Adrienne Rich

One of the United States' most highly regarded poets, Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore in 1929. A noted feminist scholar and lecturer, her poetry has received numerous awards. Active in the civil rights, antiwar, and women's movements, the themes of social justice, women's consciousness, and a sense of authentic community are reflected in her work. She is a professor of English and feminist studies at Stanford University. Among her many publications is Time's Power: Poems 1965-1981, from which the accompanying poem is taken.

In this poem, Rich pays tribute to the heroism of Hannah Senesh.

Yugoslavia, 1944

Dear Chana,
where are you now?
Am sending this pocket-to-pocket (though we both know pockets we'd hate to lie in).
They showed me that poem you gave Reuven, about the match:
Chana, you know, I never was for martyrdom. I thought we'd try our best, ragtag mission that we were, then clear out if the signals looked too bad. Something in you drives things ahead for me but if I can I mean to stay alive.
We're none of us giants, you know, just small, frail, inexperienced romantic people. But there are things we learn. You know the sudden sick of empty space between the jump and the ripcord pull?
I hate it. I hate it so,
I've hated you for your dropping ecstatically in free-fall, in the training, your look, dragged on the ground, of knowing precisely why you were there.

My mother's
still in Palestine. And yours
still there in Hungary. Well, there we are.
When this is over—

I'm your earthbound friend to the end, still yours—

Esther.

Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue

Harvey Rosenfeld

Harvey Rosenfeld was born in New York in 1939. He earned a doctorate from St. John's University and has been a professor of English since 1976. Rosenfeld has been editor of Martyrdom and Resistance, a journal devoted to the study of the Holocaust. He is the author of Raoul Wallenberg: Angel of Rescue, which was named one of the ten best books of 1982 by the National Catholic News Service.

Raoul Wallenberg was a young, American-educated Swedish diplomat who repeatedly risked his life to help save the lives of the Jews in Budapest, Hungary, who were targeted for death by the German SS and the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian fascists. Sent to Hungary through a cooperative Swedish and American effort, he is credited with saving thousands of lives. Although he was recognized as a hero for his tireless efforts to protect Hungarian Jews and to provide them with hope, the Soviets arrested and imprisoned him when they liberated Hungary from the Germans. His disappearance remained a mystery for many years, but it is now assumed that he died in Soviet captivity.

"There are no great men, only ordinary men facing a great challenge." Winston Churchill's words certainly describe Raoul Wallenberg and his rescue mission in Budapest. With only the meager personal protection offered by a diplomatic passport, he confronted SS and Nyilas
gunmen: racists, psychopaths, torturers, murderers, the dregs of a civilized society. Wallenberg literally snatched thousands of Jewish victims from the jaws of death using the only weapons at hand: some money, his wits, his courage, and an overwhelming moral commitment to save lives. His sense of responsibility to humanity allowed him to transcend his personal fears and shortcomings in order to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles with the perseverance of a true hero.

On the surface Raoul Wallenberg did not look like a hero, an Angel of Rescue. He certainly lacked the traits of the Scandinavian prototype of courage and strength, the dauntless Beowulf. With Wallenberg’s medium height, dark eyes, and dark, thinning hair, he did not even resemble the Swedish stereotype. However, unlike exploits of Beowulf, the superhuman heroics of Raoul Wallenberg are not legend; they are fact. Colleagues, classmates, and family have all reflected on Raoul’s phenomenal achievements.

Tibor Baranski had much in common with Wallenberg: they were both young, nonprofessional representatives of neutral legations, highly motivated for idealistic reasons, who succeeded through resourcefulness and indefatigable dedication.

Baranski’s first impressions of Wallenberg were of “a thin man, rather shy and virtually fearless. He dressed elegantly and was always clean-shaven. He had a good nose to sniff out danger and immediately respond with the appropriate action. Although we did get to know one another, there was little time for friendship in those hectic times.”

The representatives of the neutral legations met regularly, always at a different place so as to escape detection by the SS and the Arrow Cross. After one of these meetings, Baranski approached Wallenberg and asked if he would like to meet the nuncio. Wallenberg, very enthusiastic about the idea, asked Baranski to find out if the hour was not too late for the nuncio. “I called the nuncio, and he was excited.” Baranski recalled the nuncio’s words. “Would he really like to come? Are you sure?”

Wallenberg visited with the nuncio for about an hour and a half. “They spoke about many things,” Baranski said, “mostly about their countries. I tried to ensure their privacy, so most of the time I was at a distance from them.” The next morning, Baranski was anxious to get the nuncio’s opinion of Wallenberg. The nuncio was “very much impressed by him,” Baranski said. “In fact, he said, ‘I never met such a nice Protestant.’” Wallenberg’s impressions of the papal representative were reciprocal. “It was amazing,” Baranski said. “Wallenberg told me, ‘I never met such a nice Catholic.’ You could say that Wallenberg and the nuncio both saw each other as human beings, both on missions motivated by divine love towards man.”

