

Kelsey Matala

6333 9th Ave N St. Petersburg, FL 33710

kmatala@spchs.org

(727)-344-4065

St. Petersburg Catholic High School

High School Senior

Anti-Semitism is the discrimination of Jews for the sole reason that they are Jewish. It is seen through history in political attempts to separate and suppress Jews because of existing prejudices. During World War II, when Anti-Semitic feelings were at an all time high, courageous men and women decided to fight against Anti-Semitism. Some prominent people that went against the grain were Raoul Wallenberg and Irena Sendler. Both were not Jewish, but realized the injustices in the world and chose to do something about it. Even though it is sometimes viewed as a thing of the past, Anti-Semitism can still be found in our world today and groups such as They Can't continue to fight against this injustice. Groups like this are making great strides to end Anti-Semitic feelings around the world.

On August 4, 1912, three months after his father had died, Raoul Wallenberg was born. His grandfather filled the role and helped shape Wallenberg into a respectable young man. He taught Wallenberg about different cultures and languages and encouraged him to discover more of the world. After high school he spent the mandatory nine years in the Swedish military service and then lived in Paris for another year before going to college. Wallenberg studied architecture at the University of Michigan and ended up graduating in the top of his class in 1935. It was after moving back to Europe that he was exposed to the Anti-Semitism movement of this time.¹

While working at a Dutch bank, he heard stories of German-Jewish refugees and their struggles of living under Adolf Hitler, who had just become Chancellor of Germany. By July of 1944, Raoul opened a Swedish embassy office near Budapest's major Jewish ghetto. To run the establishment, he employed around 400 people who were given diplomatic immunity. Wallenberg used this facility to issue protective passports to Jews. Within a couple of months

¹ See *Raoul Wallenberg* by the History.com Staff

around 20,000 Jews had used this service, which protected them from deportation. In addition, Wallenberg converted houses into safe houses with the Swedish flag over them so that the residents would be protected from the Nazi's. He used his earnings to pay off German officials, first by becoming friends with them and then reminding them that at the end of the war they would be regarded as criminals. He also rescued numerous individuals from deportation trains by giving them Swedish papers that would have them released from the trains.

Through all of his efforts, Wallenberg made many enemies, one of which being Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann was in charge of making sure the Jews got sent to the concentration camps, so naturally he was no fan of Wallenberg's. Eichmann made many threats towards Wallenberg, and once even tried to have him assassinated. Luckily, Wallenberg was not in his car during the attempted assassination, but it didn't stop Eichmann from making more threats. Wallenberg seemed unaffected by these threats and even challenged Eichmann since he knew the Germans were bound to lose the war.

In the end, Wallenberg was captured by Soviet forces on the way to Debrecen, Hungary. There has been controversy as to what happened to him after he was taken into custody. While most believe that he was sent to prison in the Soviet Union and died of a heart attack, some think that he was held in Soviet custody for decades after his arrest. United States President Ronald Reagan announced Raoul Wallenberg as an honorary American citizen in 1981, a title that was formerly only held by Winston Churchill. He is noted in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for having saved the most amount of people from extinction. ²

² See *Raoul Wallenberg* by the History.com Staff

It is truly motivating how Wallenberg was courageous enough to continue helping the Hungarian Jews escape while he was under persecution. He even challenged those who wanted him dead. This is a great example for the people of today to fight against Anti-Semitism, even if it is not the most popular thing to do. Wallenberg stood up for what he knew to be unjust and showed bravery in doing so.

In Warsaw, Poland on February 15, 1910, Irena Sendler was born. A doctor who treated Jewish people with typhus³, her father went against the societal norms of the time. Because of being exposed to the disease for such a long period of time, Sendler's father died when she was just seven years old. When she was in school, the Jewish and non-Jewish children were separated because of very strict rules. She saw the ridiculousness of the rules and often disobeyed them, earning her a full year suspension. After finally completing her studies, she began working at the Warsaw Welfare Department as a social worker. At this time, the Nazis were invading Poland and Sendler began forging documents for her Jewish acquaintances. In 1942, she got the opportunity to head the Children's Department for the Council for Aid to Jews and without hesitation, agreed. Along with other social workers, Irena started rescuing children from the Warsaw Ghetto⁴ under the pretense that she was examining Jews for symptoms of contagious diseases. In order to be able to reunite the children with their families at the end of the war, she kept a detailed list of each kid and where they came from.⁵

³ A disease transmitted when one is bitten by an infected louse, mite, or flea. See *Typhus* by The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica

⁴ From 1940-1945, a designated area in which all Jews in Warsaw, Poland were forced to live. See *Warsaw*

⁵ See *Irena Sendler - Rescuer of the Children of Warsaw* by Chana Kroll

She had many different tactics to get the children out of the ghetto. One method was to sneak the children into a church on the Jewish side and then, having removed their yellow stars, have them exit through the front door of the church right under the noses of the Nazi's. Little children were often smuggled out in toolboxes or sacks. Sometimes Sendler would use an ambulance to rescue children by saying they were extremely ill, whether it was true or not. Once safely on the other side, she would take them to her friend's house to have them eat and get cleaned up. Finally, she would find them a safe home to reside in until the war was over.

