

'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study 1: Leon Greenman

Leon was quite a character. He was of small stature – about 5 foot 4", he walked with a stick but was exceptionally strong. It is hard to believe but, even in his 80s and 90s, Leon kept himself fit by doing 30 press-ups a day. He also loved to sing and could burst into song given half a chance at any function whether he had been invited to do so or not! His amazing tenor voice would reverberate around the room and capture everyone's attention.

Leon earned his living as a market trader of house -hold knick-knacks and became a collector of small interesting antique items which often appeared for sale on his market stall. He certainly had the 'gift of the gab' and shoppers regularly returned home having purchased from him many peculiar things that they hadn't set out to buy – just because he had a unique charm and was so easy to warm to.

Leon lived a very modest life without the normal creature comforts – he didn't have central heating in his home and he managed the cold nights very well, somehow. He liked to do everything for himself. In the kitchen, he mastered the perfect 'boil in the bag' chicken and rice and supplied himself with endless cups of tea, which satisfied him most nights. He never wasted food nor did he ever bin any food product that became 'out of date'.



On entering his home one could think that it was incredibly messy, but it wasn't; he simply preferred not to put away paper cuttings, books, photographs and other items that related to one particular terrible event that took place in Europe during World War 2. This event is known as, The Holocaust.

Leon was born into a Jewish family in London's East End on the 18th of December 1910. His grandparents were of both Dutch and Eastern European heritage. When Leon was young his family decided to live in Holland. Later he became an apprentice hairdresser, joined a boxing club and became an amateur singer of romantic ballads. During a musical evening held at a club for young Jewish people Leon met his future wife Esther (Else) van Dam – a Dutch girl living in London. He moved back to London, the town of his birth, to be nearer to her and the romance blossomed.

Leon and Else were married in London in the Stepney Green Synagogue in June of 1935. They honeymooned in Brighton. Shortly afterwards they went on a visit to Rotterdam in Holland to see Else's grandmother. While there, she persuaded the young couple to settle in Holland to look after her. They agreed.

On the 17th of March 1940 Else gave birth to a boy named Barney. The happiness was short lived. Nazi Germany invaded Holland just two months later. Leon, entrusted his British passports and money to non-Jewish Dutch friends for safe keeping. He was worried that these important documents and all the money he had may be confiscated. If this happened Leon and the family would be in danger of the same fate as the Dutch Jews who were now under German rule. But when Leon came to reclaim his documents, he discovered that his friends had burned the passports for fear of being caught helping Jews. Leon's money had also 'disappeared'.

Later one night in October 1942 Leon, Else, Barney and Else's elderly grandmother were forcibly taken from their home by Dutch police working for the Germans occupation forces. They were taken to Westerbork, a transit camp for Dutch Jews. Whilst there Leon tried many times to explain his British citizenship and the family's right to be interned under international law, but it was all to no use. They were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on the 18th of January 1943. On arrival Leon was separated from Else and Barney. What followed for Leon was a horrifying two years of slave labour, experimentation, beatings and starvation in numerous concentration camps. He was eventually liberated by the Americans at Buchenwald on the 11th of April 1945.

During his time in the camps he had made a 'covenant' with God: if he and his family survived he would dedicate his life to bearing witness to the Holocaust so that the despicable acts might never happen again. Leon was eventually to discover that his wife and son had been murdered in gas chambers soon after they had arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The last sighting Leon had of Else and Barney was of them crowded in a waggon waiting to be taken away – their matching red velvet hats peeping out from the group of the others facing the same fate. This tragic picture would play heavily on Leon's mind and remain with him for the rest of his life.

Despite this torment, he began a life-time mission to tell the world about what happened. While most survivors at this early stage were (understandably) too traumatised to speak out, Leon began touring schools, universities, and various faith groups to tell his story to anyone who would listen.

Leon built his life in London where he remained for the rest of his life. He never remarried.