After one meeting of the neutral legations, Baranski and Wallenberg sat together for two hours in a Budapest restaurant.

We were fantastically near to each other. We were both nondiplomats who acted for the sake of humanity. At one point, he asked me whether I was Jewish. “Why, just because I look Jewish?” I quipped. “No,” Wallenberg answered, “I just imagined that you must be Jewish because you were so zealous in trying to save them.” I then asked him about his zealotry. He told me that he had a Jewish ancestor, but that had little influence on his motivation. He did say that he spent some time in Palestine and met refugees who fled from German persecution. At that time he made a commitment to help such victims if he ever got the opportunity.

According to Baranski, Wallenberg had much to say about his family, especially about his mother. “Wallenberg was a very loving son, who wanted me to meet his mother. His mother had always told him that he was too shy. ‘You should come to Sweden,’ Wallenberg told me. ‘You have the big mouth that mother would want me to have.’”

No one is better acquainted with Raoul Wallenberg than his family. Mrs. Nina Lagergren, his half sister, expresses no surprise at Raoul’s feats. “I always felt my brother would do something very special with his life. My family was not surprised at his acts. We knew what he did was the greatest challenge of his life. It took hold of him.”

Mrs. Lagergren recalled that Raoul had said that he was going to Budapest with “all sorts of lists with people to contact.” The family never actually thought that his life would be constantly on the line. “Raoul knew that it would be a very difficult undertaking, but no one expected that he would risk his life. One did not think of such things because diplomatic immunity has been accepted worldwide.”

Mrs. Lagergren said that Raoul approached the mission with “much energy and eagerness. Because of his business trips, Raoul had developed many pleasant relationships. So in that sense, the mission became something very personal for him. His many business trips abroad had proven that Raoul was a skillful negotiator and that he could deal effectively with people. Undoubtedly, this is one factor which helps explain why my brother was able to accomplish so much in Budapest.”

Mrs. Lagergren added that her brother was very skillful at intimidation. “He was a great actor. He could imitate brilliantly. If he wanted to, he could be more German than a Prussian general. Shouting louder, sounding more authoritative than the higher-ups, he could wrest concessions from the Nazis.”

On one occasion before a train departed for Auschwitz, Wallenberg appeared on the scene with several lists of his protégés. Per Anger observed, “He
demanded in an authoritative tone whether any such persons had by mistake
been taken aboard. The Germans were taken by surprise and, right under their
noses, Wallenberg pulled out a large number of Jews. Many of them had no
passport at all, only any kind of paper whatever in the Hungarian language—
driver’s licenses, vaccination records or tax receipts—that the Germans did not
understand. The bluff succeeded” (84–85).

Anger also tells about Wallenberg’s arrival in Budapest with a revolver in his
pocket. “He said he was never going to use the revolver because he was too
afraid, too much of a coward. But of course he was very courageous.”

Lars Berg describes Wallenberg:

Wallenberg’s daring appearance at the scene of rescue was all the more admirable,
as Raoul was not at all a brave man by nature. During the air raids he was always
the first to seek shelter, and he was sometimes affected when the bombs fell too
close. But when it was a question of saving the lives of his protégés, he never
hesitated a second. He acted with a challenging boldness and bravery, though his
life then mostly hanged by much thinner than a thread during the air raids.

Thomas Veres experienced Wallenberg’s bravery firsthand. Mr. Veres, a commercial
photographer in New York, rode in Wallenberg’s big black Studebaker
almost daily, taking pictures of the rescue mission. Thomas Veres’s father, Paul
Veres, a well-known Hungarian photographer, stopped practicing his trade
when the Germans took over Hungary, and Thomas found himself with an
abundant supply of film and other photographic supplies. Per Anger introduced
the younger Veres, then twenty, to Wallenberg and the right person and a vital
assignment coincided.

Veres recalled the dangers involved, both for him and for Wallenberg. But,
he said, Wallenberg never backed away from a dangerous situation:

I came to the Swedish embassy in October, 1944. Raoul Wallenberg said that he
would like to take advantage of my profession and take pictures of the life-saving
activities. He said that the pictures would serve as historic documentation. At that
time, it was dangerous, in a sense forbidden, to take pictures on the streets. When
I mentioned this point to Wallenberg, he said that he had already signed a pass for
me, and thereby it would be legal for me to take pictures. In spite of this,
Wallenberg constantly put his life in danger. Wallenberg dealt constantly with the
Nyilas, and he knew their underhanded behavior. Legal or no, Wallenberg
certainly knew that it was dangerous to take pictures, and at the beginning I
couldn’t bring myself to take pictures. However, the bravery of Raoul Wallenberg
got to me. It may seem that I am exaggerating or just being trite, but the truth is
that Raoul Wallenberg didn’t know the meaning of danger.

