

STARK COUNTY

How a WWII refugee in North Canton became a generational bond



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Key Points

- During World War II, the Hoover Company relocated 84 children of its British employees to live with families in North Canton, Ohio.
 - Vina Wales, one of the children, formed a lifelong bond with her American foster family, the Bogers.
 - The connection between the families has continued for generations, with descendants maintaining friendships across countries.
 - Recently, Vina's children traveled from England to North Canton for a reunion with the descendants of her foster family.
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NORTH CANTON – When 10-year-old Vina Wales left England in 1940, she didn't know when (or if) she would see her family again.

Vina was headed for North Canton, where she would spend the next five years with a family she had never met but would come to call her own — the Bogers.

They were one of many local families that opened their homes to 84 British children during World War II as Germany invaded countries across Europe.

Those North Canton homes were supposed to provide temporary refuge. Instead, some created family ties stretching across generations and countries.

Two of Vina's children, 58-year-old Darren Williams and 67-year-old Ceri Casey, recently traveled from England to North Canton, retracing a piece of their mother's childhood.

At the Hoover Historical Center, members and descendants of Vina's family and her American foster family gathered for a reunion, looking at photos and sharing memories. Although Vina (Wales) Williams has since passed away, the connections she built live on.

"There's a bridge that's been built that will never be broken. That's so true that we can meet up and be like sisters, part of the family," Vina said in a 2015 panel discussion at Hoover High School, according the Alliance Review.

'Many great memories'

Williams recounted his mother's story of goodbye to England. As the train pulled away, Vina's father ran alongside it, reaching through the window to touch his daughter's hair. It was the last time they would see each other for five years.

"It was a path she didn't want but it was given to her," Williams said. "That ended her childhood in England."

The Hoover Co., which was headquartered in North Canton, created an evacuation program for children of British employees. Vina's older brother, Roy, and younger sister, Laura, also came to the U.S. They lived with different families.

Margie (Boger) Greek was one of Vina's two American foster sisters. Greek, 94, remembers Vina's arrival to North Canton. Soon enough, the pair was sharing more than a home. Vina taught Greek to knit, introduced her to games and even a pen pal.

"I have so many great memories," Greek said. "I have been so blessed."

Vina and her foster sisters, Margie and Elaine, also learned piano together, performing trios.

The sisterhood didn't end with the war. When Vina returned to England, there was regular exchanges of letters and pictures for the rest of her life.

"Mum's obviously got brothers and sisters, but she also accepted Margie and Elaine as her two sisters as well," Williams said. "That's quite something."

Hoover Co. evacuees

Megan Pellegrino, director of the Hoover Historical Center, helped organize the gathering. Among the reunion attendees were multiple generations of foster families from Virginia, California and Oregon.

At one point, the group joined in a circle for the Hoover jingle: "For it beats as it sweeps as it cleans!"

"Seeing these connections that you all have maintained, wow, I mean what a special gift through the generations and all these years," Pellegrino told the group.

Laura MacAdam, 58, is the daughter of Greek. She recalls visiting Ohio as a child, hearing stories about "Aunt Vina" from her mother. She became close with her British cousins, hosting them in California for Disney Land trips and visiting them over seas.

"It just stayed very alive," she said. "We just built our own friendships, but rooted always in the history. We always talk about it and we've tried to educate our kids."

Ceri Casey said her mother Vina was always involved in reunions, keeping the connection alive. More than anything, Casey said, Vina was grateful.

Williams agreed.

"I think mum was always so thankful," he said. 'It's quite something to have families open doors to a stranger's child."

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