On retiring he was able to pursue his lecturing with greater voracity. He also became a human rights activist and campaigner with the Anti-Nazi League, standing up against far-right groups in spite of being in his 80s. It was at a cost. In the early 1990s he became a target for attack by such movements. He was sent death threats and the windows of his home were smashed. Leon remained undeterred and continued his fight.



In his final years, he built up a hoard of material relating to the Holocaust which surrounded him in his terraced house in Ilford. Hardly an inch of space remained free of items including many of his own paintings that recorded the details of the regular nightmares he had about the things he saw during the Holocaust. He preferred things exactly as they were – and he knew where everything was.

Eventually at the age of 97 on March 7th 2008 Leon passed away.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in Leon's story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness' – what darkness is there in Leon's life and experiences?

- Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is Leon’s story one of resilience? When he tackled racism and the extreme right, was that him being ‘the light in the darkness’ of others suffering and discrimination?
- Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might Leon’s life and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
- Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in Leon’s story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all ‘Be the light in the darkness’ in some way?



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'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study 2: Nicholas Winton

Nicholas Winton was born to Jewish parents in 1909, although he adopted an English name and was baptised into the Church of England. He was a **socialist** with links to many Labour politicians and family contacts abroad, giving him an insight into the persecution of Europe's Jews by the Nazis.



In December 1938, Winton was a 29-year-old **stockbroker**. He had been planning to take a skiing holiday. Just before he left, he received a letter from his friend Martin Blake, who had already travelled to Prague on behalf of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia. It contained an invitation: *'I have a most interesting assignment and I need your help. Don't bother bringing your skis.'* In Prague, Winton saw for himself the full scale of the problem facing Jews in the German-occupied Sudetenland. Refugee camps were filling with families forced from their homes. Occupants were struggling to survive the harsh European winter. Winton was struck by the appalling conditions and his greatest concern was for the children. As a British citizen with contacts, Winton was convinced he could arrange the evacuation of young refugees to England. Winton and his colleagues Martin Blake and Doreen Warriner set up a makeshift headquarters in a hotel in Prague and began taking the names of families who wished to send their children to safety.

Transporting hundreds of young refugees across Europe required careful planning. Winton returned to London and a mountain of paperwork. The British government was only willing to let vulnerable children enter the country if strict conditions were met. Winton had to arrange a foster family for every refugee who left Czechoslovakia. A few children had relatives waiting in Britain. But in most cases, Winton had to persuade complete strangers to take the children in. He placed ads in newspapers calling for volunteers. Fortunately, the British government had already begun plans to evacuate British children from city centres in the event of war so the British public were familiar with the idea of opening their homes to those in need. In 1939 those organised trains out of Prague 669 Jewish children were brought safe passage from Czechoslovakia to England at the dawn of World War II.



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The evacuees, later known as "Winton's Children", knew little about their rescuer until the 1980s, when his work finally came to light. He was knighted in 2003 and died on July 1, 2015, at the age of 106.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in Nicholas' story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in Nicky's life and experiences?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is Nicholas' story one of empathy, humanitarianism or light? How do his actions speak to values of respect and inclusion and how important was this in such a dark time?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might Nicholas' life and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in Nicholas' story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all 'Be the light in the darkness' in some way?



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'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study 3: Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak was born Henryk Goldszmit in 1878 in Poland. An acclaimed writer, broadcaster, doctor and teacher, Korczak was highly respected within Polish society for his dedication to children, particularly forward thinking regards children's rights.



Korczak ran an orphanage. Once former child, Itzhack Belfer, in the orphanage recalls his life there

"Life was wonderful. It was full of drawing, sports and music – there was even a grand piano in the home- and we were always well fed and smartly dressed. It may be difficult to grasp, but life was the exact opposite of a typical orphanage. We experienced security, love and warmth.

Korczak even set up a children's court in the home, comprising of five child judges and an adult secretary (with no decision-making power) to discipline those who broke the rules. This even applied to Korczak himself- when he was caught sliding down the banister, he was in trouble!"