Wherever Wallenberg’s rescue operation went, Thomas Veres followed. He
witnessed the death marches to Hegyeshalom and includes in his “collection” a
“before and after” picture of a mother and daughter who survived the march,
but whose excruciating experience is apparent in their faces. He recorded the
freeding of Jews at the rail station and their return to the Swedish safe houses. He
photographed hundreds of Wallenberg’s protégés for identification on the
protected passes.

Because of his many experiences with Raoul Wallenberg, Veres saw not only
the bravery of the Swede but also his delightful sense of humor.

One day our car was in heavy artillery fire and there was our car with one license
plate in the front, a different license plate in the back. In fact, we had made plates
and signs, depending on who asked: the SS or the Arrow Cross. For example, we
had a sign that said “rushing mail,” to avoid being stopped. On that particular day,
in the midst of gunfire, Wallenberg jokingly remarked, “We should get an
automatic gadget so that when one license plate appears the others will
disappear.”

Despite Wallenberg’s bravery and determination, Veres remembers times
when even Wallenberg couldn’t succeed. At the end of December, 1944, the
Arrow Cross attacked a protected house and dragged out some of the protégés.
Veres reconstructed the following dialogue between Wallenberg and a member
of the Nyilas:

Wallenberg: “Where are the protected ones?”
Nyilas: “In the Danube.”
Wallenberg: “Why?”
Nyilas: “They were dirty Jews.”
At that point, Veres said, “even Wallenberg was stunned and couldn’t help.”

Another Wallenberg aide presently heads a pharmaceutical company in Los
Altos, California. He was one of the Swede’s personal drivers on the rescue
missions. Although he did not want to be identified, he said that “after years of
silence, it is important to tell the story of Raoul Wallenberg. Perhaps all the talk,
all the print will help locate this heroic person.”

The driver presented himself at the Swedish legation when the Nazi invasion
forced the closing of the universities. “Wallenberg was a modest, retiring
individual with steellike determination,” the driver said. “He wasn’t the Patton
type. He was adept in administrative detail and understood the German
mentality. He knew that Germans reacted to formal documents and authority.
When it came to rescue work, he was workmanlike, precise, and cold.”

Taking Wallenberg to many deportation points, the driver got a firsthand
view of the Wallenberg modus operandi: “He always overwhelmed the German
SS with double talk. Wallenberg would threaten to call their superiors if they didn’t cooperate. He used every possible deception and trick, including bribing them and telling the SS he would write a favorable report about them after Germany lost the war.”

Wallenberg’s daring spread among his workers.

Raoul usually had with him a book with names of passport holders. Sometimes the book had all blank pages. When he arrived at the train, he then made up Jewish names and began calling out. Three or four usually had passports. For those who didn’t, I stood behind Raoul with another fifty or more unfilled passports. It only took me ten seconds to write in their names. We handed them out calmly and said, “Oh, I’m terribly sorry you couldn’t get to the legation to pick it up. Here it is. We brought it to you.” The passport holder showed it to the SS and was free.

I myself carried forged identity papers for various occasions. One set identified me as a doctor for the German SS; another proved I worked for the Swedish legation. If anybody had ever searched and found those phony papers, I would have been shot there and then. All those who worked with Raoul Wallenberg took unbelievable risks. But we were his disciples and followed his courageous example.

The driver never really got to know Wallenberg personally—few did. Raoul Wallenberg had a mission—that was all that mattered. “We never got very close,” the driver said. “He never shared chitchat or confidences. It was strictly business. Wallenberg went to fulfill a mission. Never once thought of personal glory.”

Another of Wallenberg’s workers was his driver, Sandor Ardaı. (Actually, Wallenberg had another chauffeur, Vilmos Langfelder, who was abducted along with him by the Russians.) Ardaı was summoned to Wallenberg’s office in November after Langfelder had been arrested by the Arrow Cross. Wallenberg asked Ardaı to become his driver, but pointed out the dangers of the assignment. Ardaı reflected on this meeting and on Wallenberg in the weekly journal Arte Run (July 4–11, 1957):

“It is dangerous and difficult,” underlined Wallenberg. “You do not need to if you do not want it.”

I did not hesitate a second but accepted. And many times afterwards I have remembered my meeting with this remarkable Swede. He did not at all look like a hero, not as you imagine a courageous, strong-willed and freeborn hero type. He rather seemed dreaming and weak. My first mission was to drive him to the headquarters of the Arrow Cross and wait outside until he got Langfelder back. I thought silently “that this will never go well,” when he disappeared with long strides. How could the Hungarian Arrow Cross release a prisoner, just because one man requested it?

But when I saw him again on the stairs he brought Langfelder along. They jumped into the car and I drove them to the legation. Nobody commented on what had happened and I started to understand the extraordinary force which was in Raoul Wallenberg.

I never heard Wallenberg speak an unnecessary word during the month and a half I and Langfelder took turns as a driver—not a single comment, never a complaint, even if he could not sleep more than a few hours for several days.

