

**SPEECH BY**  
**GEORGE FARKAS**  
**IN SYDNEY**  
**ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2012**  
**ON THE CENTENNIAL OF**  
**RAOUL WALLENBERG**

Raoul Wallenberg came to Budapest in 1944 at the age of 32

My father John Farkas was born in Budapest and in 1944 was 26 years of age

My father was a quiet, very gentle, extremely modest and very humble man . For 37 years, neither my mother nor I, nor any other member of the family nor anyone else for that matter, knew anything of his wartime experiences, or as it transpired, his remarkable exploits and feats of bravery and courage until 1982.

In the early 1980's , a worldwide movement to honour Wallenberg and to ascertain his real fate gained momentum. Save Wallenberg Committees sprang up in many countries , including Sydney.

Even with all the publicity about Wallenberg, my father said nothing.

In April 1982, one Friday night at the family Shabbat table my mother proudly exclaimed :

*“We had big excitement at home this week. 4 Corners interviewed Dad”*

Still my father said nothing.

I enquired about what and how it was that they approached him.

Still my father said nothing.

The ABC programme 4 Corners was producing a television programme entitled “ Raoul Wallenberg - Missing Hero”.

In doing the documentary on Wallenberg, 4 Corners approached a person in Sydney who had ostensibly been rescued by Wallenberg. That person said to them :

*“ Why are you speaking to me. Why don't you interview the person who actually saved my life. He is living here in Sydney”.*

He then pointed them to my father.

It was only then that a remarkable story came to light.

The fact was that my father was, in reality, Wallenberg's right hand man for much of the 6 months that Wallenberg operated in Budapest and what is even of greater significance from an historical perspective, is that he was the last person in the free world to ever see and speak to Wallenberg immediately before the Soviets took him. In fact, the last words that Wallenberg ever uttered in freedom were to my father and they proved to be regrettably prophetic words indeed and I shall return to that in a moment.

My father had originally been placed in a forced labour camp where he pretended to have Epilepsy and after feigning an epileptic fit, was taken to a hospital, from whence he escaped.

He then joined the Hungarian Resistance and approached Wallenberg and asked to join him on his mission. He used a false name on false ID papers . In fact , I still have the original photograph of him that appeared on his false ID papers. He deliberately did not reveal that he was Jewish to Wallenberg as he was afraid that Wallenberg would then refuse his approach on the grounds of it being too dangerous for my father to be actively involved.

My father went virtually everywhere with Wallenberg , accompanying him to the railway platforms and under the gaze of the German armed soldiers, thrusting Swedish papers into hands desperately reaching out of the still open doors of the wagons and hauling the recipients out and claiming immunity and protection and taking them away, in spite of threats to their own safety.

He described Wallenberg as being available day and night on call to assist Jews.

When the death marches of 120km on foot occurred, Wallenberg set up checkpoints along the route. When a convoy of bedraggled people arrived, Wallenberg and my father would jump into his car with other aides and haul people out of the convoy. My father in describing Wallenberg's actions stated that " it took enormous nerve and courage".

When I look at how I had always known my father, it was hard to conceive that this reserved, shy and retiring man was also capable of such courageous deeds.

My father described Wallenberg as a handsome, very softly spoken man but a man who would argue with German officers on station platforms and who sometimes became so angry and forceful that he would either jump on a table or thump his fist on a table demanding the release of Jews into his custody. He successfully intimidated the Germans who seemed to hold him in awe.

His real nemesis however was Adolf Eichman who had been sent to Budapest to implement the Final Solution.

A personal contest developed between Wallenberg and Eichman, who is reported to have specifically have said that he wanted Wallenberg killed.

At a very genteel dinner party at which both were guests , Eichman issued an icy threat to Wallenberg.

He said “ *You have a Swedish passport but you can't be sure that will protect you. Even a neutral diplomat can meet with an accident*”.

A few days later , a large German truck rode into Wallenberg's car which was totally destroyed but Wallenberg was not in the car.

As to my father being the last person in the free world to see or speak to Wallenberg, in January 1945 the Soviets summoned Wallenberg to their headquarters.

My father repeatedly tried to prevail upon him not to go , telling him that his life could be in danger as their intentions were not known.

However , Wallenberg , being the proud diplomat that he was , insisted on going on the basis that he was a Swedish diplomat and the Russians as the occupying forces had summoned him.

As Wallenberg was about to get into the car , my father made a last fruitless attempt to stop him.

It was then that Wallenberg uttered those , in hindsight , dreadfully prophetic words , as the last words he ever uttered to anyone in the free world. He said :

*“ I don ’t know whether I ’ll be received as a friend or an enemy ”.*

And with those words , he disappeared never to be seen outside the Soviet Union again.

When my father was asked, in the interview, whether he thought Wallenberg had any foreboding of what was in store for him, he said that from the look in Wallenberg’s eyes when he said those fateful words, he thinks that Wallenberg had a pretty good idea of which of the two alternatives was the more likely.

