“Raoul Wallenberg: Saving a Nation”

Elizabeth C. King
Junior Division
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“I will never be able to go back to Sweden without knowing inside myself that I'd done all a 
man could do to save as many Jews as possible.”

-Raoul Wallenberg 1945

Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish businessman and diplomat, lived in Budapest from 1944-1945 where because of his brave actions (such as providing safe houses, protective passports, and other life saving measures) he rescued over 100,000 Hungarian Jews from possible death by the Nazis. Unfortunately, tragedy struck Raoul when he was taken captive by Soviet forces in 1945 following the end of World War II. With Russia not admitting the true story of his death, he was never seen or heard from again.

Before Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg

Before Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg was even born, he had a name to live up to. The Wallenberg name was and is to this day one of the most famous in Sweden. The Wallenberg family members are most commonly known as bankers, politicians, diplomats, and builders of industry. Raoul’s father, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg, was a Naval officer while his mother, Maj Wising, was the daughter of a famous neurology professor. In 1912, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg was diagnosed with stomach cancer, at the same time while he and his wife were expecting a baby. Raoul told Maj right before his death, “I would be so happy if only little Baby grows into a kind and good human being.” Little did he know how his son would live beyond his

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expectation. A few days later, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg died of stomach cancer at age twenty-three, three months before his son's birth.

**Early Life**

Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg was born on August 4, 1912 near Stockholm, Sweden. He was primarily raised by his mother and grandmother until his mother remarried a man named Fredrik von Dardel in 1918. They would later have two children, Guy von Dardel in 1918, and Nina von Dardel in 1921. Raoul’s grandfather, Gustaf Oscar Wallenberg, was Sweden's minister to Japan and later Turkey. He would become one of the most important guides in Raoul's life. As young as eleven years old, Raoul would be sent by his grandfather on exotic trips around Europe as a way of helping Raoul find his independence. After graduating high school in 1930, Raoul took nine years of required Swedish military training. Later in 1931, Raoul traveled to the United States of America to study architecture at the University of Michigan. His grandfather hoped that by sending Raoul to America he could find “The spirit of America” as he himself had years before. In Michigan, Raoul was like any other American, but right away his architecture professors saw Raoul's gift for drawing. When Raoul wasn’t in school, he spent time hitchhiking around America. In 1935, Raoul completed his B.A. in architecture. He graduated with honors and won the Institute of Architect silver medal, given to the student with the highest scholastic standing.

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Life Before the War

Shortly after graduating from college, Raoul headed right back to Sweden. After being in Sweden for several months, Raoul headed down south to spend the next six months living in Cape Town, South Africa. There he worked with a Swedish import firm, bartering products and traveling around to other towns in South Africa. In 1936, Raoul left Cape Town and worked at the Holland Bank in Haifa. However, it was in Haifa where Raoul slowly learned of the German Holocaust. During this time, Raoul came into contact with Jews who fled Hitler’s Germany. Their stories moved Raoul deeply. After finishing his job in Haifa, Raoul reported back to Sweden for another month of Swedish military duty. During his ride home on a train, Raoul passed train stations displaying Nazi banners and saw the reality of what was happening to Jewish people. Unfortunately once back in Sweden, Raoul also learned of the death of his grandfather who had died while returning to Sweden in fragile health at the age of seventy-four. Once Raoul was done with military duty, he began to look for jobs but the economy was poor and there were no jobs in Stockholm for an American-trained architect, not even in his family’s own Wallenberg bank. Raoul tried to start some of his own businesses, but as hard as he worked the companies always failed. The next few years would be hard for Raoul, especially since a war was coming.

Beginning of a World at War

By the end of 1940, the Germans controlled much of Europe and had sent tens of thousand of Jews to concentration camps, their fates unknown. However, even with a war going on, Raoul was still seeking to establish himself in business. In the fall of 1941, Raoul met Koloman Lauer, a Jewish businessman who imported and exported specialty food items in Stockholm, Sweden. Lauer needed someone who could freely travel throughout Nazi-occupied Europe to sell his products and Raoul was just the man for the job. He began his work in 1942 and traveled around Europe as Lauer’s trade representative until 1944. In June of 1944, Raoul met Iver Olsen of the War Refugee Board. Olsen needed a citizen of a neutral country to organize some kind of help for the Jews being deported from Hungary. After seeing mistreatment of Jews himself while working for Lauer, Raoul knew this was what he wanted to do. With Raoul being perfect for the job, the War Refugee Board and the World Jewish Council approved funding for his rescue mission. The Swedish Foreign Office appointed Raoul as an official diplomat on June 23, 1944, meaning Raoul had just got himself the most important job of his life, saving a nation of Jews from further tragedy.