On one occasion we had come to a station where a train full of Jews was on the point of leaving for Germany and the concentrations camps. The officer of the guard did not want to let us enter. Raoul Wallenberg then climbed up on the roof of the train and handed in many protective passports through the windows. The Arrow Cross men fired their guns and cried to him to go away, but he only continued calmly to hand out passports to the hands which reached for them. But I believe that the men with the guns were impressed by his courage and on purpose aimed above him. Afterwards he managed to get all Jews with passports out from the train. His only aim was to save as many as possible. And by his personal courage he managed to save thousands.

Wallenberg’s insistence on helping groups rather than individuals became even firmer during his hectic round-the-clock rescue mission after the Arrow Cross took over. However, a dramatic, storybook episode, that of the Vandor family, proved an exception. On November 3, a frantic Tibor Vandor sought out Wallenberg. Vandor’s wife was in labor with their first child, but all hospitals refused to help. In the middle of the night Wallenberg took the Vandors to his room, while he slept in the corridor, covered with his coat. At 7 A.M. the Vandors invited Wallenberg into the room to see the new arrival and to name the dark-haired girl. He chose the names Nina Maria Ava. “She looks like my grandmother,” Wallenberg laughed. “I am honored to be her godfather.” With Wallenberg’s permission the name was changed to Yvonne Maria Ava.

After the war the Vandors went to Switzerland, Holland, and then Montreal, where Yvonne was raised as a Christian. “My parents always wanted to forget the past,” Yvonne, now Mrs. Ron Singer of Toronto, recalled. “All I knew was that I was born in Hungary during the war. I always felt that I had roots, that I didn’t belong. When I married Ron fourteen years ago I converted to Judaism because I wanted to identify with Ron and with a group that had roots.”

Years later, when the Singers were living in England, a relative told Yvonne that she was Jewish by birth. “I became driven with a desire to know more about my past, but my parents refused to say more.” Then like a bolt from the blue, on October 20, 1979, a story dealing with the heroics and search for Raoul Wallenberg appeared in the Toronto Star. This article referred to the Vandors and the birth of Yvonne. In Mrs. Singer’s words:
I was reading the story aloud to Ron, when I came to those lines where I read my own name. I burst out crying. Ron and I clung to each other and we were both crying. It became very difficult to go on reading. I finally found myself: The reaction in the community has been incredible since that day. There is a sizable Hungarian Jewish community in Toronto. Many others have also found their roots. They have discovered that they are Jewish. They have come to the realization that they are only alive because of Raoul Wallenberg.

If Raoul Wallenberg could be said to be the Angel of Rescue, one could also say that the forces of Satan were arrayed against him. Chief among these infamous Nazi devils was Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's Bloodhound, the man who made mass murder into an efficient, mechanized process. The conflict between these two men provides a study in contrasts: the Angel of Rescue versus the Bloodhound. Whereas the arrival of the Swede in Budapest was an event of joy, the Nazi's appearance in Hungary prompted gloom and despair. While Wallenberg was a man of culture and learning, Eichmann was an individual of little knowledge but much pretense. Lévi describes Eichmann's entrance into Hungary in the Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry:

There is reason to believe that "Eichmann" used a new name in every country he went in order to prevent creating a panic, so terrible was the record of the atrocities for which he was responsible. Eichmann was fond of pretending that he was born in Palestine and spoke Hebrew fluently; in point of fact, no one ever heard him say anything in that ancient tongue beyond a Biblical quotation regarding the creation of the universe, and that can hardly be taken as conclusive proof of his knowledge of the language. . . . When Eichmann made his first appearance at the headquarters of the Jewish Congregation in Budapest, he opened the conversation with the following pleasanty: 'Sie wissen nicht wer ich bin? Ich bin ein Blutthund!' (So you don't know who I am? I am a bloodhound!) (108).

In his relentless efforts to save Jews, Wallenberg worked around the clock, at times without eating and sleeping. He was forced to change apartments to escape the assassination plots of the Nazis and the Nyilas. Eichmann, however, was immersed in a hedonic existence. He was a permanent guest at the estate of László Endre, where they were united, according to Lévi, by three things: "their passion for horses, their love of alcohol, and their insane hatred of everything Jewish" (109). The wild orgies at the Endre estate were common knowledge.

The Angel of Rescue and the Bloodhound both resorted to deception: the Swede used subterfuge to save the targets of the Holocaust; the Nazi employed chicanery to facilitate his plans for genocide. After learning of the atrocities taking place in the provincial ghettos, the Jewish Council of Budapest compiled a memorandum and turned to Eichmann requesting an improvement of the situation. The Bloodhound responded with typical Eichmann dishonesty: "Not a single word of the report is true, for I have just inspected the provincial ghettos. I really ought to know. The accommodation of the Jews is no worse than that of German soldiers during manoeuvres and the fresh air will only do their health the world of good." When the Jewish leadership continued to press, the Bloodhound replied with another attempt at deception. The treatment of the Jews was no fault of the Nazis, but of Endre, who "will die Juden mit Paprika freisetzen" (who wants to devour the Jews with sweetpepper). When the Jewish leadership later received reports of the deportations in Sub-Carpathia and in the northern and trans-Danubian districts, Eichmann lied brazenly once more, telling the leaders: "If the Hungarian Jews behave themselves and do not join the Ruthenian partisans, there will be no deportations."

