

May 20, 2009

Dear Diane, Rachel, and the Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States,

I'm not sure if you remember me; my name is Megan Reese and I'm about to graduate from Buchanan High School in Clovis, California. I did a National History Day project on Raoul Wallenberg during my freshman year. My partner, Brittany and I traveled to New York for research, and we visited the Raoul Wallenberg Committee offices.

As my senior years winds down, I've been reflecting on my high school career. The defining experience in my life thus far has been my History Day project and Raoul Wallenberg. I wanted to write to you in order to share my experience and to thank you for all you've done for me.

I threw myself headlong into my History Day research, compiling over 200 sources. After investigating every aspect of Wallenberg's life, I came to feel as if he were a friend or a brother. I have found a hero in Raoul Wallenberg. His actions never cease to amaze and inspire me. He represents the epitome of selflessness, resourcefulness, and altruism.

Throughout the course of my research, I interviewed 18 Holocaust survivors. They told me about their lives and about Raoul Wallenberg's courageous actions. It was these conversations that truly opened my mind and my heart. Words cannot convey the depths of their resilience, love, and faith. As a sheltered freshman, I was shocked by the magnitude of their wisdom. I was deeply, deeply inspired. I realized the value of loving openly, of forgiveness, and of selflessness. Before this project, I contained little empathy for others, but the survivors opened my eyes to the reality of the world around me. They stirred in me the passion to make a difference. I wanted to scream to the world, to tell what I had learned, to share the survivors' stories. And so, after the History Day competition, where I won the state title and placed sixth nationally, I continued my journey.

I wrote an inspirational speech and I have presented this, along with my History Day documentary, at leadership conferences, Church groups, and local civic organizations, reaching over 1,400 youth and adults. In my presentation, I tell Raoul Wallenberg's story. I emphasize the importance of the past, the detriments of prejudice and indifference, and, most importantly, the power of one to make a difference. It is incredibly rewarding to look out at an audience and see tears in their eyes, to know that you have somehow touched them. I have realized that sharing my passion and knowledge is one of my greatest strengths and one of the best gifts I can offer the world. This project sparked my desire to leave a legacy of love and passion.

I cannot thank Raoul Wallenberg and the survivors enough. I have grown and changed immensely as a result of their actions. The Raoul Wallenberg Committee played a large part in this transformation. You welcomed me into your office and took time to speak with me. You granted me access to your materials and even helped me schedule interviews with survivors. I greatly admire the projects you undertake, from research to awards to "A Study of Heroes." You are truly making a difference in this world. I'm sure that Wallenberg would be proud of your work.

I'm headed to the University of California at Davis next year; I'll be in the Integrated Studies Honors Program. I went in as an International Agricultural Development major, but I'm sure I'll end up changing majors at least a few times; I have absolutely no clue what career I want to pursue! However, I know that I'll always have the friendships, skills, and passion I discovered throughout the course of my History Day project. Thank you again!

Best wishes and much love,

Megan ☺

Megan Reese

MR Reese45@gmail.com
559.907.8729