Mission to Budapest

Raoul arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944, at a time when some pressure had been relieved since Admiral Horthy had stopped the deportations of Jews by Adolf Eichmann a day

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before. However, Raoul knew this was a temporary situation and the deportations could resume at any moment. During Raoul’s first few days, he met up with his old friend, Per Anger, who had known Raoul from Stockholm and his trading trips to Budapest. The two young diplomats would work together to save lives both with the same job title, “Secretary of the Swedish Legation.” Anger and his staff had been issuing some passports based on applications for Swedish citizenship. They indicated that person would be emigrating to Sweden as soon as travel was possible after the war, but they could only be issued to Swedish citizens and those with family or business interests in Sweden. Since Jews with the passport were considered Swedish citizens, they didn’t have to wear the yellow star. Anger and his staff issued over seven hundred of these passes. Jews were only allowed outside between eleven a.m. and five p.m., but they spent hours trying to get these passes. Raoul wanted to grow Anger’s efforts in a much larger way. Raoul suggested that they would print the passports in blue and yellow, keep the three crowns of Sweden, but add a photo of the passport holder and the Swedish minister’s signature (See appendix A). Raoul hoped that this would make it appear like a fancy document the Nazis couldn’t deny. They would call this new document a Schutz-pass, Schutz meaning protection and pass for passport. The Swedish Legation knew they would have to bluff the Nazis if they wanted to get enough of these passes out to people. Raoul set up his own

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department next to the Swedish Legation where he hired Jews in need of work. On August 12, Raoul convinced Admiral Horthy to allow him to give out forty-five hundred Schutz-Passes. Although Horthy agreed to this, Raoul did it in his own way. He distributed much of the passes as “Collective Passes” meaning they applied to a whole family of “Swedish citizens.”Raoul also expanded the Swedish Legation into two buildings, where he gave out food and offered medical attention to hundreds of Jews each day. By mid-August, Raoul had begun to buy and rent thirty-two apartment buildings which would be called “Swedish Houses,” with the fear that the star-marked Jewish houses made it too easy for Adolf Eichmann's officers to round up Jews. Each house hung the Swedish flag and had signs that read: “This house is protected by the royal Swedish government.” With Raoul's architectural skills, he was able to house thousands of people in these buildings that were meant for hundreds. However, even with all these life saving measure, Raoul wanted to do more.

**Power Struggle**

On August 25, 1944, Horthy put a stop to Eichmanns plan of deporting Jews out of Budapest, causing Eichman to leave Hungary. This brought relief for Raoul and others who had hoped to protect the remaining Jews of Budapest, but they still had no time to waste. Raoul continued his efforts and requested the government release Jewish laborers who were being held in camps within Hungary. Things seemed to be going Raoul’s way until late September when Arrow Cross members began invading yellow-star houses and the International Ghetto. In addition, Admiral Horthy surrendered to the Soviets on October 11. Later on October 15,  

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Horthy announced that Hungary would be allied with Russia, after the Soviets threatened to kill his kidnapped son. Even worse for Raoul, the new foreign minister of Hungary, Baron Gábor Kemény, made a radio announcement that Schutz-Passes were no longer valid. Raoul and the Swedish Legation knew they had to fix this new problem quickly. Raoul asked for the help of Elisabeth Kemény and told her that “Your husband may lose his life when the war is over and crimes against the Jews are punished.”

Elisabeth told her husband, who then made a radio announcement the next day stating that all Schutz-Passes would be valid again. Also during that week on October 17, Raoul meet a teenager named Thomas Veres, who would become Raoul’s official photographer and would document Raoul’s rescue efforts (See appendix B). However Adolf Eichmann had returned to Budapest that same day, meaning the deportations would soon start again.

**Raoul to the Rescue**

On November 2, 1944, the Soviets broke through the German and Hungarian defenses just southeast of Budapest, meaning Raoul had to start printing his passes in Russian. On November 8, Jews of all ages were grabbed from their homes in the ghetto and marched through the cold streets with what would become known as the Death Marches. As soon as Raoul heard of these happening, he loaded his car with blankets and kettles of hot soup and drove straight into the danger. He handed out food and clothing along the way and tried to rescue those with Schutz-Passes. On some trips, Raoul brought a typewriter so that one of his staff could type letters of protection in the back of the truck. Veres went everywhere with Raoul and

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secretly recorded everything that happened. Beginning November 20, Raoul would use a megaphone everyday to call Jews to come forward with their Schutz-Pass. Even if they didn’t have one, Raoul tricked the Germans in a subtle way claiming they were Swedish citizens by using any identity card or scrap of paper they handed to him. Raoul told the Nazis: “I know this man well… I personally gave him a passport… Let’s not waste our time… the line is long…” Once he even climbed on top of a train car and handed out the passes to Jews through the windows. Other times, Raoul and his staff hurried to the icy Danube River and pulled out Jews who had been roped together and shot, some alive and some dead. As news of Raoul's efforts to save Jews spread around the world, it put such a big target on Raoul that his driver, Vilmos Langfelder, had to attach different plates to Raoul’s car to avoid being stopped or questioned. As December rolled around, the Soviet siege of Budapest began. Following Christmas, most of the Swedes and other neutral diplomats, including Raoul, were living in cellars due to all the bombing. Raoul’s thirty-two Swedish houses and the International Ghetto were running out of food and medicine. After Erno Vajna issued an order on January 2, 1945, that all Jews must move the the main ghetto within three days, Raoul immediately protested. By January 6, Raoul compromised a deal with Vajna to give food to Hungarians in exchange for allowing protected Jews to stay in the International Ghetto. Though the rest of the Swedish Legation decided to leave Budapest on January 10, Raoul decided to stay so he could talk to the Soviets on behalf of

