



**Raoul Wallenberg Children's Foundation**

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

(860) 232.0890

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## **Documentary film: "Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg"**

The Foundation is producing a documentary film that highlights the life and heroism of Raoul Wallenberg: "Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg". *The film explores his ultimately unjust fate after he was taken by Russian soldiers in Hungary at the end of World War II and the many efforts to rescue him. While there have been many accounts of Wallenberg's heroism in Hungary, there has not yet been a film to tell this story.*

### **Synopsis**

The documentary film "Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg" is the story of the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust and the woman who dedicated her life to rescuing him after his imprisonment in Russia. The main protagonist of our documentary story is Sonja Sonnenfeld who spent thirty years on a passionate mission to rescue this great hero from the gulags where he was taken after the war ended. As a young Jewish woman, Sonja Sonnenfeld lived with her family in Berlin during the 1930's and witnessed the rise of Hitler and the daily persecution of Jewish citizens. Later, after "retiring" at age 67 until her death in 2010, she worked tirelessly to find and save Raoul Wallenberg with Wallenberg's sister and brother, Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel. The film explores how Sonja worked with world leaders and other prominent persons in her quest. Through her own voice, we learn about the support she received from Simon Wiesenthal, Henry Kissinger, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President George H.W. Bush and many others towards finding and freeing Wallenberg. There are many intriguing stories including her meetings with spies and several rescue missions she helped to organize. The film also delves into the evidence suggesting that, despite the official Russian report of his death in 1947, Wallenberg was still alive, even as late as the 1990's.

In addition to her work in the pursuit of "Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg", Sonja Sonnenfeld visited German schools, speaking to youngsters about the atrocities she witnessed as a youth and about the important work that Wallenberg accomplished before his arrest by the Russians. She made her last trip to Berlin schools just before she passed away at nearly 98 years old.

"Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg" is the story of the hero himself, his deeds and disappearance, as well as the intriguing story of the ultimately impossible struggle to save him. It is also the story of the time in which Wallenberg's ultimate fate was sealed, a first-hand account of the terrible inhumanity that compelled Raoul Wallenberg to choose the great challenge he bravely faced. Finally, the film is the story of an inspiring woman who spent thirty years after retirement on a



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voluntary mission to save a hero and continued lecturing to youngsters well into her late nineties reminding them to “never be indifferent”!

The film project has completed pre-production and collected more than 100 hours of footage covering Sonja Sonnenfeld’s vivid account and several of her compelling visits to German middle and high schools.

A 6 minute overview of the film can be found [here](#).

An 18-minute sampling of the current footage and the full film proposal can be found [here](#).

**Current Status Winter 2017:** the RWCF-I documentary film has completed the Pre-production stage and is entering the Production stage.

- Presentation DVD and online video complete
- Interviews with several key people
- Historical Research
- Archival Research
- Cross-platform advanced web site built for RWCFI and film promotion
- More than 100 hours filmed interviews and footage with Sonja Sonnenfeld, Frank Vajda, and Vladimir Bukovsky

## **Next steps:**

Filming additional interviews with those associated with the many Wallenberg sightings and rescue attempts as recounted by the Wallenberg family and Mrs. Sonnenfeld. Among those to be interviewed:

Nina Lagergren-Sister of Raoul Wallenberg, now age 92, Charles Levy-Attorney, Chicago, IL (supported Wallenberg rescue attempts), Frank Vajda M.D.-Australian Neurosurgeon (rescued by Wallenberg), Annette Lantos-Widow of Congressman Tom Lantos (both rescued by Wallenberg), Zbigniew Brzeziński, Henry Kissinger, Marvin Makinen (heard about Wallenberg while imprisoned in Russia), widow of Karl Gustav Svingel (Svingel led a prisoner exchange attempt), members of the New York Raoul Wallenberg Committee.

To complete the documentary, additional filming is needed at locations associated with the story, collection of archival materials, German to English translation and transcription, graphics work, musical score, and a distribution plan.



