

Sousa Mendes Foundation

Annual Report

2014



The Sousa Mendes Foundation, dedicated to honoring the memory of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and to educating the world about his good work, has a two-fold mission: raising funds for the restoration of the Casa do Passal and the creation within its walls of a museum and memorial site; and sponsoring US-based projects that perpetuate his legacy.

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:

Mariana Abrantes de Sousa, Marie J. Gomes, Robert Jacobvitz, Olivia Mattis, Harry Oesterreicher, Della Peretti, Raquel Rosa, Jackie Schwarz, Lee Sterling

EDITOR: Olivia Mattis
DESIGNER: Fiona Cashell

SOUSA MENDES FOUNDATION, PO BOX 4065, HUNTINGTON, NY 11743, USA.
PH: (206) 426-5951

www.sousamendesfoundation.org



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The year 2014 saw the beginning of the reconstruction of the Sousa Mendes home, Casa do Passal. This is a long-awaited dream of the Sousa Mendes family, the Sousa Mendes visa recipient families, the Sousa Mendes Foundation, and all supporters of the cause worldwide. This is truly a new beginning and the first step towards the realization of the dream of having a fitting memorial to Aristides de Sousa Mendes in Portugal, his country of birth. (Read more about this project on **page 5**.)

2014 also saw the completion of a new documentary film, *With God Against Man*, by Semyon Pinkhasov, based on the “Journey on the Road to Freedom” that the Sousa Mendes Foundation co-organized and co-led in 2013 through France, Spain and Portugal. It follows the pilgrims as they “search for Sousa Mendes” in the footsteps of the 1940 refugees. (See images from this film on **pages 8 and 9**.)

In 2014 we held a record number of events from coast to coast and expanded our social media beyond Facebook to Twitter. We received generous support from a number of foundations as well as donations of all sizes from hundreds of champions of the cause. (Please see Donor Honor Roll on **page 12**.) The cause is simple: to spread the story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes as an inspiring example of the lesson that one person can make a difference.

With your help, we are making a difference... *together*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia".

Olivia Mattis, Ph.D.

President, Sousa Mendes Foundation

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

The Sousa Mendes Foundation is proud to present *Aristides de Sousa Mendes: Hero of the Holocaust*. This 36-page graphic novel by famed cartoonist José Ruy tells the gripping true story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and his decision to defy the direct orders of his government in order to save the lives of thousands of refugees during the 1940 exodus from Nazi-occupied Europe.

This vividly illustrated, full-color book, translated into English by Della Peretti, is sure to enlighten and inspire young readers, ages 10-15, with the lesson that one person can make a difference. The back section of the book includes photographs of the real people involved in the story — Aristides de Sousa Mendes, his family, and many of those that he saved.

At the affordable price of \$14.99, why not order copies for friends, family, and your local public library? It would also make a great complement to the Passover Haggadah. For more information or to order yours, please click [here](#).



Above: Lolita Goldstein with refugees departing from Lisbon harbor on the Serpa Pinto, 1941.

Left: Lolita Goldstein in 1940.

Right: Lolita Goldstein today.



SPOTLIGHT: LOLITA GOLDSTEIN

The Sousa Mendes Foundation is creating an enduring video archive of interviews with eyewitnesses to the events of 1940. One of these is Ms. Lolita Goldstein, age 97, who was a refugee aid worker in Lisbon in 1940, employed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Olivia Mattis interviewed Ms. Goldstein about her work in processing the Sousa Mendes visa recipients and other refugees who escaped Nazi-occupied Europe via Lisbon. Ms. Goldstein spoke about the process involved, including her work in finding ship passage for the refugees to the United States and other final destinations. The video interview archive, involving the participation

of documentary filmmaker Anton Evangelista, is entirely funded by the Sousa Mendes Foundation's generous donors.

Thank you for helping us to preserve history!

