

Sousa Mendes Foundation

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# ANNUAL REPORT



75 YEARS • 1940 - 2015

2015



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### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:

Mariana Abrantes de Sousa, Olivia Mattis, Gerald Mendes

Cover image: Great-granddaughters of Sousa Mendes visa recipients. Photo: Betty Adler

Designer: Fiona Cashell

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SOUSA MENDES FOUNDATION, PO BOX 4065, HUNTINGTON, NY 11743, USA

PH: (206) 426-5951

[www.sousamendesfoundation.org](http://www.sousamendesfoundation.org)

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.



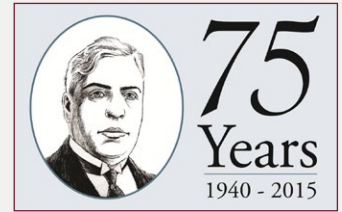


## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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In 2015 we marked the 75th anniversary of the heroic act of rescue of Aristides de Sousa Mendes in the Spring of 1940. It was also the fifth anniversary of our Foundation – so there was a lot to celebrate.

Highlights of the year included:



- receipt of a \$35,000 grant from arts benefactor Marilyn Ziering to present the World Premiere of *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides*, a musical work on the life and deeds of Aristides de Sousa Mendes by American composer, Neely Bruce
- receipt of other major contributions from Eileen Berets, the Ralph Schlaeger Charitable Foundation and many individual donors
- the beginning of our partnership with actor Michel Gill, son and grandson of Sousa Mendes visa recipients
- the publication of the graphic novel *Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Holocaust Hero* by José Ruy
- the induction of Aristides de Sousa Mendes into the Garden of the Righteous at Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC
- witnessing the near-completion of the exterior renovation of the Casa do Passal in Portugal
- a successful crowdfunding campaign for our project, “Visas to Freedom, Stories of Rescue”
- and much more!

We invite you to read about these achievements in the upcoming pages and to join us in the important task of spreading the inspiring story of “perhaps the largest rescue action by a single individual during the Holocaust” (to quote historian Yehuda Bauer).

Together, we can make a difference!

Warm wishes,

Olivia Mattis, Ph.D.

President, Sousa Mendes Foundation



## MARILYN ZIERING SPEAKS ABOUT HER INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOUSA MENDES FOUNDATION

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*“When I was first approached about supporting the Sousa Mendes Foundation, I knew nothing about its mission or the life of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. But as I learned more about this heroic man I realized that his story had to be told. And what better way to tell it than through music. It was a great pleasure for me to be a part of the world premiere of the oratorio, *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides*. May the Foundation go from strength to strength.” - Marilyn Ziering*

# ACTOR MICHEL GILL JOINS THE SOUSA MENDES TEAM

“President Garrett Walker” from *House of Cards* is the son and grandson of Sousa Mendes visa recipients



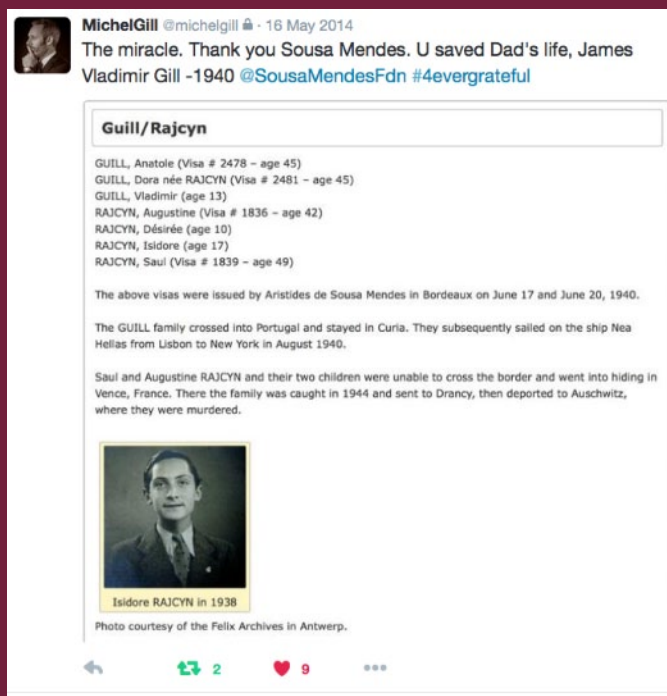
## It all started with a Tweet...

