Taking a Stand: An Unforgettable Hero

Inhumane obsessions and atrocious impulses drove Adolf Hitler and his Nazi forces into fulfilling their dream of a world made strictly upon their harsh standards. An anti-Jewish population was sought after and is now remembered worldwide as the Holocaust. It is a word that derived from the Greek with a literal translation of “sacrifice by fire”. This systematic, state-sponsored persecution of millions of Jews by the Nazi regime is infamous today for its cold-heartedly devastating objective to perform genocide in eliminating a racial or cultural group. What was once such a horribly tragic event in the lives of our ancestors has now evolved into educating worldwide on the heroes and heroines that took a stand against this genocidal atrocity. It is truly impossible to believe that one person alone “took a stand” to make a difference amongst this time of tragedy but understandable that millions of positive contributions were made throughout the world by thousands of courageous individuals who dreamt of a life beyond hatred. Around the globe, intelligent minds united and unique forms of bravery were committed. Amongst such devotion, honor, and heroism, the astonishing efforts of Raoul Wallenberg are still recognized today.

Wallenberg was born in 1912 into one of the most prominent and prosperous banking families in Sweden. As a teenager, he came to America to study architecture at the University of Michigan and, in 1935, earned a degree as he graduated with honors
and awards for the highest scholastic standing student. His grandfather sent him to Cape Town, South Africa, to practice his proficiency for architecture at a Swedish company. The real life-changing experience, however, began in Palestine where Wallenberg first encountered the suffering of the Jews in Europe. He witnessed wealthy Jews flocking into Palestine penniless and eagerly listened to their unforgettable stories of Nazi persecution but became baffled on how he can assist. After functioning as an apprentice, he later took over a foreign division where he possessed a remarkable ability for learning languages and traveling to aid in Budapest. Seen as a natural leader, he was recommended to the American War Refuge Board in 1944 to rescue the Jews of Budapest. This is where our analysis of Wallenberg’s efforts persists. The Swedish non-Jew left his wealthy family and the safety of neutral Sweden behind him in 1944 to save Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary (Yellin). Utilizing everything at his disposal, the 32-year-old succeeded in rescuing over 100,000 Jews within a six month period. How exactly did he accomplish such a huge project and rescue such an enormous number?

An opportunity to accomplish such a meaningful task became irresistible to Raoul Wallenberg and his thirst for aid grew uncontrollably. Six months in Hungary proved his efforts to be daring, motivated, and courageous. Raoul exploited every attempt possible in saving Jews, and, after reaching a maximum number of permitted passports, invented the “Schutzpass.” These indiscriminately distributed Swedish passports granted immunity to each possessor from deportation to death camps and, in turn, saved 20,000 Jews. Simultaneously speaking, Wallenberg used American funds to purchase “safe houses” for sheltering Jews, protected hundreds from “death marches”, and went above and beyond his expected role. When necessary, he pulled Jews off of cattle cars
declaring them to be Swedish. Not all of the danger in the world could have frightened Wallenberg! At the peak of his fearlessness, he was successful in persuading the Nazi bombings to the Budapest Ghetto commanders to call off the attack. In January of 1945, Wallenberg was imprisoned by the Soviets and, consequently, never seen again.

As I study the effects of genocide, the Holocaust, and the act of bullying itself, I become absorbed into my early childhood: a time when I was unable to fit in with any group of friends. Reminiscing back to these early days reminds me that it is necessary to stand up for oneself and to never forget the values that were drilled into my head as a Greek-American student. With an extremely foreign family and background, my hair was different, my style was frowned upon, and my lunches were interestingly gross. My mother knew that she had to comfort me everyday after school mainly because the bullying became unbearable. As I grew, however, I became bulletproof beyond belief. I would not permit the giggles and jokes about the mole beside my nose from entering into my subconscious as “hideous” or “disgusting” and my lunch food remained the same Greek-style portions of unique vegetables. In other words, I found others who adored this trait of strength and, most importantly, I found myself. I became unafraid of standing up for myself because of my willpower to succeed and I was not willing to allow the popular crowd from stripping me of my esteemed happiness.

As a tri-lingual speaking high school student scholar, athlete, and president of CHOICES at my school, I have assisted others in finding the courage to be strong. Being president of this anti-drug, alcohol, and bullying club, I organize events and plan projects around the lives of younger teens with regards to help them resort to required characteristics in order to stop bullying and start succeeding independently. Our group
acts out skits and performs plays for adolescent audiences to grow the courage and take a stand for themselves. We promote a vibe of security and assistance. Throughout my active involvement in clubs, athletics, and church-sponsored activities, I have evolved into a much different individual. My evolution, starting off as being bullied with no acquaintances has become one that won homecoming queen and nominated for awards consecutively because of my care for the soul and elimination of bullying as a whole.

As we bring Raoul Wallenberg’s name to life, examining his deeds and positive messages proves to our society that one can make a difference. We can strive for an unselfish, justified, and harmonious world if we believe. Becoming involved and “taking a stand” requires determination and willpower to succeed. Wallenberg possessed fearless and cunning qualities of a true “upstander” that will someday inspire me to perform an act equally as big. Anyone can write their final chapter of fate that will affect future generations. Raoul Wallenberg’s final hours may have been a mystery, but he sure made a difference throughout every society.

Works Cited