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## Other Film Information

This documentary explores the many contacts and missions; the national and international figures who worked with Sonja Sonnenfeld and the Raoul Wallenberg Committee to free Wallenberg. It offers thoughts about what happened to Wallenberg in Russia, where it is believed he was alive for many decades after the Russians reported his death, and highlights information from Russian officials about his whereabouts, as well as stories of meetings with famous spies. It tells the fascinating story about the family's trip to Moscow and of several daring and dangerous rescue missions.

The documentary film "Rescuing Raoul Wallenberg" will be feature length between 90-120 minutes and begins when both Raoul Wallenberg and Sonja Sonnenfeld were born, just six weeks apart in 1912 and chronicles their youths in parallel, following their development until the onset of World War II.

- The film next delves into the darkness of the Holocaust; Sonja's (as a Jew and Swedish Citizen) subsequent departure from Berlin, and Wallenberg's journey to Budapest.
- The film then explores how and why Wallenberg was taken by the Russians and what his life might have been like in captivity. This section includes the struggle of Raoul Wallenberg's parents--and later his sister and brother-- to save Wallenberg, with the help of Per Anger--who worked with Wallenberg in Budapest.
- These events lead us to 1979 when Sonja Sonnenfeld joined the Raoul Wallenberg Committee in Stockholm just one day after "retiring" and undertook her own passionate rescue mission with Wallenberg's sister and brother, Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel.
- We explore how Sonja worked with world leaders and other persons in her quest. Told through her own voice, we will learn about the support she received from Simon Wiesenthal, Henry Kissinger, Helmut Kohl, President George H.W. Bush and many others towards finding and freeing Wallenberg.
- There are many intriguing stories from this point in time as well, including her meetings with spies and several rescue missions she helped to organize. The film delves into the evidence suggesting that Wallenberg was still alive even as late as the 1980s or 90s.



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- Dramatic re-enactments help to illustrate what life might have been like in one of these Russian “camps of silence” where Wallenberg was held. We will also depict the visit of the Raoul Wallenberg Committee to Moscow where some of Raoul Wallenberg’s personal articles were returned and the family was asked to sign the death certificate dating his death to 1947 (which was refused because it is well known he lived beyond 1947).
- Only three months before Sonja passed away, on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, she had made her last visit to Berlin and Bremen, Germany to again lecture at German schools. Even more inspiring is that Sonja had still another trip planned for September 2010, just weeks before what would have been her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday. These lectures will also be highlighted in the film.
- The film will close with the somber reality that Wallenberg’s ultimate fate may never be known. It will also conclude with the inspiration that both Wallenberg and Sonja Sonnenfeld offer to the world and will pay tribute to both of them and their impassioned and selfless struggles to make the world a better place.

## About the Raoul Wallenberg Children's Foundation

The Raoul Wallenberg Children's Foundation International (RWCFI) is based in Stockholm Sweden, Saint Petersburg Russia, and Hartford Connecticut. The Foundation was initiated with the backing of the official Raoul Wallenberg Committee (RWC) in Stockholm whose founders were Wallenberg's siblings, Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel, along with Swedish Diplomat Per Anger. Their mission for more than 30 years was to find and secure Raoul Wallenberg's release from the Soviet prison system. Our launching documentary film project tells the story of Sonja Sonnenfeld, who joined the committee in 1979 and took responsibility for leading Wallenberg’s rescue effort.

***Our mission, in the spirit of Wallenberg’s work, is to ensure that families and children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, have the resources needed for achieving optimal family and child outcomes.***



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## Foundation work:

- Establishment, with the Raoul Wallenberg Committee, of the Raoul Wallenberg Medical Center in Moscow for the purpose of research and follow up care of children from Chernobyl.
- Distribution of approximately \$ 3,000,000.00 customs value of Humanitarian aid to children's hospitals and orphanages in St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad).
- Founded with Russian Partners the Raoul Wallenberg International University for Family and Child in Saint Petersburg, recently awarded recognition as one of the three best private educational institutions for child and family study in Russia. [Learn more.](#)
- RWCFI is raising funds in the US to support programs that promote healthy child development.