

Wallenberg Lecture Introduction/9-25-90

Purpose: to present Wallenberg Medal to ELIE WEISEL (el-EE' vee-ZELL')

Irene Butter will introduce Wallenberg Lecture itself and then introduce JJD

Good Evening and on behalf of the University of Michigan

it is my great honor to welcome our world renowned Wallenberg Medalist,
Mr. Elie Weisel and our many distinguished guests and colleagues.
to this inaugural Wallenberg Lecture and Medal presentation.

As you know, this is the first

of what will be an annual event at the University of Michigan.

The Raoul Wallenberg Medal and Lecture Series.

This program, is named after one of our most illustrious alumni, Raul Wallenberg.

It is intended to honor each year a person

whose life and work embody those humanitarian principles
and achievements..

...that great moral courage....

that so gloriously characterized Raul Wallenberg's life.

Raul Wallenberg was a hero.

Sadly, in today's world that term "hero" sounds an archaic note.

The ideal of heroism is perhaps another victim
of this age of "lowered expectations".

Today, we offer our youth few easily recognized heroes at least in popular culture.

But we still produce heroes,

and, tragically, we still produce the conditions that cry out for heroes.

people who will use their talents, sacrifice themselves for others,
to protect the poor, the innocent, the oppressed and persecuted.
People who struggle for peace, oppose prejudice and injustice.
We still have people who care for the sick, the homeless and the
hungry.
People who teach the truth when it is forbidden or just unpopular.
We still have heroes, but perhaps the problem is
that we do not understand their true value in these materialistic
times..

As I said, Raul Wallenberg was a hero.

He sacrificed his own life to rescue persecuted Jews.
from the Nazi Holocaust.

During one of the darkest chapters of human history,

Wallenberg was one who kept the light of human decency aglow.

Our University is so honored to count him among our alumni.

He came to us seeking a truly democratic education,
different from that he would have found in Europe or
from America's great private institutions of the time.

I like to think that the Michigan education he went away with in 1935,
helped form his conscience and character.

helped prepare him for his great work.

But there is no real accounting for heroes.

All we know is that throughout history,
humanity has been blest with them.
even in its most wretched moments.

Heroes are a reminder that we humans are capable of greatness.

even when the news about our propensity
for indifference and evil is most painfully bleak.

Heroes come in many forms.

Introduction of Elie Wiesel.

Tonight we honor the hero as storyteller and teacher.

The work and achievements of Elie Weisel are well known
to all of you.

Author of some 30 volumes, educator, philosopher and human rights
advocate.

He is a Nobel Laureate,

and has been awarded the United States
Congressional Gold Medal of Achievement
and the Medal of Liberty
along with countless other awards and honors from around the world.

As I said, it is rare for us to recognize heroes in this time

It is even more rare for a storyteller and teacher to be heralded
by all the world for heroic greatness.

The fundamental reason Mr. Weisel is so honored is, I think,
that he has become our conscience.

He brings us dreadful news about our capacity for evil

but at the same time he teaches that we need not be its victims.
he teaches that it is within our power to transcend and overcome evil
if we remember and learn from our worst history.

As he puts it, he is a "witness".

The lone family survivor of the death camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald,
Mr. Weisel, as Irving Abrahamson puts it,
having experienced the Holocaust,
tells the tale to humanity in order to prevent another catastrophe.

The same author points out that he has brought to his audience

the classic message of the Jew: **There is no life without morality.**

As Mr. Weisel, himself, has written:

“We only seek justice.

We do not aim to hurt, only to sensitize.

By retelling our tales we seek to make our contemporaries aware of what happens to human beings when they live in an inhuman society surrounded and penetrated by indifference on the one hand and evil on the other”.

There is no more important lesson for us to learn.

And it is certainly fitting that this University honor a great teacher whose message is timeless ...more important today than ever.

It is also appropriate that this alma mater of Raoul Wallenberg honor a man who has acted on his convictions on behalf of so many people persecuted, oppressed and suffering in many countries around the world.

I want to thank all those who have helped create this program.

It is a wonderful contribution to the intellectual and moral life of our University.

AWARD Ceremony

Now let me ask MR. WEISEL, to join me for the presentation.

I feel privileged to award you this first Raoul Wallenberg Medal.

I know of no one who better exemplifies what it stands for.

Award Medal

Ladies and Gentleman, please join me in acknowledging Mr. Weisel.