PHOENIX RISING – CASA DO PASSAL

Located in Cabanas de Viriato, in central Portugal, Casa do Passal was the family home of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and his large family. When he was recalled from his post as Consul of Portugal in Bordeaux, France in 1940 he received many refugees there, including the members of the Belgian Government in exile. He lived there later after being forced into retirement from the



diplomatic service. The Casa do Passal site consists of a palatial country home, with a mansarde in the French style, situated on a small estate, with a grand view of Serra da Estrela to the east, Portugal's highest mountain, and looks to the church and cemetery at the back, where visitors often leave small pebbles at the Sousa Mendes family mausoleum as a sign of respect.

After Sousa Mendes died in poverty, the Passal estate was sold at a creditor's auction and remained uninhabited ever since, eventually falling into disrepair. It was declared a site of "public interest" by the municipality in 1993 and classified as a Portuguese National Monument as of March 3, 2011 by the Portuguese national heritage authority. The Fundação Aristides de Sousa Mendes (FASM), created in 2000 by the Sousa Mendes family to honor his memory and with the mission to create a museum in the former family home, acquired the Casa do Passal estate in 2001, thanks to a sizable grant from the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although a group of volunteers worked to shore up some of the damaged floors and to patch the roof in 2004, it remained exposed to the elements and new gaps appeared in the tile roof since 2008 until it collapsed entirely in 2013. That year, FASM transferred possession of Passal to DRCC, the official Regional Cultural Directorate, under a 10-year *contrato de comodato* for the purpose of carrying out the restoration, starting with replacement of the collapsed roof, and with extensive structural reinforcement.

In 2014, DRCC, under the able leadership of Celeste Amaro, launched this Phase I of the restoration of Passal, at a cost of 316,000 euros, 85% financed by EU Structural Fund grants and the remainder by the Portuguese Government. In addition, the Sousa Mendes Foundation has earmarked \$35,000 of funds raised thus far for the Passal project, to be transferred in 2015.

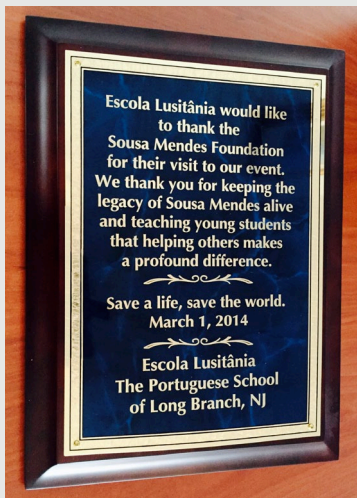
The renovation project, a complete transformation of the building exterior, is documented on our Facebook page in the album **Phoenix Rising (Casa do Passal)**. The phoenix is indeed rising from the ashes!

The next phases of the Passal project will include the development of a museum program and an operating business plan for a sustainable Sousa Mendes memorial center, as Passal takes its place among other cultural sites such as Holocaust museums, Sites of Conscience and local and regional cultural tourism circuits such as the Rede de Judiarias, the network of Jewish quarters currently being developed. The Casa do Passal is key to bringing the story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and his Act of Conscience to a wider and more interested audience.

Hence the importance of helping to preserve this tangible evidence of our shared cultural heritage of peace.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

The Sousa Mendes Foundation collaborated with the high school-age students of the Escola Lusitânia in Long Branch, New Jersey, and their teacher, Raquel Rosa, on a project, "Save a Life, Save a World." First, students conducted research about Sousa Mendes's life and learned who he was and what he did. They watched the movie *O Consul de Bordéus* (The Consul of Bordeaux) during class and studied the website of the Sousa Mendes Foundation. The students created their own video about Sousa Mendes that was publicly screened on March 1st 2014, during a formal dinner in the presence of Portuguese Consul General Dr. Pedro Oliveira, Mayor Adam Schneider of the City of Long Branch, Congressman Frank Pallone, and representatives of the Sousa



Mendes Foundation. These included then-President Louis-Philippe Mendes, Joan Halperin, the SMF New Jersey Representative, and João Crisóstomo, member of the SMF Advisory Council.