The actor Michel Gill, best known for portraying President Garrett Walker on the hit Netflix series *House of Cards*, posted a heartfelt Tweet about his gratitude towards Aristides de Sousa Mendes for saving his father's life. He attached a page from the Sousa Mendes Foundation website devoted to his family members. This Tweet caught the attention of Joan Halperin, who runs our Twitter feed, and she posted a reply. That was in May of 2014.

Fast-forward to August 5, 2015. We were beginning to cast the Los Angeles performance of Neely Bruce's dramatic oratorio, *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides*, to be held on January 24, 2016. We were looking for a narrator to portray the speaking role of César de Sousa Mendes, brother of Aristides. Our Board President, Olivia Mattis, wrote to Michel Gill's agent to see if the actor might be interested and available.

We received a response directly from the actor: “I would love to help you out and support the foundation.”

So began our collaboration with this marvelous man who has become the voice of the Foundation. So far we have worked together not only on the oratorio but also on the project “Visas to Freedom, Stories of Rescue,” for which he narrated the fundraising video.



Michel Gill featured in *Visas to Freedom, Stories of Rescue*.  
Photo: Anton Evangelista

Thank you, Michel, for generously giving your time, your talent and your heart to the Sousa Mendes cause!

Please follow us on Twitter:  
@SousaMendesFdn

# OUR MOST URGENT PROJECT

*“Visas to Freedom, Stories of Rescue” is our project to record video interviews with Sousa Mendes visa recipients and other direct witnesses to the events of 1940.*

The Sousa Mendes Foundation has launched a major initiative to videotape Holocaust refugees, now in their 80s and 90s, who escaped Nazi-occupied Europe through Portugal with the help of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Consul-General in Bordeaux.



John Tetzeli, visa recipient. Photo: Sam Li Shen Koay

## COST OF THE INTERVIEWS

Each video interview is professionally produced and costs between \$700 and \$1500, depending on where the interview subject lives and whether there is travel involved. The more funds we raise, the more interviews we will be able to film, edit, and make available in our educational materials, on our Vimeo page, and on our website.

## SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

We have already completed thirteen filmed interviews of which five have been edited and can be viewed. We have plans to create an additional fifty to sixty video interviews in the United States, South America, Europe and Israel. In addition to Holocaust refugees, these will include Holocaust aid workers and Portuguese citizens who provided



Left to right: Joan Halperin, Eileen Berets and Olivia Mattis. Photo: Anton Evangelista

shelter to Jewish families in 1940 on their way to freedom.

## DOESN'T THE SHOAH FOUNDATION INTERVIEW SURVIVORS?

The Shoah Foundation no longer interviews Holocaust survivors but is now devoted to cataloguing its existing collection. It is incumbent upon the Sousa Mendes Foundation to capture the memories of the Sousa Mendes visa recipients before it's too late. But to do so, we need your support.

Many thanks to the more than 60 donors who have already contributed to this important project!

For more information on the Crowdrise campaign, log onto:

[www.crowdrise.com/visastofreedom](http://www.crowdrise.com/visastofreedom)

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR LUCKY SWEEPSTAKES WINNERS IN OUR CROWDRISE CAMPAIGN:

Linda Arnay, Danny Cohen, Stanley Deser, Todd Dimston, Lillian And Joseph Elfenbein, Paul Freudman, Jesse Goldberg, Owen Good, Peter Gourevitch, Bernard Josefsberg, Robert Kashtan, Elis Figueiredo Kastin, Blythe Kearney, Gerald Korngold, Dina Nelson, Victor Novotny, Julio Rodrigues, Manuel Rogers, Jr., Kim Sawyer, Ferdinand Scharf and to our Grand Prize winner of a trip to Europe care of Brussels Airlines: Elena Bruce



