

They saved lives with rubber stamps and signatures

Our Congressman since 1980, Tom Lantos, has a distinction no other Congressman has ever had, or would ever want. Tom's life was once in grave jeopardy. He was saved, like thousands of other Hungarian Jews, by a Swede who could have just closed his eyes to massive injustice during World War II. Instead, Raoul Wallenberg, through means ranging from clever to devious to conniving to illegal, managed to save thousands whose only crime was their ancestry.

True to the cynical saying "no good deed goes unpunished" Wallenberg's heroic use of diplomatic legerdemain eventually cost him his life.

Years ago I wrote Lantos to suggest it appropriate to honor Wallenberg with a postage stamp. It could be part of a postal series, Heroes of Freedom.

While Lantos' reply was discouraging, I'm happy to say a Wallenberg stamp now exists. Tom Lantos recently had a gathering in his office in San Mateo to honor not only Raoul Wallenberg, but other diplomatic heroes, men who, often against their government's policies, gave out tens of thousands of visas which allowed some Jews to get to relative safety.

The Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, France, Aristedes de Sousa Mendes; the Japanese Deputy Consul General in Kaunas, Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara;

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



Consul Jan Zwartendijk, and Wallenberg were honored by Lantos in the presence of members of some of their families.

Between them they saved tens of thousands, yet for every person saved, perhaps 50 or 60 died. Such was the enormity of the evil of Adolf Hitler and his followers.

Think of the human potential lost because of indifference, fear, or selfishness by most other diplomats. Think of the desperation of Jews helpless before grave danger. Were there 50 other brilliant economists like Tom Lantos who went to the gas chambers? Perhaps. Were there many other brilliant minds destroyed? Certainly. Einstein easily could have been among them. We will never know who the world lost because of "The Final Solution" to a Jewish Problem that existed only in the demented minds of the Nazi leadership.

Sousa Mendes interests me especially. He was Portuguese, like my

grandfather. He acted from deeply felt Catholic principles. His wife backed him, as did Sugihara's. It's ironic Sugihara was punished, not honored, after the war. He had disobeyed his government. The Japanese government, even while Japan was occupied, was able to punish those in its ranks who had preferred principle to expediency. Again, "no good deed..."

I was stationed in Germany for two years in the 1950s. It's ironic, but true, that I met not one German who let me know he was a Nazi. While I didn't go around asking, many of those who survived the war must have been horribly ashamed of what had been done. I'm happy we can honor those, like Sousa Mendes, Sugihara, Zwartendijk and Wallenberg, who saved those they could, one at a time. They chose to save the very lives of others in imminent peril. When you see a Wallenberg postage stamp, stop for a moment of silence. Honor him and honor those he was unable to save.