Wallenberg's family, friends, colleagues in Hungary, and the protégés whom he saved have attested to his graciousness, gentility, and courage. Before his execution in Bratislava after the war, Dieter von Wisliceny, the Bloodhound's collaborator in Budapest, enlarged upon Eichmann's boorishness, crudity, and cowardice:

In 1944 Eichmann met a woman in Budapest, whose name was Ingrid Schama (?). She was living separated from her husband and I think she had private means. She had absolute power over Eichmann. When the Russians were advancing in Hungary, Eichmann prepared poison for the woman in case she was captured by the Russians.

In Hungary Eichmann had another love affair, too, with a young Viennese woman, called Margrit Konschir. In the last years preceding the debacle, Eichmann, who would get drunk by night, was anyway an easy prey to women.

In spite of his high rank, Eichmann could never get rid of his lower middle-class habits and mentality. He most carefully avoided any encounter with personalities of the elite. He sent his deputy, Günter, to official receptions. Not as though he had been reluctant to receive any honours; it was rather because he did not trust himself; he was afraid of making a fool of himself in a milieu alien to him. He always wished to remain the mystery man." He was living in constant fear that they were after his life. He only travelled by his own personal motorcar and never dared to fly because he was afraid the plane might crash.

There were always weapons in his car: two revolvers and hand grenades. In one of his pockets he always had a hand grenade and in the other a percussion cap . . . Actually Eichmann was afraid.

In September, 1944, in Hungary, he feared lest the house he was staying at would be blown up. He had bunkers built in his garden. So cautious was he that he did not let himself be photographed. When he needed a photograph for an identity card, he had his likeness taken at the photographic studio of the Gestapo and ordered only a few prints.
The adversaries first caught sight of each other at the bar of the Arizona nightclub in Budapest. Eichmann appraised Wallenberg as yet another effete diplomat, a playboy as dissolute as himself. His misperception of the Swede’s character was quickly corrected as their opposing missions came into conflict.

Wallenberg was probably the first person who had ever dared to frustrate and countermand Eichmann’s orders. As he thrust his type of devastation on Europe, Eichmann had met only token resistance to his wishes. Wallenberg’s presence, therefore, became a new and unwelcome experience for Eichmann. As a means of becoming “acquainted” with the opposition, Wallenberg invited Eichmann and a top aide to his home for dinner. “Wallenberg was well aware,” Berg said, “how much easier it is to bring a difficult transaction to a successful conclusion after an indulgence of good food and fine wines.” Unfortunately, the overburdened Wallenberg completely forgot about his “distinguished” dinner guests. When Wallenberg arrived home at his usual late hour, the exasperation of the hungry, thirsty Nazis had peaked: not only had Wallenberg forgotten about the invitation, but it was the cook’s day off. Wallenberg, never easily rattled, kept the Nazis at bay with a few drinks and called Lars Berg, who agreed to have all the guests for dinner. With typical poise Wallenberg told the placated guests that there had been a misunderstanding and that the dinner had been set in the home of attache Berg.

Berg and coworker Göte Carlsson had a most charming residence at Hunfalvi Street and a cook of the highest quality. The house had previously belonged to nobility, and the owner left the new tenants his exquisite tableware. “The count’s best porcelain and silver were laid out for the guests,” Berg said, “and thanks to our excellent cook, the dinner was a great success. I am sure that Eichmann never even suspected that Wallenberg had forgotten him.”

Berg recalls that the dinner was held late in the fall of 1944, and as they dined the Russian guns could be seen on the distant horizon. “Raoul was very relaxed that evening,” Berg recalls, “since there were no emergencies or interventions which required his attention at that moment. Our little salon became a battlefield for one of Eichmann’s many defeats against Raoul Wallenberg.” The latter’s opening salvo was a cool discussion of Nazi doctrines and the military outlook for Germany. Berg observed, “With clarity and logical precision, Wallenberg fearlessly tore Nazi doctrines into shreds and predicted that Nazism and its leaders would meet a speedy and complete destruction. I must say that these were rather unusual, caustic words from a Swede who was far away from his country and totally at the mercy of the powerful German antagonist Eichmann and his henchmen.”

But Wallenberg’s attack on Eichmann had a definite purpose: he actually sought to influence Eichmann. “In his prediction of the imminent doom of Nazism,” Berg said, “there was also a sincere exhortation to Eichmann to bring to an end the senseless deportations and the unnecessary killing of Hungarian Jews.”

Wallenberg pointedly put the question to Eichmann: “Look, you have to face up to the facts. You have lost the war. Why do you not give up now?”