# A NEW DAY FOR THE SOUSA MENDES HOME “CASA DO PASSAL”



Since its inception in 2010, the Sousa Mendes Foundation has had as one of its prime objectives helping to raise funds for the creation of a memorial museum in his family home “Casa do Passal” in Cabanas de Viriato. The Casa do Passal, where Sousa Mendes lived after he was barred from the diplomatic service following the disciplinary proceedings, was sold at a creditors’ auction and fell into disrepair. The Sousa Mendes Foundation has created a reserve currently standing at \$51,038.46 to support activities related to the creation of a future museum at this site.

## THE HISTORY.

In 1999, the Sousa Mendes family met in Cabanas de Viriato and jointly decided to reacquire the home with the ambition of transforming it into a fitting memorial. Accordingly and with this purpose in mind, in 2000 a Portuguese foundation was established, the Fundação Aristides de Sousa Mendes (FASM), with the help of a sizable grant from Portugal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs intended as reparations to the family. The house was acquired by FASM in 2001, but subsequently the project stagnated, and the house continued to deteriorate even as the memory of Aristides de Sousa Mendes was restored and knowledge of his actions spread among the numerous visa recipients and the growing number of admirers in various countries. Finally, in 2014 and 2015, the dream of a museum shared by the many friends of Sousa Mendes began to take shape.

## PHASE I.

Following the signature in 2013 of a 10-year “lease” (*contrato de comodato*) between FASM and the DRCC – Direção Geral de Cultura Centro – the Portuguese cultural authorities undertook the reconstruction of Casa do Passal beginning with a new roof and extensive structural reinforcement of the exterior walls. This work was made possible by the allocation of European Union structural grants and cultural budget funds, totaling €316,000. The external restoration was the subject of a site visit in August of 2015 by José Barreto Xavier, Undersecretary of Culture, and Tzipora Ramon, Ambassador of Israel to Portugal, as well as other stakeholders including national and local government officials, members of the Sousa Mendes family and representatives of the Sousa Mendes Foundation, FASM, and the Virtual Museum Aristides de Sousa Mendes (MVASM). On this occasion, the national and municipal authorities reaffirmed their commitment to the creation of the future Sousa Mendes museum as a “memorial to good citizenship in trying times” and as a key element of Portugal’s cultural heritage. The Ambassador of Israel recalled the recognition of Aristides de Sousa Mendes as a Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1966 and described the Casa do Passal as a fitting space for education about the Holocaust.

## PHASE II.

On the occasion of the August 2015 site visit, Celeste Amaro, the Regional Director of Culture, announced the new tender for further external works in 2016, namely windows, doors, retaining walls and wrought iron fences, with a cost estimate of €70,000 to be paid from Portuguese governmental funds. On this occasion, the Sousa Mendes Foundation announced our own allocation of \$50,000 towards the project.

## PHASE III.

The final and most challenging phase will consist of the “interior works” needed for the creation of the

museum which is expected to open within the next several years. This phase will require the development of a museum program and an operating business plan, to ensure that the Casa do Passal takes its place among international cultural sites. Casa do Passal is also expected to serve as an anchor to regional and national cultural tourism circuits such as the Rede de Judiarias, the network of Jewish quarters currently being developed.

The Sousa Mendes museum will tell the great story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes as well as the stories of the many people he saved. Some parallel initiatives underway include the call by the municipality of Carregal do Sal to locate the historic home furnishings and the continuing research and collection of artifacts and testimonials undertaken by the Sousa Mendes Foundation and the MVASM. The Portuguese national

and municipal authorities have set aside €800,000 for this next phase, but it is expected that the creation and operation of the future Sousa Mendes Museum will require wider resources and involvement to be sustainable in the long term.

The Sousa Mendes Foundation sees the Casa do Passal as key to making the Act of Conscience of Aristides de Sousa Mendes tangible to new generations and to bringing his story alive to a wider and more interested audience in order to promote our shared cultural heritage of peace. The renovation project is documented on our Facebook page in the album Phoenix Rising (Casa do Passal). The phoenix is indeed rising from the ashes!