History is a witness to how he was received and treated.

In January 1945 the Soviets informed the Swedish Government that its troops had taken Wallenberg into custody.

In August 1947 , completely contrary to the 1945 Soviet statement, the Soviet Government told the Swedish Government that Wallenberg had simply disappeared in Budapest and the Soviet Government didn’t know anything about his whereabouts.

Ten years later, 1957 saw the infamous Gromyko Memorandum in which the Soviets admitted they had been holding Wallenberg in a Moscow prison , but that he had died of a heart attack on 17 July 1947.

However, conveniently the Soviets stated that the Lubyanka prison infirmary doctor who had verbally stated that, had died in 1953 and the Soviet Minister for State Security , to whom he had stated that, had been executed in a purge of the security forces.

Rumours persisted that the Soviets had in fact executed him and retired Soviet officials had been saying that off the record for years.

However considerable doubt has been cast on whether Wallenberg died in 1947.

The fact is that to date, there exists no legitimate evidence of Wallenberg’s death in Soviet documents.

What is even more disturbing is that there are also eyewitness accounts to his being alive for many years thereafter.

1. He was seen and identified as Wallenberg in Soviet prisons in 1951 , 1952 , 1957 , and 1959.
2. In 1961 , a Soviet Physician , Professor Schwartz told the Swedish Government that an informant had told her that Wallenberg was in a Soviet hospital, unwell psychiatrically.

That informant subsequently changed his story alleging she had misunderstood him.

On a later occasion , he told her that he had , after her revelation , been called in to see Kruschev who was very angry and told him he should not talk of things he knows nothing about.

3. In 1963 , a Swedish prisoner was seen in Lubyanka prison , the very prison in which Wallenberg had allegedly died back in 1947.
4. In 1975 , a Swede was seen in a Soviet hospital who had been in prison for 30 years. The prisoner who had seen him and reported that in 1977 was immediately re-arrested for having done so.
5. There are eyewitness reports to his being alive in Soviet prisons in the 1980's.

So my father's reporting of Wallenberg's own perception of his likely fate, was prophetic indeed.

I tried to convince my father to join the Wallenberg Committee or speak publicly about his association with Wallenberg.. I pointed out to him that the world was then clamouring to hear about Wallenberg.

He refused. He didn't want to be conspicuous. He didn't want the limelight. He didn't want any attention. He didn't regard what he did as anything extraordinary but as simply a reaction to extraordinary times that many others in his position would have also done.

He died in 1987 , with the major part of his story untold, forever lost to historians, biographers , libraries and museums.

There are two interesting Post-scripts to this story.

The first was a few years ago when I met a man who had been Wallenberg's bicycle courier in 1944 and who saw him regularly. I asked him whether he knew my father. He said he didn't know what my father looked like but what he had noticed was that there was always another man with Wallenberg wherever Wallenberg was.

I showed him the 1944 photograph of my father and he immediately, without even a moment's hesitation or even blinking, said:

“ That's him. That's the man who was always with Wallenberg”.

And this was over 60 years after he had last seen him.

The second Post –script to this story occurred on 21 February 2000.

I was in my Chambers when my receptionist informed me that the United Nations was on the phone. My instinctive reaction was that they were no doubt trying to sell me tickets to a Ball or some function. You know the old story “ Tell them I have given already”.

I indicated I was unable to speak to them.

After my switchboard closed at 6pm, at approximately 6:30pm my private unlisted line ( known only to a few ) rang. It was the United Nations office in Sydney. Persistent buggers I thought.

You can imagine my surprise to be told that Koffi Annan, the UN Secretary General and his wife , Nane Lagergren were to be in Sydney for only a few hours the following day, in between arriving from Canberra and returning home that evening and that having heard of my father's connection with Wallenberg, she was very anxious to meet me but only had a half an hour at 3.45pm.

Of course I agreed, thinking her interest was because she was Swedish.

It was only when she and I , in that meeting, were working out how old Wallenberg would be were he still alive , that she said something which

made me realise that she was in fact Wallenberg's niece and that was the reason she wanted to meet me , to hear as much as possible as I knew from my father about her uncle, particularly his last words.

You can also imagine my surprise when half way through that meeting, in walked Koffi Annan, in between meetings of his own and said to me  
“ *I just wanted to shake your hand*”.

That was indeed a memorable moment in my life , because the reality was that he was not shaking my hand - he was shaking the hand of John Farkas' son.

I am indeed particularly proud of my father's association with Raoul Wallenberg.

Someone once said of “ History” that :

“ *History is something that never happened, written by a man who wasn't there*”.

In today's increasingly anti-semitic world where a revisionist view of history is becoming increasingly fashionable, it is ever more important to record the testimony of people who **were** there and bore witness to what **really** happened. It is imperative that we never forget and honour incredible heroes like Raoul Wallenberg, who represent everything that is decent, humane and honourable and who , at the price of their own life, stood up against evil when it really counted.