Halperin gave a moving presentation to the assembled gathering about Sousa Mendes's role in her family's exodus



in 1940. Crisóstomo told the students that they should be proud to have such as hero as part of their Portuguese heritage. Mayor Schneider described the Sousa Mendes story as a perfect vehicle for strengthening Jewish-Christian relations. Also screened during the event was the short documentary film, *I am Alive Thanks to Aristides de Sousa Mendes*, by the young Portuguese filmmaker Priscilla Fontoura. During the first weekend in May the students took a field trip to Washington, DC where they visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Portuguese Embassy, and the White House. At the Portuguese Embassy the students met the Portuguese Ambassador, Dr. Nuno Brito. At this meeting the students had a chance to learn about the role of a diplomat and about the political position of the Portuguese Government during World War II.



Louis-Philippe Mendes receives key to the City of Long Branch from Mayor Adam Schneider as Raquel Rosa (far left) and her students look on.

INTERNATIONAL VISIBILITY

At the International Holocaust remembrance conference “Hope II,” in Haidari, Greece, the Sousa Mendes Foundation was well represented, with Dominique Torrès and Della Peretti, daughters of visa recipients; Louis-Philippe Mendes and Aristides Sousa Mendes, grandsons of Aristides de Sousa Mendes; and Mariana Abrantes de Sousa, a longtime activist in the Sousa Mendes cause.

Each talk was customized to appeal to students by presenting the intimate, personal experiences of the speakers’ relatives in a historically accurate context. Each spoke about the courage of Aristides de Sousa Mendes in saving thousands of people from annihilation at the hands of the Nazis. Abrantes discussed the fatal if unpredictable progression from prejudice and intolerance to persecution, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The audience was made up of high school students, local officials, press, and speakers from fifteen

countries. It was financed by the European Union to bring awareness about acts of resistance during World War II. Other organizational participants in the event were the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, the Nobel Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, and other prestigious organizations. The talks are available [here](#).



Della Peretti



Mariana Abrantes de Sousa

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

Yom Hashoah commemorates the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and is an annual event to remember the victims of the Holocaust as well as the heroes and rescuers. The City of Rochester chose Aristides de Sousa Mendes as its theme for the 2014 event and invited two representatives of the Sousa Mendes Foundation to deliver Keynote addresses: Olivia Mattis and Louis-Philippe Mendes. Mattis spoke about her family’s exodus in 1940 and about the genesis of the Foundation. Mendes spoke about the aftermath of the 1940 events and his family’s decades-long quest for justice. Also in attendance was visa recipient Rochelle Kashtan, along with her children and grandchildren.

The following morning, Mattis, Mendes and Kashtan spoke to a citywide gathering of young people, ages 12-18, about Aristides de Sousa Mendes and his role in saving the lives of innocents. The event featured a screening of the new documentary film *With God Against Man* by Semyon Pinkhasov. The students asked many questions, and were most curious to hear from Kashtan about her time as a child refugee. The ceremony and educational program were organized by Bonnie Abrams, Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester’s Center for Holocaust Awareness and Information (CHAI).