**For more information, log onto:**

<http://sousamendesfoundation.org/casa-do-passal/>

## WE REMEMBER



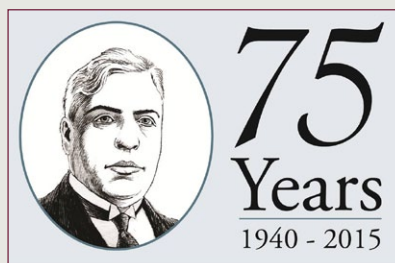
***Speech delivered by Gerald Mendes, grandson of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, on the occasion of the inauguration of a plaque on the French/Spanish border at Hendaye in memory of Aristides de Sousa Mendes***

September 25, 2015

75 years ago in Hendaye, on this bridge, thousands of people were able to cross and flee certain death. On this 75th anniversary of these events, we remember that under the skies of Europe darkened by Nazism, men, women and children were running for their lives. And that many were unable to escape, either killed on the routes of exile or succumbing to fatigue, hunger and disease. And that most borders were closed to them.

But that there were also people who were not indifferent to their misery and who reached out to them, sometimes risking their own lives or disobeying orders received.

We remember that many thousands were able to reach Portugal thanks to Aristides who gave out visas to thousands of men, women and children, allowing them to cross at this very spot, on the bridge



Portuguese people, who even brought them soup on board the trains that had just arrived in Vilar Formoso. We also remember that the people who were thus saved contributed to building the society of today, sometimes in a remarkable way.

Today, 75 years later, people are still fleeing misery and war that plague them in their countries of origin. These are men, women and children who die sometimes by the hundreds on the routes of exile or in their rickety boats. Borders are often closed to them in a confused Europe, that is detached and indifferent to the problems of faraway lands. And there are hundreds of thousands stuck on the roads of exile, giving way to hunger, fatigue and often also humiliation.

75 years after the events of 1940, we hope that there are people who are providing help and that the people thus saved will in turn contribute to building the society of tomorrow. Perhaps 75 years from now, people will remember that someone once helped these refugees too. I would like to thank the organizing committee for all the work done these past few years to honor the memory of Aristides and of all the people he saved.



# HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY AT ADAS ISRAEL CONGREGATION



On April 19, 2015 on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom Hashoah), the Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC inducted Aristides de Sousa Mendes as the latest honoree in their Garden of the Righteous. Each year for the past twenty-four years, Adas Israel has selected a Holocaust rescuer to highlight in order to remember the acts of goodness from that dark period in history. The event organizer was Judith Strauch, in coordination with Jane Friedman from the Sousa Mendes Foundation.



**Linda Mendes and Louis-Philippe Mendes unveil the plaque bearing their grandfather's name**

Members of the Sousa Mendes family were on hand from the United States, Canada and France, and visa recipient families were well represented. The event included remarks by the Portuguese Ambassador to the United States, Nuno Brito, who spoke about the recent decision by the Portuguese government



**Zander Ebin (left) and Benjamin Sloman portray Salazar and Aristides, in a performance of highlights from *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides* by Neely Bruce**

to atone for The Inquisition by offering Portuguese citizenship to descendants of Portuguese Jews that were expelled from that country centuries ago. Sousa Mendes's daughter, Marie-Rose Faure, sent a message that was read to the congregation describing her childhood memories of her father and her role in his posthumous recognition.

The event included a performance of highlights from the dramatic oratorio *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides* by Neely Bruce. Performers included Benjamin Sloman as Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Cantor Arianne Brown as Angelina, Stephan Kirchgraber as Rabbi Kruger, Zander Ebin as Salazar, and the composer at the piano. Gerald Mendes, grandson of Aristides de Sousa Mendes,



**Gerald Mendes and Cantor Arianne Brown**

narrated in the role of César, twin brother of Aristides. The capacity audience was enthralled and gave a standing ovation.

The event was highlighted in a feature article in *The Forward* "This Portuguese Diplomat was Disgraced for Saving Jews; Now, He is Getting His Due" by Nathan Guttman.