In October 1940, the Jews of Warsaw were ordered to move into the newly created ghetto. In response, Korczak relocated his orphans to within the ghetto walls. Despite the terrible conditions of disease and starvation, and the constant fear of being sent to their deaths, Korczak managed keep the children safe, often going without food so that they could eat. Moreover, he was able to maintain the educational principles that characterised the 'little republic'. The orphanage inside the ghetto did not give up its humanitarian principles.

Korczak was prepared to go to his death rather than betray his beliefs. In 1942, when the Nazi authorities decided to kill everyone within the Warsaw ghetto, including all the orphans, Korczak refused to accept offers from outside the

ghetto to help him escape. Rather than abandon the orphans he chose to remain with them, and he died alongside them in Treblinka in 1942.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in Janusz' story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in Janusz' life and experiences?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is Janusz' story one of empathy, heroism, humanitarianism or light? How do his actions speak to values of respect and inclusion and how important was this in such a dark time? Is there any light in Janusz' story?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might Janusz' life and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in Janusz' story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all 'Be the light in the darkness' in some way?



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'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study 4: Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga

Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga were Muslims living in **Sarajevo** at the time when the Nazis seized the city, in 1941 following their invasion of Yugoslavia. The Nazis looted the old **synagogue**, and 400-year-old Torah scrolls were burned. Since the **Gestapo** office was just across the street from the home of the Hardaga family, they were able to hear the screams of prisoners being tortured in Gestapo jail cells at night. This photograph (Zejneba on the far right, along with her sister-in-law on far left) shows them walking the wartime streets with their friends, Rivka Kalb (a Jewish woman) and her children. Zejneba covered the yellow Star of David Rivka and her fellow Jews were ordered to wear, on their left arms, with her veil in order to protect them.

Amid the brutality, Mustafa and Zejneba Hardaga decided to take in their Jewish friend and business partner, Yosef Kabiljo, and his wife and daughter. Their home had been destroyed during a Nazi bombing raid. When the Gestapo officers came in Hardaga's home to check documents Yosef and his family were hiding in the back of a walk-in closet. The Germans were only ten meters away from them but they didn't find them. The Kabiljo family stayed in Mustafa's home until they were able to move to Mostar, a Bosnian city that was under Italian rule. Unfortunately, Yosef had to stay behind and liquidate his business and he was eventually caught and imprisoned and forced into slave labour. When Zejneba Hardaga discovered where he was working she went there and brought him food. Yosef eventually managed to escape and he returned to his hiding place in the Hardaga home. The Nazis eventually found out that the Hardaga family was helping Jews. They executed Ahmed Sadik, a member of the family who helped to forge documents with Christian names for Jewish families like the Kabiljos. The Kabiljo family was rescued and made their way to Jerusalem.

In 1992, the war in Yugoslavia started and Bosnia was at the center of it. Serbian troops were surrounding Sarajevo. People were dying in the streets, houses were burned, and snipers targeted people leaving their houses. The Hardaga family were hiding in their basement. They lost all hope that they would survive before receiving a message from an Israeli journalist covering the war. The Kabiljo family in Jerusalem didn't know if their friends and saviour's were alive in Sarajevo. They contacted an Israeli journalist who was covering the war. The journalist passed a message to a local community that the Kabiljo family was searching for Zejneba Hardaga. Another message was sent to Jerusalem that Zejneba, then 76, and her youngest daughter Sara, were still in Sarajevo. The families were divided by faith, but were united by war again some fifty years later.

After the Kabiljos learned that Zejneba was alive, they contacted the officials to organize a rescue. The Kabiljos managed to get the case all the way to Yitzhak Rabin, the then Israeli Prime Minister. Zejneba and her daughter were rescued from the violence, and invited to seek refuge in Jerusalem.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in the Hardaga family story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in the Hardaga families live and experiences?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is the Hardaga family story one of empathy, humanitarianism or light? How do his actions speak to values of respect and inclusion and how important was this in such a dark time?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might the Hardaga family choices and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in the Hardaga family story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all 'Be the light in the darkness' in some way?



