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HOUSE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The members of the House of Representatives of the State of Illinois learned with sadness of the death of Lisa Fittko on March 12, 2005; and

WHEREAS, Lisa Ekstein was born in 1909 in Uzhgorod in what was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire; most of her childhood was spent in Budapest and Vienna; she was evacuated and sent to the Netherlands with other children for a year during World War I; after the war, her family moved to Berlin; and

WHEREAS, She emerged from a leftist, artistic family to become active in the resistance to Hitler in the early months of his rule, then fled to continue the fight in other European countries for seven years; during her time in Europe, she met and married another leftist activist, Hans Fittko; for seven tense months in 1940 and 1941, the Fittkos escorted refugees on a tortuous path over the Pyrenees mountains so they could go on to Spanish and Portuguese ports to seek passage to safe havens; and

WHEREAS, Many of the people she helped were intellectuals, artists, and anti-Nazi organizers; the first refugee she helped was Walter Benjamin, a Marxist literary critic and philosopher whose work has drawn new interest in recent years because of his provocative insights on subjects from consumerism to surrealism; she had earlier helped the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who had been her friend in Paris, get out of a prison in France; and

WHEREAS, Together, the Fittkos became part of the rescue mission of Varian Fry, an American who is credited with saving about 2,000 people, many of them artists and intellectuals, including André Breton, Marc Chagall, and Max Ernst; and

1           WHEREAS, The Fittkos eventually escaped to Cuba, then went  
2 on to Chicago, where Ms. Fittko's brother lived; Mr. Fittko  
3 preceded her in death in 1960 and was posthumously awarded  
4 Israel's Yad Vashem Medal, an honor reserved for gentiles who  
5 risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust; and

6           WHEREAS, Ms. Fittko became well known in postwar Germany,  
7 and in 1986, the president of West Germany awarded her the  
8 Distinguished Medal of Merit, First Class; in the United  
9 States, her story was eventually documented in several novels  
10 and films, including the 1998 documentary "Lisa Fittko: But We  
11 Said We Will Not Surrender"; and

12           WHEREAS, She wrote two books about her experiences; "Escape  
13 Through the Pyrenees" was first published in West Germany in  
14 1985 and won that country's award for the political book of the  
15 year; it was translated into French, Spanish, Italian,  
16 Portuguese, Japanese, and in 1991, into English; in 1993, her  
17 book, "Solidarity and Treason: Resistance and Exile,  
18 1933-1940", was published; and

19           WHEREAS, After settling in Chicago, Ms. Fittko worked as a  
20 secretary to support relatives who survived the Holocaust but  
21 were shattered by the experience; she was always highly  
22 involved with IVI-IPO, including the campaign of the late Mayor  
23 Harold Washington, and was a strong supporter of independent  
24 politics; she was an active member of the Hyde Park Peace  
25 Council and always brought issues of peace to other  
26 neighborhood organizations; she worked with the Hyde  
27 Park-Kenwood Interfaith Council to get temples and churches  
28 involved in peace issues and was very involved with the nuclear  
29 freeze movement; and

30           WHEREAS, Lisa Fittko had phenomenal energy; she was  
31 creative and had amazing knowledge and a sense of history and

1 remembrance of the past; and

2 WHEREAS, The passing of Lisa Fittko has been deeply felt by  
3 many, especially her nieces, Evelyn Marsh, Catherine  
4 Stodolsky, and Marlana Ekstein; therefore, be it

5 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
6 NINETY-FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
7 we mourn the passing of Lisa Fittko, who will be remembered for  
8 the amazing work she did to save the lives of many; and be it  
9 further

10 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
11 presented to the family of Lisa Fittko as an expression of our  
12 deepest sympathy and our true respect for the life that Ms.  
13 Fittko lived.