Since she conducted these activities for eighteen months straight, the Nazis began to get suspicious. She continued her work, but changed her name and address multiple times in order to avoid getting caught. However, five months after the Warsaw ghetto was abolished, Sendler was arrested. The Germans tortured her in hopes that she would give up the whereabouts of the children, but she never faltered. Eventually, she was released into the woods after a guard was bribed by members of the Zegota⁶. She spent the remainder of the war in hiding because the members of the Zegota put her name on a public list of those who were shot by the Gestapo⁷. After the war, she tried to reconnect the children with their families, but only a couple could be tracked down because out of the Jews who lived in the Warsaw Ghetto, only one percent made it out alive.⁸

Sendler was hardly recognized for her tremendous acts of bravery against Anti-Semitism. While she was given the title of Righteous Gentile in 1965 and a tree in her honor in 1983, very little was done to celebrate her achievements. It wasn't until a group of high school students

⁶ From 1942-1945, an underground Polish organization operated to help the Jews in Poland find safe places to stay. See *Jewish Resistance: Konrad Żegota Committee*

⁷ Was the secret police force in Nazi Germany. See *Nazi Perpetrators: The Gestapo*

⁸ See *Irena Sendler - Rescuer of the Children of Warsaw* by Chana Kroll

from Kansas came across her name in the *US News* did she start to gain recognition. The girls were shocked to find that a little woman saved over 2,500 children, and even more so when they found out that she was still living to tell the story. In 2001 they brought national attention to Irena Sendler when they went to visit her in Poland. In the years following she received numerous awards for her bravery. Sendler passed away on May 12, 2008.⁹ Her most memorable quote as to why she risked her life to save the children is, “My parents taught me that if a man is drowning, it is irrelevant what his religion or nationality. One must help him”.¹⁰ Sendler truly lived this quote by saving thousands of Jewish children at a time where in doing so she could have been killed. Her actions against anti-semitism have inspired people throughout the world to stand up for equality and what is just.

It is amazing that a little woman could rescue over two thousand children from the Jewish ghetto for eighteen months straight. Even more so astonishing is that Sendler was not caught until after the ghetto had been destroyed and even when she was in prison she still managed to escape. She was fearless in the fact that she risked her life everyday for more than a year in order to save innocent children who were being persecuted for their religion. Sendler greatly impacted the lives and viewpoints of the high school girls who discovered her achievements. The recognition she has received afterwards is a great encouragement to end anti-semitism in the world today.

Statistics show that fifty six percent of people surveyed said that they were “unconcerned” about violence towards Jews. The fact that such feelings are common among such a large portion of the population shows that more needs to be done to educate people about

⁹ See *Irena Sendler - Rescuer of the Children of Warsaw* by Chana Kroll

¹⁰ From *Irena Sendler - Rescuer of the Children of Warsaw* by Chana Kroll

the horrors of Anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is still present in our world and more steps can be taken to eradicate it if more people are become aware of it. The growing presence of Social media and the internet has had a significant impact on Anti-Semitism in the world today. There are even videos on YouTube that give instructions on how to terminate Jews and Israelis. One specific group that is taking action online to combat Anti-Semitism is “They Can’t”. They Can’t specifically focuses on Anti-Semitism online and taking down comments and profiles that post hateful comments. Over 50,250 posts have been flagged in the three years that They Can’t has been operating. This organization has been slowly but surely taking down posts encouraging Anti-Semitism which is a huge battle to fight. Their main goal is to stop Anti-Semitism online and end the view of society that such things are acceptable. ¹¹

Personally, I can take a stand against Anti-Semitism by joining groups that make efforts to end this atrocity. They Can’t is all about ending Anti-Semitism on social media. As a teenager social media is a big part of my life, so if I see posts about Anti-Semitism, I can do my part and report the post. Another thing I will do is get the word out about Anti-Semitism. I’m sure that a lot of my friends do not know what it is or that it is still present in the world. By doing this, I will bring more light onto the subject and get more young people to take a stand as well. Since we are the next generation, we have the ability to make Anti-Semitism a thing of the past.

Each person is born with human dignity, a right that can never be taken away. Discriminating Jewish people disrespects their human dignity and takes away their inherent right. By ending Anti-Semitism we are respecting the rights of the Jews and restoring equality for them in our world. People such as Raoul Wallenberg and Irena Sendler have done their part

¹¹ See *We Stop Online Anit-Semitism and Incitement to Terrorism: They Can't*

to end Anti-Semitism, and organizations like They Can't are following their example. By taking a stance against Anti-Semitism like they have done, we can get rid of this injustice once and for all.

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