"People that he saved had no idea who he was," Friedman told Guttman. "We were all alike. We knew that our families got Portuguese visas but had no idea who Sousa Mendes was." This ceremony was one more step in assuring that Sousa Mendes

is never again forgotten. "I think my grandfather would be very proud and happy," Linda Mendes said to the reporter. "He'd be so proud that it's not only Portugal, but that so many human beings know about his story."

Photo Credits: Betty Adler

# SKI TO SEA

## TEAM SOUSA MENDES GETS TO WORK!



Top left: Sebastian Mendes. Bottom Left: Ella and Leah Jarvik. Middle: Louis-Philippe Mendes. Right (clockwise from bottom left): Gerald Mendes, Sebastian Mendes, Patricia Stenger, Louis-Philippe Mendes and David Sousa Mendes.

The Ski to Sea heptathlon competition has been held every year in Bellingham, WA, since 1973. But the 2015 edition, held on Sunday, May 24, was a very special one for "Team Sousa Mendes" which was composed of members of the Sousa Mendes family together with the family of visa recipient Lissy Jarvik. 75 years earlier, these families had been connected during another event, much sadder, in Bordeaux, France, as refugees were fleeing the Nazi invasion of Europe. In June of 1940, Lissy Jarvik, who was then a young girl, was among the refugees seeking visas to get to Portugal, as they were running for their lives. Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who was Consul General

of Portugal in Bordeaux, had received the decree "Circular 14" from the Portuguese Foreign Ministry, stating that no visas should be delivered to Jews and other "undesirables." Sousa Mendes disobeyed and delivered several thousand visas in a short period of time, in order to save all these people. In May 2015, the Sousa Mendes and Jarvik families were reunited to have a great time by competing together in a team against some 300 other teams whose members had to relay from cross country ski, to downhill ski, running, cycling, kayaking, mountain biking, and canoe.

*Congratulations to our team!*



# SOUSA MENDES'S LIST

## THE SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS

*[The below text is excerpted from articles by Olivia Mattis published in 2015 in PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators, and Avotaynu Online, a forum for Jewish genealogy enthusiasts.]*

The Sousa Mendes Foundation actively seeks families who received lifesaving visas from the Portuguese diplomat Aristides de Sousa Mendes in the Spring of 1940. Sousa Mendes, stationed in Bordeaux, France, rescued thousands from the Holocaust by providing them visas to Portugal in violation of strict orders issued by his own government. If you know of a family that escaped the Holocaust through Portugal between 1940 and 1942, please write to us at: [info@sousamendesfoundation.org](mailto:info@sousamendesfoundation.org).

“Most people who were saved by Sousa Mendes don’t know that they were saved by anyone,” declared Dr. Sylvain Bromberger, professor emeritus at MIT and himself one of the lucky ones. To date, the Foundation has identified approximately 3,300 Sousa Mendes visa recipients individually by name. To explore these visa recipients by country, by ship, by name or by region in Portugal where they resided, please visit our website.

### DOCUMENTING EACH FAMILY: THE WORK OF THE SOUSA MENDES FOUNDATION

Our research has as its ambitious goal to identify all Sousa Mendes visa recipients worldwide and trace each family’s story of survival. Beginning with scans from a handwritten visa registry book and cross-referencing it with ship manifests and other records, we have been able to reconstruct entire family groups, including names, faces, ages, artifacts, and testimonials, thus bringing each family’s story to life. A grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany has greatly aided in this effort.

Among the models for our project is Serge Klarsfeld’s (1994) magisterial book *French Children of the Holocaust: A Memorial*, a richly documented account of the more than 11,000 French children murdered in the Holocaust. While our project shares that undertaking’s goal “to fill in as many blanks as possible” (p. 104), the action we are documenting — rescue, not murder — is its mirror image. Accordingly, just as Klarsfeld uses deportation lists and camp arrival records to document the fate of the murdered Jews of France, so do we use ship manifests and immigration records to document the fate of those who were saved on French soil in the largest solo rescue operation of the war.