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'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study 5: Irene Sendler

Irene Sendler was a Polish nurse, humanitarian, and social worker who served in the Polish Underground during World War II in German-occupied Warsaw, and was head of the children's section of **Żegota**, the Polish Council to Aid Jews (Polish *Rada Pomocy Żydom*), which was active from 1942 to 1945.

Assisted by some two-dozen other **Żegota** members, Sendler smuggled approximately 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw Ghetto and then provided them with false identity documents and shelter, outside the Ghetto, saving those children from the Holocaust. With the exception of diplomats who issued visas to help Jews flee Nazi occupied Europe, Sendler saved more Jews than any other individual during the Holocaust.



The German occupiers eventually discovered her activities, and she was arrested by the **Gestapo**, interrogated and sentenced to death, but managed to evade execution and survive the war. During this period she was tortured, and yet she continued her activities. In 1965, Sendler was recognised by the State of Israel as **Righteous among the Nations**. Late in life, she was awarded the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest honour, for her wartime humanitarian efforts.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in Irene's story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in Irene's life and experiences?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is Irene's story one of empathy, humanitarianism or light? How do his actions speak to values of respect and inclusion and how important was this in such a dark time?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might Irene's life and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light)



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– what in Irene’ story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all ‘Be the light in the darkness’ in some way?

‘Be the light in the darkness’ Case Study 6: Le Chambon – the village that took a stand

All over Europe, a small number of individuals tried to save Jews. But in Le Chambon, a village in southern France, the entire community became involved in rescue. Le Chambon



was a Protestant village in a predominantly Roman Catholic region, which before and even during the war was a center of tourism. Its residents turned their tiny mountain village into a hiding place for Jews from every part of Europe. Between 1940 and 1944, Le Chambon and other nearby villages provided refuge for more than 5,000 people fleeing Nazi persecution, about 3,500 of whom were Jews. Magda Trocmé, the wife of the local minister who played a leading role in the rescue operation, explained how it began:

Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done—nothing more complicated. It was not decided from one day to the next what we would have to do. There were many people in the village who needed help. How could we refuse them? A person doesn’t sit down and say I’m going to do this and this and that. We had no time to think. When a problem came, we had to solve it immediately. Sometimes people ask me, “How did you make a decision?” There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help

Almost everyone in the community of 5,000 took part in the effort. Even the children were involved. When a Nazi official tried to organize a Hitler Youth camp in the village, the students told him that they “*make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. It is contrary to Gospel teaching.*” The majority of the Jewish refugees were children. The villagers provided them with food, shelter, and fake identity papers. They also made sure that those they sheltered were involved as much as possible in the life of the town, in part to avoid arousing suspicion from other visitors. Whenever residents of Le Chambon learned of an upcoming police raid, they hid those they were protecting in the surrounding countryside. André Trocmé, concluded his sermons with the words, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself. Go practice it.*”

In February 1943, the police arrested André Trocmé and his assistant, Edouard Theis. Although they were released after 28 days, the Gestapo continued to monitor their activities. In



summer 1943, the Gestapo offered a reward for André Trocmé's capture, forcing him into hiding for ten months. Many knew where he was, but no one turned him in.

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in La Chambon's story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in the La Chambon story/example?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is the La Chambon story one of empathy, humanitarianism or light? How do his actions speak to values of respect and inclusion, community cohesion and citizenship, and how important was this in such a dark time?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might La Chambon's example and legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in the La Chambon story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What does his legacy reveal about how we can all 'Be the light in the darkness' in some way?