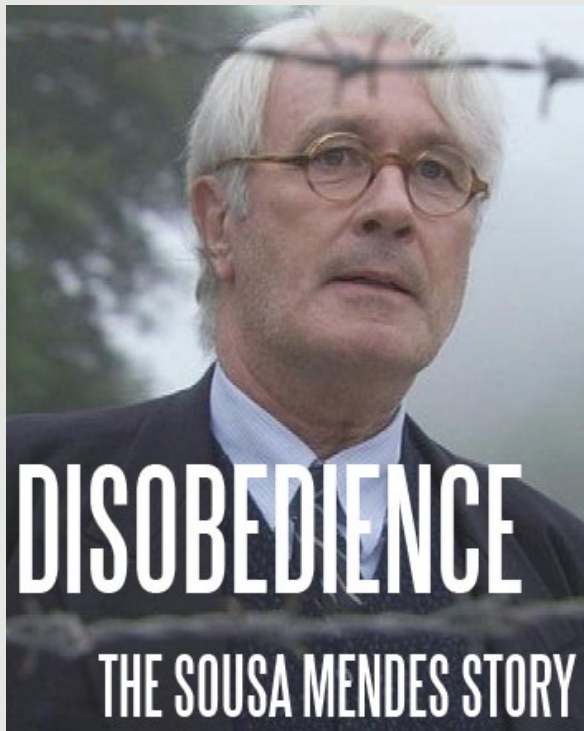


Olivia Mattis



Louis-Philippe Mendes

SOUSA MENDES ON SCREEN



In 2014, *Disobedience: The Sousa Mendes Story* was screened by a dozen Jewish Film Festivals in the USA and Canada, and at many other venues including universities, synagogues and cultural centers. The film also premiered in Panama and Aruba in the Sousa Mendes Foundation's first forays into Central America and the Caribbean. The film was awarded Best Narrative Feature at the San Diego Jewish Film Festival. The Sousa Mendes Foundation provides a guest speaker at most of these events, greatly increasing the audience's understanding and appreciation of the historic and far-reaching implications of the actions of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. The distribution of this film was ably handled for three years by Harry Oesterreicher and is now being managed by Robert Jacobvitz.



Above: Film stills from *Disobedience: The Sousa Mendes Story*.



Above: Harry Oesterreicher



Above: Film still from *With God Against Man*. Gerald Mendes stands outside the Portuguese Consulate in Bayonne, France, where his grandfather delivered visas in June 1940.



Above: Film still from *With God Against Man*. Visa recipient Lee Sterling searches for the house in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, where he lived in 1940.



Above: Film still from *With God Against Man*. Joan Halperin retraces the route her family took on their exodus to freedom.

In addition, *With God Against Man*, the new documentary film by Semyon Pinkhasov, was shown in the United States and abroad. In Sussex, England, it was screened as part of a conference on the subject of “June 1940,” with post-screening remarks by Dr. Arthur Hartog, who appears in the film and whose family members received visas from Sousa Mendes. A screening in Rhode Island featured a discussion led by Law Professor Daniel Subotnik, son of visa recipients. In New York City, the film was the centerpiece of an important event at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, followed by a panel discussion

moderated by James Traub of *The New York Times*. In addition to the filmmaker, panelists included Joan Halperin, daughter of visa recipients, and Dr. Richard Weisberg, Law Professor, both of whom appear in the film, and Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, former Director of the Department for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, and currently a member of the Sousa Mendes Foundation Advisory Council.

To arrange a screening of either of these films, please **contact us**.

ORIGINAL EXHIBITION

These are my people! – The Story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes is an exhibition, appropriate for audiences of all ages, that was curated by the Sousa Mendes Foundation and professionally designed and produced. In twenty richly illustrated panels, the exhibition interweaves biographical details about Aristides de Sousa Mendes with the story of the largest refugee migration in history – the one following the Nazi invasion of the Benelux countries on May 10, 1940 and the fall of Paris on June 14, 1940. Famous Sousa Mendes visa recipients depicted in the exhibition include Hans and Margret Rey (authors of *Curious George*), Salvador Dali, and Maurice Rothschild. But most visa recipients depicted (and in reality) were ordinary families escaping the horrors of the Nazi occupation of Europe. Panel topics are: Introduction; Twins From a Distinguished Family; Marriage and Diplomatic Postings; Family Life; May 10-18, 1940 – Germany Attacks Four Countries; Refugees Try to Escape the Nazis; Salazar and Circular 14; The Fall of Paris; Chaos in Bordeaux; The Consul and the Rabbi; Day of Conscience; Assembly Line; Refugees Cross to Safety; Ships to Freedom; Sousa Mendes Visa Recipients – Famous and Not Famous; Trial and Punishment; Descent Into Poverty; Loss of the Family Home; 30,000 People and Their Descendants Could Fill a Stadium!; Righting a Wrong.



Image: Installation shot from Cambridge Public Library, June 2014

For booking information please **contact us**.

FINDING THE VISA RECIPIENTS

The international research committee of the Sousa Mendes Foundation consists of 10 far-flung members in the United States and abroad: Sylvain Bromberger, Paul Freudman, Jane Friedman, Marie J. Gomes, Olivia Mattis, Linda Mendes, Harry Oesterreicher, Della Peretti, Jackie Schwarz, and João Schwarz da Silva. Their work lies in identifying visa recipients and their descendants and gathering documents related to their flight from Nazi Europe. Once located, the families are contacted for further information and documentation that the Foundation uses to create a web page for each family. These pages can be viewed [here](#).

