

Raoul Wallenberg. NSW parliament!

Let me tell you a story that is little known!

When RW was asked the question, that would end his life prematurely, but let him save tens of thousands of others, he was 31 years old and pretty bored with his job in Stockholm!

His career was at a standstill!

This was 1944. He was director of a Swedish Hungarian export/import food company.

He lived in a two room apartment in central Stockholm and he still did not have the income that his grandfather had put as a floor for marriage.

He had started to look for something else! Because this was not his idea of a life!

RW:s father, Oscar W died from stomach cancer when he was newly married at 23. His wife Maj was 21 and expected a baby, Raoul!

The man who took over his upbringing was his grandfather, Gustav W, who had great ambitions for his grandson, but did not have the normal ideas about education.

To save him from the Swedish women, “the hyenas” as he called them in a letter to RW, he sent RW to the US to become an architect. He was there for almost five years.

Then to South Africa for six months with a timber company and then for six months to Haifa – this was important – to work for a Dutch bank.

Now he spoke English and German fluently. He was a fabulous actor, a strong leader and had energy to work around the clock!

This character was what would save tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest.

Still!

In the Wallenberg bank-family they were of the opinion that RW was too talkative and maybe should try out a career as a politician instead of being a businessman?

Sunday 19 March 1944 the German troops marched into Budapest. A nazi puppet-government took over Hungary. A few days later Adolf Eichman's special command arrived with the task to finish the then biggest community of Jews in Europe, 800.000.

R:s colleague in the company was Kalman Lauer, originally a Hungarian Jew who had come to Sweden to seek refuge. Kalman's family, and the family of his wife's, were now in deadly danger in Hungary. A colleague writes in his diary that in a week's time Lauer's hair went from black to white.

Until now the US had been cautious regarding the Holocaust in spite of being more or less aware of what happened since end of 1942. It was only now that The War Refugee Board was established in order to organize rescue operations for the Jews in occupied Europe.

The nazi takeover in Hungary was the first challenge for this organization. The basic idea was to work with neutral states which could send emissaries to Budapest to organize these rescue-operations.

End of May the instructions went out to American Embassies in Europe.

By chance the American Embassy in Stockholm had the same entrance as this Swedish Hungarian Company run by RW and Kalman Lauer.

The American finance attaché, Iver Olsen, had been appointed the representative of WRB in Sweden. And one day he met KL in the elevator. He asked if this was Mr Lauer whom he had heard about, offered a cigarette – that's what you did back when – and told him that the American Embassy was instructed to ask the Swedish MFA to send a "humanitarian emissary" to Budapest. Did he know about any reliable, energetic and intelligent person who could do this!

Yes! He did! RW!

So this is how the American Ambassador, Herschel Johnson, a few days later could demarche MFA not only about the task, but also could present a name of an appropriate person! Of course it helped that RW had studied in the US for almost five years!

So RW would go to Hungary on an American rescue mission, financed by the US, but under the cover as a Swedish diplomat!

Of all the countries on the list of the WRB, Sweden was the only one to say yes!

(It does make me a little bit proud!)

At the Swedish Embassy in Budapest the Ambassador Ivan Danielsson and his deputy Per Anger had already started the rescue operations but were overloaded by work and had asked for assistance.

Much later Per Anger would admit that he didn't know the extent of the American involvement in the task of RW. This is how secret the mission was.

The six months in Haifa did play a big role for RW. It was not by accident he chose to work with business partners who were Jews from Central Europe.

Already in 1938 RW went to Germany and managed to get out a business partner who had been sent to a concentration camp.

RW arrived to Budapest 9 July 1944 by train from Vienna. Many would say that he came too late! 437.000 Hungarian Jews had already been transported, mainly to Auschwitz.

In Budapest only some 200.000 Jews remained. These were the ones he would work so hard to save!

Thank you!