## SOUSA MENDES'S LIST

The research process involves several layers of work. First, we needed to decipher the names in the visa registry book, which were written in great haste, in a variety of hands and with frequent misspellings and abbreviations. We then grouped these names into families, cross-referenced, and verified them using ship manifests and online genealogical databases. This process allowed our team to ascertain each family group's complete traveling party and add any missing names to our list. Thus we learned, for example, that in a family of two adults and four children, with only two visas granted, six lives were saved. We then cull further information from the manifests, including city of last residence. For any refugee families that had resided in Belgium, we obtain further information and documentation from the Foreigner Files in the Felix Archives in Antwerp, including photographs, dates and places of birth, alternate spellings of names, and maiden names.

The last stage in the process entails identifying, locating, and contacting visa recipients or their descendants. This stage involves research into immigration records, obituaries, telephone directories, and social media. By the time we reach out to the families to ask for testimonials, photographs, passports, and other artifacts, we usually have a great deal of information to share with them.

## ADDING FACES TO NAMES

An important goal of our project is to put faces to as many names as possible. This is especially important in

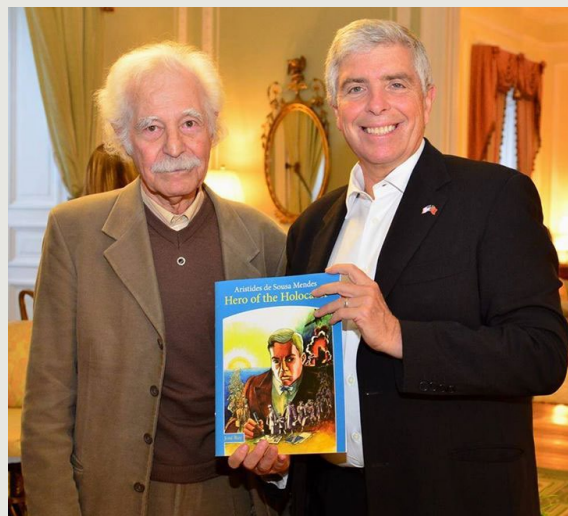
those cases where the refugee was unable to leave Nazi-occupied France despite the visa from Sousa Mendes, and was subsequently deported and murdered. We are aware of other cases where the refugees managed to embark on a ship, only to drown when the ship was torpedoed. We are able to obtain photos of the visa recipients from the Foreigner Files in the Felix Archives; Brazil immigration cards; and the families themselves, if we are in contact with them. The work done by our research team goes beyond a scholarly or educational function to serve a memorial role, as well.

As survivor and author Roman Kent remarked in a speech at the Center for Jewish History (2011), the Allies won the war militarily, but it was the Righteous Among the Nations — those individuals in Nazi-occupied countries who at great personal risk refused to be bystanders in the face of evil — who won the war over morality, by safeguarding timeless humanistic values. Similarly, in a July 2012 speech marking the anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv round-ups in Paris of 1942, French President François Hollande declared that in the dark days of World War II, when the collaborationist French government betrayed the trust of its citizens by failing to uphold their rights, it was the Righteous Among the Nations who saved France's honor. Chief among these was Aristides de Sousa Mendes, whose rescue action on French soil was unparalleled.

### LINK TO FULL ARTICLE:

<http://www.avotaynuonline.com/2015/05/sousa-mendess-list-search-for-survivors/>

# GIVE THE GIFT OF INSPIRATION!



Published in March of 2015, our graphic novel by award-winning cartoonist José Ruy tells the gripping true story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes through the cartoon medium to reach young readers, ages 10-15.

Order yours today from our website, [www.sousamendesfoundation.org/store/](http://www.sousamendesfoundation.org/store/) or from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). 32 pages, full color, \$14.99 plus tax.

When ordering on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) be sure to set your home page to “[smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)” and select “Aristides de Sousa Mendes Foundation - US” (our official name) as your designated charity. Easy!

Graphic novel author José Ruy (left) with US Ambassador to Portugal, Dr. Robert Sherman.

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