

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

A Public Diplomacy Legacy ^[1]

Public diplomacy mourns yet another practitioner who helped tear down the Berlin Wall during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Mo Rothman, a former top Hollywood film executive, died at the age of 92 in Los Angeles on September 15. Mo was a member of our volunteer Film Acquisitions Committee at the U.S. Information Agency in the 1980's.

As administrator of the rights to the classic Charlie Chaplin silent films, Mo obtained access to them for us, and they became instant hits and needed no translation for audiences abroad, who loved Chaplin's "City Lights," "Limelight," "The Goldrush!," and others. The Chaplin collection fed into more than 500 Hollywood films collected by the head of our volunteer Film Acquisition Committee, Leo Jaffee, former Chairman of Columbia Pictures, who is also gone. As is Charlie Wick, also from Hollywood, who headed the USIA throughout President Reagan's two terms, when I headed the TV and Film Service.

Part 1 of Charlie Chaplin's "Limelight"

Mo lived in London, but joined other members of the Film Acquisition Committee to meet in the Oval Office with President Reagan, who expressed gratitude for the free gift to America of films, which had a book value of several millions of dollars, the biggest patriotic Hollywood joint effort to help its government since World War II. The President already knew Mo and others from his Hollywood days. Credit goes to Charlie Wick who spirited that Film Acquisition Committee, which fed into our successful international video tape rental club, that operated out of U.S. embassies and cultural centers abroad.

There were lots of folks who played a role in bringing down that wall, and memories fade. There ought to be a U.S. Public Diplomacy Hall of Fame that could be sprung from someone's budget, to honor the unsung heroes of that era. I've got several nominations, as I'm sure you all do.