Starting with nothing more than a name or group of names from the Visa Registry Book and, using both online and archival resources, we find as much information as possible. Every snippet of information is precious: a previously unknown maiden name found on a ship manifest, a name change stated in a citizenship application, immigration records, alumni records, the name of a son or daughter found in a wedding announcement, grandchildren named in obituaries, etc. We also look for photographs, in order to put a face to every name. Different privacy laws in Europe mean that there is sometimes a delicate choice to be taken as to which information can be posted on our website. A simple rule that we follow is to respect the privacy of any living person and to post photos of the refugees as they were in 1940 but not today.



In many cases, we have been able to reconstruct the complete journey the refugees undertook to escape. Looking at the complex routes they took, we can really appreciate the amount of energy and resourcefulness it took to find a country, any country, willing to accept them. When we first started researching names a few years ago, we didn't realize the scale this project would reach and the impact it would have on so many. Locating and contacting descendants is always a great joy as it shows that most of the visa recipients did survive and were able to build new lives thanks to the visa that Sousa Mendes signed.

This project is funded by a generous grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. The research work is ongoing, so if you know of a family that escaped the Holocaust via Portugal, please **contact us**.

Clockwise from top left: Marie J. Gomes, Paul Freudman, Jackie Schwarz, Jane Friedman.

FLORIDA REPORT



Robert Jacobvitz

In 2014 there were events all over the state of Florida, thanks to the efforts of SMF Florida representative Robert Jacobvitz. On January 22 and 23, Jacobvitz, along with SMF Board member Harry Oesterreicher and visa recipient Michael Spett attended and spoke at the Donald M. Ephraim Palm Beach Jewish Film Festival at two separate showings of *Disobedience: The Sousa Mendes Story*, one in **Palm Beach** and the other in **Boynton Beach**. Oesterreicher, son and grandson of visa recipients, and Spett shared their family stories. Jacobvitz, one of the prime champions of Sousa Mendes since the

1980's, spoke about his role in obtaining posthumous justice for Sousa Mendes in the United States and Portugal. The film was next shown on February 4 at the 14th Annual Broward County David Posnack JCC Jewish Film Festival in **Davie**, with Jacobvitz leading the post-film discussion. On March 16 and 17 the film was screened at the 5th Annual Jewish Film Festival of **Sarasota-Manatee** at two separate venues, with Jacobvitz leading the discussion. On June 8, Olivia Mattis presented the film at Temple Beth Hayam in **Stuart**. On November 9, the film was shown to approximately 800 participants at the 13th Annual Kristallnacht Film Forum held in **Boca Raton** under the auspices of the March of the Living, Southern Florida Region, with Spett and Jacobvitz leading the post-screening discussion. One week later on November 16, the film was shown at the **Jacksonville** Jewish Film Festival, with the discussion again led by Jacobvitz.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REPORT

January 2014 started off with a presentation to a large gathering at the **Pasadena** Temple, where SMF Board Member and visa recipient Lee Sterling spoke about the events of June 1940, the Sousa Mendes family, the role of Salazar and the infamous Circular 14, and the impact of the events on his family. On February 8 and 16, the film *Disobedience: The Sousa Mendes Story* was screened during the San Diego Jewish Festival in venues in **Carlsbad** and **Clairemont**. In Clairemont, the film was simulcast in three theaters! The film tied for the "Audience Choice" Award for Narrative Feature of the festival. Grossmont College in **El Cajon** hosted a film screening on April 10, with Sterling leading a post-film discussion. There were over 200 students attending the event, many of them refugees themselves from the turmoil in Iraq.

Later in April Sterling spoke to two groups of children, 4th-6th graders, at Temple Solel in **Cardiff**, about his experience as a child refugee and the capacity of each person to make a difference. Sterling spoke to an audience of older adults on August 26 at the University of California, **San Diego**, in the context of the Osher Lifetime Learning Institute. On November 17, Jewish Family Service of **Palm Springs** hosted a film screening, with Sterling again leading a post-film discussion. Also in November, the Brandeis National Committee San Dieguito Chapter hosted a screening and discussion with Lee Sterling in **Encinitas**.



Lee Sterling in front of the Casa do Passal.
Photo: J. P. Marnoto



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