As the discussion went on, Eichmann could not conceal his surprise that anyone would have the gall to attack not only him, but also Hitler so openly. “He soon discovered,” said Berg, “that he was losing the battle to Wallenberg. Eichmann’s well-learned propaganda phrases sounded empty and had little strength against Raoul’s forceful, intelligent presentation.” Stunned, Eichmann replied in a very open, revealing manner:

“I admit that you are right, Mr. Wallenberg. I actually never believed in Nazism as such, but it has given me power and wealth. I know that this pleasant life will soon be over. My planes will no longer bring me women and wines from Paris nor any other delicacies from the Orient. My horses, my dogs, my palace here in Budapest will soon be taken over by the Russians, and I myself, an SS officer, will be shot on the spot. But for me there is no rescue any more. If I obey my orders from Berlin and exercise my power ruthlessly enough here in Budapest, I shall be able to prolong my days of grace.

After making this admission and stating his resolve to continue, Eichmann served notice on Wallenberg: “I warn you, Herr Legationssekretär. I shall do my utmost to defeat you. And your Swedish diplomatic passport will not help you, if I consider it necessary to do away with you. Even a neutral diplomat might meet with accidents.”

According to Berg, the Germans are very “correct” in diplomatic dealings. And, not surprisingly, Eichmann left without anger or bitterness. “With the unfailing politeness of a well-brought-up German officer, Eichmann bid us goodbye and thanked us for a charming evening.”

Berg speculated on the purpose behind Wallenberg’s lecture and rebuke of Eichmann: “Perhaps Raoul did not achieve much by his frank argumentation, but sometimes it could be quite a relief for a Swede to be able to tell his straightforward opinion to a German SS officer. Without doubt Eichmann left the house very much impressed by Raoul’s fearlessness and strong personality.”

Wallenberg certainly left an imprint on Eichmann. A few days after their charming evening together, Wallenberg’s private car was out on official business, but Wallenberg was not inside. A big, heavy German truck rammed straight into Wallenberg’s car, wrecking it completely. Wallenberg lodged a firm protest directly to Eichmann regarding the attempt on his life. Eichmann was “sorry” about the “accident,” but quickly told his adversary “I will try again.”

However, Eichmann had more important things to attend to, such as the planning and implementation of the death marches and other schemes to
complete the final solution, so neither Wallenberg nor his cars were ever attacked again. In fact, Wallenberg is reported to have dealt directly with Eichmann in bargaining for the release of Jews. But Eichmann continually voiced his hatred of the Swede. One of his outbursts sparked an international incident. During a conversation with a staff member of the Swedish Red Cross, Eichmann made known his desire to shoot "Jew-dog" Wallenberg. "It is possible that Eichmann's statement was an empty threat," Anger said, "but we were not prepared to leave it unchallenged." After receiving a telegram from the Swedish legation, the Foreign Office in Stockholm instructed the embassy in Berlin to lodge a protest to the Germans, complaining about the threat against Wallenberg and demanding that the SS command in Budapest respect the legation members and their staffs. Edmund Veesenmayer, Hitler's ambassador in Budapest, "apologized" to Stockholm, assuring Sweden that Eichmann's words were not to be taken literally. However, Veesenmayer explained, Eichmann's reaction had to be understood in light of Wallenberg's illegal activities on behalf of the Jews. Wallenberg acted in a "far too unconventional and unacceptable way." In that sense, Veesenmayer maintained, Eichmann's words should be viewed as a future warning, meant to restrain Wallenberg from persisting in his rescue efforts.

Unwilling to be on hand for the arrival of the Russians, Eichmann hurried out of Budapest on December 23, 1944, but before leaving, he conceded that Wallenberg had been a "brilliant chess player." Their conflicting goals—Wallenberg's, to save as many Jews as possible; Eichmann's, to kill as many Jews as possible—had made them bitter, determined foes, but Wallenberg had outfoxed and outmaneuvered the Bloodhound. With his chief adversary Eichmann gone, the Angel of Rescue next directed his efforts towards outsmarting the Nyilas and contending with a more deadly group of villains.

Wallenberg's rescue activities brought him many potent enemies—aside from Eichmann. Although Wallenberg was able to influence Foreign Minister Kemény through the baroness, he had no success in dealing with Deputy Foreign Minister Zoltan Bagossy, Wallenberg's "particular antagonist," according to Berg.

Bagossy was a real sadistic Nazi and hated Jews with all his heart, if he had any heart at all. He was absolutely unsuceptible to persuasion whether in form of bribes or reasoning. He remained the master spirit of the deportation of the Jews. Not even the menace of blacklisting him with the Russians seemed to have any effect on him. In distinction to almost all other German and Hungarian Nazi big-shots he was not even interested in Wallenberg's very last means of influence—a Swedish protection passport either for the person in question himself or for his mistress or somebody else near of kin. Bagossy could just not be swayed (29).

