

A Lesson in Compassion

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9-10th Grade Category, Second Place**

In fifth grade I learned a lesson in compassion that has stayed in my heart to this day. I learned it's the heart that matters; not the deed itself. Saving one life means just as much as saving one hundred; changing one life shows as much love as changing one hundred because to that one person you've changed their world. You have given hope, even if it be in a simple smile; you really can change their life.

Sarah Jacobs, a mentally and physically handicapped girl in my fifth grade class, taught me the most valuable lesson I may ever learn. One day she drew me a picture; I looked at it, put it in my folder, smiled, and said how cool it was. The next day I got another picture, and again the next day. Before I knew it, we were best friends, but the friendship wasn't as easy as I expected. My friends told me I couldn't talk to her or they wouldn't talk to me. I tried to convince them that Sarah was the sweetest girl, but 10-year-old girls aren't the most understanding. I was so mad that they wouldn't accept her, so to prove them wrong I became better friends with Sarah.

We had sleepovers on the weekends just like any of my other friends, and I remember one night in particular: Sarah was in the other room when her mom approached me to say how thankful she was for me being Sarah's friend. She said, "Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to Sarah, she smiles all the time now, and her mental and physical therapy is improving. And I know it's hard for you in school being friends with Sarah, but thank you." I didn't know what to say except, "No problem, Sarah's really nice." I learned something that night. You can change a person's life by just being a friendly face. I know that my experience with Sarah doesn't compare to Raoul Wallenberg's experience in the Holocaust, but I understand his motive. He wanted to help people, whether it was a family of five, or a town of 50,000.

Raoul Wallenberg was a Swedish man who changed the lives of thousands of Jews, but it was the individuals who mattered to him. In 1944, Raoul Wallenberg was elected Secretary of the Swedish Legation in Budapest. He was to try to save as many of the Jews that were being deported as possible. At this point 437,402 Jewish people had been deported from Hungary, leaving only 230,000 Jews outside the capital when he arrived (geocities). His mission seemed relatively easy, but he took it above and beyond the call of duty. Wallenberg's task was to issue protective passports, but he was

only allotted 1,500. Later, using his persuasive personality, he raised the number to 4,500 passports, but in reality he delivered three times that (geocities). Wallenberg also set up hospitals, nurseries, soup kitchens, and safe houses for anyone who needed them.

This wasn't the end of his struggle. Thinking the worst was behind him Wallenberg began preparing to leave Hungary, but the Arrow Cross gained power, and that night many of his staff and his car disappeared. Wallenberg only found ten of his employees. Under the new government, death marches were put into action. Again, Wallenberg stepped up and delivered loads of food, medicine, clothing, and passports to the borders. Raids and disappearances became common. These events led Wallenberg to go from house to house doing whatever was necessary to save the Jewish people. His own staff was even taken and tortured. Raoul Wallenberg saved many lives, but he never forgot about the individual. To me, that is moral courage; caring about each person you're standing up for. He was so passionate about his cause that he slept less than four hours a night so he had time to save the hundreds of Jews being taken weekly. As the war was coming to an end, Wallenberg disappeared and was never seen again. This was an unfortunate ending to a great life of saving people and standing up for what was right.

Reading about Wallenberg's actions that saved so many lives made me think about my own personal values and beliefs. I asked myself would I do what he did for so many people? Would I be so committed and willing to stand up for a cause I believed in? I didn't know the answer; it's something that I haven't thought about it in great detail. Learning about this man's life inspired me to learn more about myself and a cause that I would stand up for. He defined moral courage for me; he was a living example of what we all should be willing to do for one another, and most of all he knew who he was and what he believed in.

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