "Black Lives Matter" rally in our community, which allowed me to experience taking a stand. Even though my actions may not have been as significant as Sugihara's, if we all work together and take modest steps like these, we can make a difference in our communities. By doing so we can attain "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" a Sanskrit quote from ancient Indian book which translates "The World Is One Family" and live in harmony and peace.

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THIRD PLACE

NOLAN KIM

# REGINA'S TESTIMONY

Anyone who thinks that testimonies are a fraction of stopping us from doing something like the Holocaust is wrong. Regina is a Jewish Holocaust survivor in the Holocaust, and her story starts on May 12th, 1926, in Radom, Poland, when she was born, and ends on December 27th, 2019, in Columbia, Maryland, when she died. Even though she is gone, her story continues in the world. The memories shared by the Holocaust survivors connect with listeners and make horrors real, and they keep survivors' stories alive.

Memories shared by Holocaust survivors keep their stories alive; survivors make the horrors of the Holocaust seem more real. Testimonies of survivors show a stark contrast between regular life and life after the Nazis destroyed it. Although Regina's life started normally, on September 1st, 1939, when she was 13, her life changed forever. Her life was shattered when the Nazis invaded Radom and forced the Jews to relinquish all their valuables. In 1941, she went to a ghetto. However, Regina's parents wanted to protect her from suffering because she was very young. The Nazis' destruction of her life demonstrates how a cruel regime can change things suddenly.

The memories shared by the Holocaust survivors keep their stories alive. Regina's parents told her to run and live with Rozia, her sister. Regina worked in Rozia's town,



fixing factory windows and cleaning houses. Unfortunately, her town area turned into a ghetto, they were separated when sent to other ghettos. Regina was forced to make Panzerfauste, an explosive anti-tank weapon, but befriended a man named Sam Spiegel at the ghetto. Although Sam and Regina were separated when they got transported to another camp, and they promised to meet again in Sam's hometown. However, she and the other woman escaped the train they were on by opening the door and jumping off. The Soviet army later liberated her from the Nazis, and she then went to Katowice, Poland, and rode a train to Radom.

Memories shared by Holocaust survivors connect listeners. Regina was in Radom when someone saw her and told her that Sam was in Kozienice. Sadly, in 1944, Rozia got shot trying to flee a ghetto with her baby, and they both died. Sam soon got the news that Regina was in Radom and sent a horse and a buggy to get her, and they reunited in Kozienice and were married in Foehrenwald, a displaced persons camp. They settled in Washington, D.C., and had three children there. The ending of her story is bittersweet because she and Sam are free, but her whole family dies, and her life is never normal again, even when she is free.

As said, her testimony is essential to ensure another Holocaust doesn't happen again because everybody will know about her pain and suffering. Reading her testimony, people can understand how she and other Holocaust survivors felt. Finally, imagine how you would have felt if you were a Jewish Holocaust survivor from the 1930s.

## **Works Cited**

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HONORABLE MENTION

TALIA GOLDNER

## Question 1: Upstander

Upstanders are people who choose to not just stand there, but help people out. They stand up for what they believe in. My great grandma Rose survived the Holocaust because of upstanders who decided to help her.

My grandma had a nice childhood with her parents and 6 siblings. She loved cooking for family and being with animals. Her life changed after World War II broke out. My grandma was not much older than me when the war began and the Nazis invaded Germany and Poland where she grew up. When she was 12 she had to leave her family behind in order to survive. Then a local Catholic family was nice enough to risk their lives to help save my grandma and her sister's lives. They kept her hidden on their farm and told people that she was their cousin visiting from another part of Poland. If they got caught doing this they would get killed so it shows that they didn't just care about themselves but they cared about others too.

When I think about what these people did to help it makes me want to be an upstander as well. I might not be able to save people's lives but I can help people by speaking up when I see things that don't seem right. For example, when classmates are being bullied or made fun of I can help them or tell the bully to stop. This has happened in group texts and in person. Even though it's not always easy to speak up, it is always right.

My grandma Rose was also an upstander. She was a kind, generous person and thought about others before herself. She always made people feel welcome in her

house. Whether it was for a meal or if they needed a place to stay. This shows that she cared deeply about others and didn't like to see people upset.

Although the Holocaust was terrible and made my grandma mad and sad, she was also able to be grateful for the upstanders that helped her and she passed on good things to others in her life. She inspires me to stand up for what I think is right and I will continue to do good things in honor of her.