Despite Bagossy's animosity towards Wallenberg, the deputy foreign minister never considered having his foe assassinated. The same could not be said for two other satanic forces: Kurt Rettmann and SS Hauptsturmführer Theodore Dannecker. An instigator of the Nyilas' atrocities, Rettmann was quite incensed over Wallenberg's continual thwarting of his plans to "kill all Jews." Rettmann sent a warning to Wallenberg that he would have him murdered if he did not cease his rescue work. Dannecker also wanted to do away with Wallenberg. He planned the near catastrophe of a German truck ramming into Wallenberg's car and publicized it, by bragging that it was his scheme. Wallenberg's worker Charles Wilhelm was also aware of Dannecker's intentions and warned Wallenberg.

Despite these warnings, Wallenberg's response always remained the same: the Angel of Rescue would never give up his mission. In answer to Rettmann's death threats, Wallenberg said, "It is not my intention to worry about myself or about my safety. The more help I can dispense, the more safe passes I can give out, the happier I am."

Mrs. Paula Auer, of Newark, New Jersey, recalled Wallenberg's heroism during the final days of 1944. On February 14, 1947, the Newark Jewish News presented her experiences in perhaps the first account of a Wallenberg rescue. Mrs. Auer and her family had found refuge in a Swedish protected house. She said, "When the Russians reached the gates of Budapest, the Nazis broke into this and other Swedish homes and like crazed beasts shot all the Jews they saw. They then threw the bodies into the Danube. Somehow I escaped the Nazis' search and got word to the Swedish legation. Wallenberg and his assistants arrived in time to prevent the massacre of the remaining 160 Jews in the home."

From his home in Stockholm, Georg Libik related Wallenberg's fearless adventure during Christmas week. Now a civil engineer, Libik was a slalom champion in his native Hungary. His father was a commissioner in a Nazi war factory; his father-in-law, Albert Szent-Györgyi, was a Nobel laureate in medicine. During the war, Libik said, his father-in-law was a leader of the Hungarian resistance movement and a "personal enemy of Hitler." After the Arrow Cross came to power, the Nyilas raided a meeting of resistance leaders, at which Libik was present. The Arrow Cross seized his address book with its listings of underground workers. Libik managed to escape from the clutches of the Arrow Cross and warn all those in his address book.

At this time, Per Anger took Libik onto his staff under the pseudonym of Bela Ratkowsky, while sheltering Szent-Györgyi at his residence in Buda. Libik joined his father-in-law at the Anger residence around Christmas time.

Georg Libik reconstructed that memorable evening. "It was one night, some time after 10, when Wallenberg showed up at Per Anger's apartment. He looked like a student with his red scarf and black winter coat. He was bareheaded and
looked very pale." Libik first thought that Wallenberg must be some sort of lunatic. "This fellow must be mad, I said to myself. It’s suicidal to be out so late at night, with all the Nylias roaming the streets.”

Wallenberg and Anger went to a corner and began conversing in low tones, first in Swedish and then in German. "The situation was obviously very serious," Libik said. "The Arrow Cross had bullied their way into a protected house on Bengtzen Street, drove the people out into the courtyard, searched them, and treated them brutally. One could expect, Wallenberg said, that ‘they would be shot in the Danube.’"

Wallenberg’s car and chauffeur were missing, and for that reason he had come to Anger. "Wallenberg was afraid that he could not get to Bengtzen Street in time to stop the massacre from being carried out. There were many lives to be saved. Despite some misgivings about the recklessness of Wallenberg, Anger was agreeable and asked me to drive Wallenberg to Pest before the bridges over the Danube were blown up."

Libik left with a false identification and a gun at his side. According to Libik, "Wallenberg had a different outlook. ‘I do not rely on power,’ Wallenberg told me. ‘My strength is that I can bribe or threaten the Arrow Cross.’ We drove off with no lights on. It was a frightful scene on the streets of Pest. Everywhere there were houses on fire. It was my country, part of my life being destroyed. But with all the human corpses, all the dead horses strewn along the streets, there was no time for meditation.”

Wallenberg entered the building on Bengtzen Street alone, telling Libik to park the car where the Nylias could not see it. "I thought to myself," Libik said, "why is Wallenberg doing this? Why didn’t he stay at home, even if the unfortunate people were to die. How could a foreigner—and a Swede—be more noble and a truer patriot than the Hungarians. If the Hungarians didn’t care about their own people, why should a foreigner? My head was filled with such medieval, romantic wanderings while I thought of Wallenberg with admiration.”

Libik waited an hour in the car for Wallenberg to return. "He came out and happily announced, ‘Everything is okay. Everyone has permission to return to the house.’ I never for a moment doubted the truth of Wallenberg’s claim, but I admit it was difficult to believe.”

An anonymous Hungarian Jew who was saved because of Wallenberg’s refusal to be coerced, to give up, gave the following account in the March 6, 1945, Dagens Nyheter about a Nylias armed patrol invading a protected house:

Wallenberg: “This is Swedish territory. You have got nothing to do here.”

Chief of Patrol: “I have orders to take the able-bodied men away from here.”