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the Jews. On January 13, Soviets entered the Red Cross headquarters where Raoul was and captured him. Though the accounts of Raoul’s experiences in the next three days differ, he was believed to have been interrogated by the Soviets. By January 17, Raoul and Langfelder left Budapest with Soviet officials, in hopes of meeting with the commander of the Soviet army. Raoul told his friends right before they left, “I don’t’ know whether I’m going as a prisoner or as a guest.” To this day, Raoul and Vilmos have never been seen or heard from again.

**The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg’s Fate**

Even in our twenty-first century, no one knows what really happened to Raoul Wallenberg. What is known is that Raoul and Langfelder were taken into custody and arrested on January 17, 1945, under the order of the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin. After traveling by train to Moscow, they walked to Lubyanka Prison on February 6, 1945. By January 16, 1945, the Soviet government had notified the Swedish minister that Raoul was in good hands. Over the next few years, friends and family tried to bring attention to the world of Raoul’s disappearance. It is said that in Lubyanka Prison, Raoul told his cellmates that he was in prison because the Soviets thought he was a German spy. Though the Swedish government never pressed the Russians to admit that Raoul was somewhere in their prison system, the Soviets broke their silence in 1957, claiming Raoul died of a heart attack on July, 17, 1947, in Lubyanka.

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Prison. However, as late as 1978, rumors continued of cellmates seeing Raoul in prison. In 1989, Soviet officials had suddenly “found” a box of Raoul’s belongings including his wallet, diary, and passport (See appendix C). By October 2016, Swedish officials formally declared Raoul legally dead. It is estimated that Raoul Wallenberg saved around 100,000 Hungarian Jews in Budapest between the time of 1944-1945. Though the fate of Raoul is still unknown, his legacy will forever be that one person can make an immense difference in the world. His legacy lives on in the many thousands whom he and others saved, and in the generations that follow them.

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Appendix A


This is a photo of one of the many Schutz-Passes issued by Raoul Wallenberg and the Swedish Legation in Budapest in 1944. It includes the person's picture and personal information, usually being printed in German and Hungarian.
Appendix B

“This is a picture taken by Raoul Wallenberg’s personal photographer, Tom Veres. This picture shows Raoul(Circled) at a train station handing out Schutz-Passes to Jewish people.
Appendix C

This is a photo of Raoul Wallenberg’s diplomatic passport from 1944. He used it to travel around Budapest and be protected by the Swedish government. His passport was discovered in 1989 after Soviets returned a box of his personal belongings to his family.
Bibliography

Primary Source Documents

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“The Longview Daily News.” 6 Mar. 1947. This newspaper article talked about the disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg and his effort to save Hungarian Jews in Budapest however, it had a strong option saying that the Russians had him in prison and that he might be dead. This helped me understand the perspective of both the Soviets and people in America. I used this in my research paper when talking about the options of different people after Raoul's disappearance in 1945.

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“Oakland Tribune.” 12 Apr. 1947. This newspaper article talked about Raoul's stepbrother Guy von Dardel mission in America in 1947 of teaching people about Raoul Wallenberg’s effort of saving Hungarian Jews in Budapest. This source helped me understand my topic
better in the fact that not as many people heard of Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance as I would have thought. I used this source in my research paper to talk about the actions people were talking to bring up Raoul's disappearance.

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“The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle.” 16 Mar. 1944. This was a newspaper article published in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1944 during the time in which Raoul Wallenberg had not yet begun his rescue efforts. It also included other news about the war but I thought it was interesting that word of his actions had reached all the way to Wisconsin. This helped me understand the perspective of people on Raoul Wallenberg in America compared to other places in the world. I used this in my research paper when talking about the actions Raoul Wallenberg had to face since he was becoming more famous.

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different story of cellmates seeing him in prison. This helped me understand the opinions of different people and what they think really happened to Raoul Wallenberg after 1945. I used this website in my research paper when talking about Raoul Wallenberg's disappearance.


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on his time at the University of Michigan. It helped me understand the background knowledge from Raoul Wallenberg's life before World War II and the important people and events in his early life that shaped himself, later leading him to his mission of saving Jews. I used this in my research paper when talking about Raoul Wallenberg early life.