'Be the light in the darkness' Case Study
7: 'The Boys'

On the 14th August 1945, 300 child survivors of the Holocaust arrived at Carlisle airport to begin their long process of recovery from the deprivations and horrors that they had endured. They were part of a larger programme, funded by the Jewish



organisation the Central British Fund. They made provision for 1000 child survivors of the Holocaust to travel to Britain, only 732 could be found. This first group of 300 children would spend time near Lake Windermere in the Lake District as part of a programme of recovery and recuperation.

These young people were some of the very few children from across Europe to have survived the Holocaust, 90% of all Jewish children living in Europe were murdered in the Holocaust. Without exception, each of these children had endured unimaginable trauma and difficulties and most of them would find very few survivors from their wider families. They had witnessed murder, torture and brutality on an unprecedented scale. These child survivors would become known as 'The Boys' even though there were some girls amongst them. About 80 of the survivors were girls, survival for girls during the Holocaust was almost impossible.

'It is important to realise what the devastation of the Holocaust really meant. Despite all of the efforts that were made, not a thousand children could be found.' Sir Ben Helfgott. Ben was born in Piotrkow, Poland and spent his childhood living under brutal Nazi occupation. He survived ghetto conditions, slave labour, numerous concentration camps and the death marches. Ben arrived in Windermere at the age of 15. Like many of 'The Boys' he was determined to learn, to make up for the years of lost education. By 1956 he was representing Britain as captain of the Olympic weight lifting team. Sir Ben Helfgott works tirelessly to champion the importance of learning about the Holocaust.



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As a result of their experiences 'The Boys' needed to recover their health, both physical and mental, and the programmes and conditions at Windermere were designed to help them. Michael Perlmutter recalled *'I was reborn in Windermere in 1945.'* David Hirszelfeld said *'It felt like heaven.'* Roman Halter recalled *'I went to see the doctor and asked him how I could put some meat and muscle on my bones. He said, "Take up swimming in the lake." So I swam morning and afternoon and became quite a good swimmer, so much so that by 1950 I took part in the Jewish Olympics.'*

When Harry Olmer arrived in Windermere he was 15 years old. He suffered terrible nightmares and at first did not want to talk about what had happened in the camps. He said: *"It was absolutely heavenly. Really heavenly. The difference was enormous in every respect; the accommodation, the food, the care. It was indescribable. You can't compare it to what it was before."* Harry studied hard and worked as a dentist. He is a grandfather of five.

Many of 'The Boys' settled in the UK and went on to have happy and fulfilled lives, families and many children and grandchildren. A significant number of 'The Boys' remain active and committed to Holocaust education and we have had the pleasure of working closely with them.

Harry Spiro was also 15 years old when he arrived at Windermere. He recalls his separation from his parents and his sister during the deportations from the Piotrkow ghetto in Poland. They were all murdered in the gas chambers at Treblinka. *'Our family is our greatest achievement. When I look at my three children, all happily married, and seven (soon to be eight) grandchildren, I think about my mother and her last words, that at least one member of the family should survive...I look on my family as her victory – and my victory over what the Nazis failed to do.'*

Discussion points:

1. 'Be the light in the darkness' is the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day focus – what in 'the Boys' story speaks to this theme?
2. There are several ways to consider this theme 'Be the light in the darkness':
 - Darkness draws in: (the darkness of distortion and hate, emotional darkness) – what darkness is there in 'the Boys' lives and experiences?
 - Light during the darkness: (resistance, rescuers, lighting the way with kindness/hope, shining light into the darkness) – in what ways is the Boys story one of resilience, optimism, overcoming adversity? How do they speak to empathy, humanitarianism or light?
 - Darkness today: (the darkness of denial and distortions of genocide, identity-based prejudice and hostility today) – in what ways might the Boy's legacy reveal some of the challenges and darkness we still face today?
 - Being the light in the darkness today: (shining light through testimonies and personal stories, confronting denial, distortion and misinformation, our responsibility to be the light) – what in the Boys story, might inspire careful consideration of our actions today? What is their legacy?



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