Wallenberg: “Nobody will get out. If you try to take anybody away from here you will get into trouble with me. As long as I am alive, nobody will be taken from here. You will have to shoot me first.”

Tibor Vayda still vividly recalls the December rescue operation on Úllói Street.

There were more than three hundred men and women at our office, which was also a Swedish protected house on Úllói Street. The Nylias stormed in and shouted. "Wallenberg is not here. Everybody, get out. Swedish protection means nothing. Protective passes mean nothing." People wanted to take their luggage, but the Nylias sneered. "You don’t need luggage because you will be dead soon.”

About noon we were marched to SS headquarters. We expected to be shot after being thrown into the Danube. Somehow—and I still do not know how—a message was gotten to Wallenberg. At 2:00 in the afternoon his car roared through the courtyard. Not one of the three hundred was lost. He simply put it straight to the SS commando: "You save these men, and I promise your safety after the Russians win the war.”

Tibor Vayda never saw Wallenberg again. "He was a quiet hero. Few people got to know him on a personal level, except perhaps his secretary, Mrs. Falk, and our fellow worker, Vilmos Forgacz."

Per Anger describes his last meeting with his colleague on January 10, 1945. "I remember reminding him once again of the extremely dangerous position he was in, and advised him to move over with us on the Buda side from the Pest side. The Hungarian Nazis were especially at this point hunting for him and he endangered himself by continuing his rescue work. But he turned a deaf ear to this. He wanted to be near the Jews who needed his help.”

During January, amid the infernolike fires in Budapest, Wallenberg received death threats in the mail. Stones were thrown against his car. Armed gangsters hunted him. Everything was done to make it impossible for him to visit his protégés, but nothing could make Wallenberg give up his work.

Although Wallenberg refused to give up his rescue work, he was neither naive nor foolhardy. He was fully aware of the dangers surrounding him. He continually changed apartments as well as his sleeping place for the evening. One of his last apartments was on the sixth floor of Madách Street. Lévai succinctly captured the historical charm and allure of the lodging: "He [Wallenberg] found a haven at the apartment of writer Magda Gabor. He had been there many times before and had spent much time with Baroness Kemény" (167).

But, while Raoul Wallenberg was a veritable Angel of Rescue, he was still a mortal possessing normal fears. After an encounter with the Nylias official Vásznköndy, Wallenberg remarked, "I have never been closer to death.”

On January 10, Anger and Wallenberg were on a mission together. Bombs fell continually. Proceeding with the car was most difficult, as the roads presented obstructions of human bodies, dead horses, fallen trees, and demolished houses. Anger turned to his colleague and asked whether he was frightened.
The response tells the story of Raoul Wallenberg—as the Angel of Rescue, but equally as an ordinary mortal: “Sure, it gets a little scary, sometimes, but for me there’s no choice. I have taken on this assignment and I would never be able to go back to Stockholm without knowing inside myself I had done all a man could do to save as many Jews as possible.”

In explaining why Raoul Wallenberg could not return home, one of his protégés compared him to an obsessed, overworked violinist. “He was a driven man, unable to let go of what had become an obsession,” according to Edith Wohl-Ernster, first violinist of the Stockholm opera. “He was like a violinist playing an extremely difficult concerto. His work sapped all his strength, but he refused to quit.”

Wallenberg’s nonprofessional counterpart at the nunciature, Tibor Baranski, recalled the Swede as an “extraordinary” person, but with the usual apprehensions of mortals.

We were normal human beings. Certainly we both were afraid at times of the dangers in our path. What is important is that Wallenberg was able to rise above and defeat these fears and accomplish so many wonderful things. He saved 76,000 Jews when he prevented the central ghetto from being destroyed. More than 25,000 life-saving Swedish protection passes are the result of his initiative and actions. That’s almost 100,000 lives saved by one man! What else is there to say?

Remember My Name (Act 1, Scenes 1–3)

Joanna H. Kraus

Joanna H. Kraus was born in 1937 and was raised in Portland, Maine. She has made significant contributions to the theater, most notably in the area of child drama. Educated at the University of London, Sarah Lawrence College (B.A., 1959), the University of California, Los Angeles (M.A., 1963), and Columbia University (Ed.D., 1972), Kraus taught at the State University of New York, Brockport, until 1995. The New York State Theatre Education Association gave her their Lifetime Achievement Award in 1995. Among Kraus’s best-known works are The Shaggy Dog Murder Trial, Remember My Name, from which the following excerpt is taken, Mean to Be Free, and The Ice Wolf. Kraus now resides in Walnut Creek, California.

Remember My Name is the story of ten-year-old Rachel Simon and the people of St. Laurent de Pins, France, who sheltered Rachel when her parents sent her there from Marseilles for safety. Living under the name Madeleine Petit, the child is aided and sheltered by a priest, a war widow, a teacher, and a member of the underground. In this excerpt, Rachel takes on her new name and begins her journey to safety.