

# RAOUL WALLENBERG DAY

BY GABRIELLA KLEIN

It began to rain in earnest as we pulled up in front of the Seasons Hilltop Bistro in Queen Elizabeth Park on January 29th, 2006. Rain is such a common occurrence here in the Pacific Northwest that it barely deserves a nod, but on that day the heavy dark skies seemed fitting; as though the heavens were commiserating with the determined line of people walking down the curving path, hunched below open umbrellas. We were winding our way towards a barely noticeable bronze

a violent close. Twenty years later the Second Generation Group of Vancouver along with the Swedish Consul, Anders Neumuller and the Consul General of Hungary, Andre Molnar revisited the site so that this important legacy would not be forgotten.

I was invited to speak on behalf of the Second Generation Group because my mother, Eva Klein and my grandmother, Yolan



plaque that sits under a small waterfall, in order to attend the 20th Anniversary Event commemorating Raoul Wallenberg Day.

At a ceremony organized by the Second Generation Group on January 26, 1985 His Excellency Per Anger, Wallenberg's friend and fellow rescuer and the Swedish Ambassador to Canada, unveiled the plaque honouring Raoul Wallenberg for his heroic efforts that saved thousands of Hungarian Jews in Budapest as the Second World War was drawing to

Hexner, survived the war together in the Budapest Ghetto due in great part to the haven provided by one of the 'Wallenberg safe houses'. It was a great privilege to bear witness before the 80 people standing in the pelting rain and to pay tribute to the brave man without whose efforts I might not even exist.

In the Jewish tradition we are taught that it is important to remember. For many it is painful to travel back in time and they choose to do it as little as possible. Today I will take that journey for the two women who can no longer walk that road,

my mother and my grandmother. I will respectfully remember those ancestors whose voices speak to me, who have followed me to this adopted land with its own tradition of honoring ancestors and who stubbornly refuse to let me forget my story that began in the old land of my birth, Hungary.

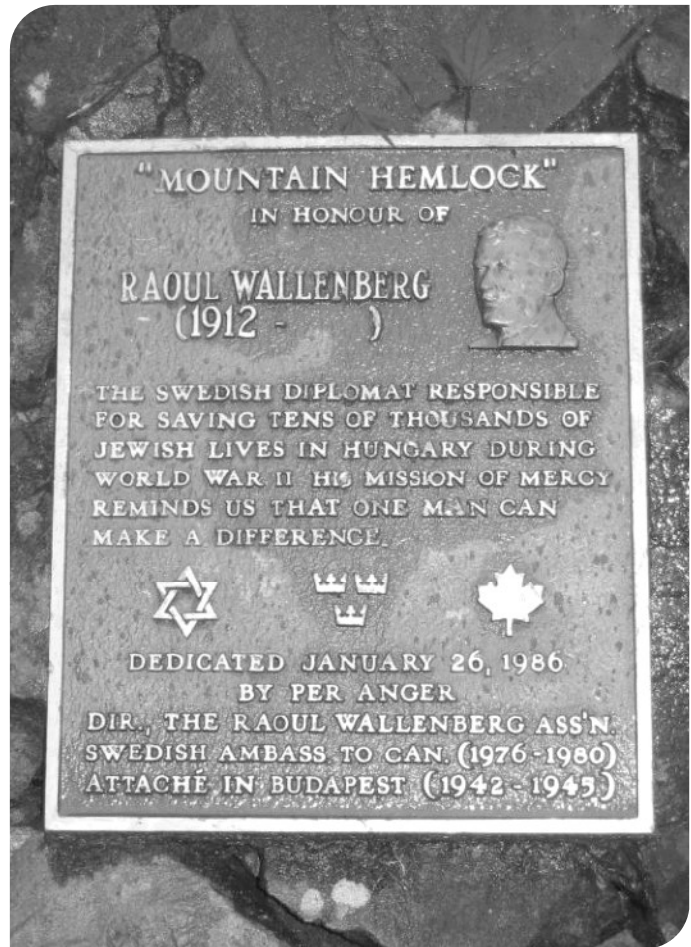
The event began with a welcome on behalf of the Swedish community by Mr. Lennart Osterlind and continued with greetings from The Hon. Councillor and Deputy Mayor Peter Ladner. The Consul General of Hungary, Andre Molnar acknowledged the valour displayed by Raoul Wallenberg against the face of seemingly impenetrable evil. The Consul of Sweden, Anders Neumuller concluded the ceremony by laying a wreath on the plaque. The short but moving ceremony created a palpable feeling of sorrow mixed with gratitude amongst the attentive crowd who then congregated up at the restaurant where we feasted on Swedish cookies and chocolate bubka.

“Whether Hungarian,  
Swedish, Salish or English,  
we cut our teeth on the  
legends of those who  
fought evil...”

Whether Hungarian, Swedish, Salish or English, we cut our teeth on the legends of those who fought evil, slayed dragons and gained the kingdom as reward. What rare element transforms a man or a woman into a hero and why are they so few?

Raoul Wallenberg disappeared mysteriously on January 17th, 1945 in Hungary and was imprisoned in the Soviet Union. Although he was never heard from again Raoul Wallenberg’s legacy lives on through the many lives he saved: some say as many as one hundred thousand Jews. His reputation as a man of unswerving conviction, intelligence and charisma is the stuff of legends. I am pleased to report that the Mayor of the City of Vancouver, Sam Sullivan, proclaimed Sunday, January 29th, 2006 as “Raoul Wallenberg Day”, an event that will henceforth be recognized annually.

Perhaps what this flesh and blood man had is what all children know when they hear those old fairy tales. A hero simply needs the unfaltering strength of his own conviction. Raoul



The Wallenberg Plaque at Queen Elizabeth Park

Wallenberg did not win the princess or gain the treasure and his just reward was stolen from him, but he lives forever... through me and thousands like me who say his name with reverence. The man was called Raoul Wallenberg and he possessed conviction. He is my hero.