

Tad Taube Escaped Nazis, Created Own Empire

By Meredith May

Four tennis matches are happening at once, but Stanford fan Tad Taube can't look away from the current collegiate champion.

"See her? Now I want you to watch how she has incredible balance," he said, leaning forward in his seat. "That's why she's going to win."

Match point—Cardinal. And another personal victory for Taube, 79, whose name graces the tennis stadium. Ever since his brief stint on the Stanford tennis squad, Taube has been in love with the sport: It's direct, it's measurable, and it's just one man against the world.

It fits the worldview of a young Polish boy who escaped the Nazis and pushed himself to become one of the most prominent philanthropists in the Bay Area and his homeland. Now, at the leadership table of three foundations with a combined \$550 million in assets—the Koret Foundation, the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, and the Taube Family Fund—Taube redirects a sizable portion of Bay Area wealth along with his real estate fortune to numerous artistic, athletic, civic and Jewish cultural institutions.

He also donates his time, and has served on many civic boards, including the University of San Francisco, the Stanford Athletic Board and the Hoover Institution.

"There are only a handful of people in the Bay Area who have an impact like that," said Commonwealth Club of California CEO Gloria Duffy, who chose Taube as one of this year's recipients of the Distinguished Citizen Award.

"I don't view money as an asset to be indefinitely accumulated," said Taube, who is on the Commonwealth Club's board. "I view money as an asset intended to take care of your primal needs, but also the social and communal needs that are begging to be given some attention."

A regular on the gala circuit with his third wife, Dianne (he's the first one on the floor every time the DJ plays "YMCA" by the Village People), Taube is also a devoted father who hired a construction crane to hoist a two-story log cabin play-



Philanthropist Tad Taube left Poland at age 8, two months before Hitler invaded.

house onto his 10-acre property for the youngest of his six children (including two with Dianne). The same hard-charger who helped start the short-lived United States Football League also loves tinkering in the garden, swimming with dolphins in Hawaii and setting up friends on blind dates. A voracious reader with 12 books open in his library at any one time, he's a studied political conserva-

tive with an enormous disdain for President Obama.

“The worst thing is to be on his e-mail list,” said longtime friend and philanthropist Bernard Osher. “He sends constant updates about the political situation, and he types like a madman. He’s a strong Republican, very right-wing, but you live with it, you know? He’s got a great mind.”

PHILANTHROPY AS BUSINESS

Taube avoids donating to what he calls “bottomless pit” causes—poverty, hunger, disease—because “no matter how much money you put in, it’s hard to measure the impact.”

He takes a business approach to philanthropy, looking for measurable bottom lines.

“Without it, any project will die,” he said. “Unless you are a government agency—in that case you’ll live forever because their answer to all problems is to throw more money ... and you can put that in the paper!”

The foundations he works with have directed more than \$80 million to Stanford, for the tennis stadium, football stadium, the Hoover Institution, the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, the Taube Center for Jewish Studies, the Taube Hillel House and numerous general operating grants.

“When I first approached him about building a stadium, I was expecting to get about \$5,000, maybe \$10,000,” said Stanford tennis director Dick Gould.

Taube gathered more than \$2 million.

Through the Koret Foundation, he donated \$2 million to help rebuild the Palace of Fine Arts. Another million to refurbish the South American Aviary at the zoo.

“Contrary to what some people may think about him having a particular point of view, Taube listens and is open to others,” said friend and private equity investor Warren Hellman, who enlisted Taube’s help recently to relocate the Judah L. Magnes Museum’s 10,000 Jewish artifacts to the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley.

“He is very catholic in his giving. ... Our family tries to emulate his diversity,” Hellman said. “Taube’s philanthropy is an impressive mix of

local, national and international.”

He helped establish the Koret School of Veterinary Medicine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the only school of its kind in the Middle East. It works closely with the veterinary department at UC Davis.

“The school helps ease hostilities between Israel and its neighbors because students from Egypt, Syria, Jordan come together over science,” he said.

Overseas, the Koret Israel Economic Development Fund, with a \$20 million loan guarantee fund, has helped Jewish and Arab entrepreneurs in Israel open clothing stores, day care centers and green electronics companies. Recently the development fund collaborated with the nonprofit Kiva.org, which collects microloans over the Internet, to help Bedouin women with business plans.

Poland named Taube honorary consul for the Bay Area in 2007, following his donations to the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, the annual Jewish Cultural Festival, and most recently the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews, a \$200 million project set to open in 2013 and rival the scope of Holocaust Museum in Washington.

“He wants to record the positive impact of Jewish history in Poland, not just the death camps,” said Abe Sofaer, president of the American Friends of the Koret Israel Economic Development Fund.

“Poland was the site of the greatest genocide ever committed by so-called civilized man,” Taube said over a lunch of wood-fired pizza near his real estate investment offices in Belmont. “I want to be part of its renaissance.”

LEFT POLAND IN 1939

To understand what he means, it’s vital to know where he came from.

Taube’s first recollection of fear was as an 8-year-old boy in 1939, riding a train from Warsaw to Paris with a family friend through the heart of Nazi territory. At each stop in Germany, Taube watched the terror in his escort’s face as SS officers checked their IDs, which identified them as

Jews. The pair found passage to New York from Paris in a cramped below-water room aboard the Queen Mary. At Ellis Island, Taube reunited with his parents, who had left Poland two months earlier to attend to his father's meat importing business. After reading the American newspapers, his parents had decided to send for their son rather than return to an impending war.

Two months after Taube left Poland, Hitler invaded. His great-grandmother was shot in a ghetto roundup. A grandfather was killed by German police dogs. A cousin found shelter in a convent. A grandmother escaped to Rio de Janeiro. But these things he wouldn't learn until he was an adult.

After eight weeks in a boys summer camp in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, Taube emerged speaking fluent English, racing with the boys in the lake and watching aerial combat movies.

The family left to try their luck in a Polish neighborhood in Los Angeles, where Taube's mother found work as a dishwasher, and his father, a former CEO with a law degree, became a janitor. Taube's parents befriended some Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer employees, who needed Polish and Russian child actors for pro-war propaganda films. Taube found himself making \$50 a day playing roles as a baseball player, a son in a Russian family trudging across the country to escape the Nazis, and a Polish kid who gets in a fistfight with a young Nazi neighbor.

The family began to prosper as Taube's father started a business making coats from imported Russian furs. Eventually he rose to become CEO of Eversharp, the pen and razor company.

"My father was my role model," he said.

DAD PICKED STANFORD

His father was also the boss. Taube still remembers a conversation in high school that went something like this:

"Son, where are you going to college?"

"UCLA."

"No, Stanford."

"Yes, sir."

After graduating from Stanford, Taube was called to the Air Force, an exciting alternative to

the junior engineering job he had lined up at a soap factory in Berkeley. A failed vision exam prevented him from flying, so he was assigned to a communications squadron, developing and installing landing systems that helped pilots navigate in zero visibility. During his service, he was sworn in as a U.S. citizen.

In 1959, after getting his master's degree in industrial engineering from Stanford, he joined two Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory physicists to create E-H Research Laboratories, which built test instruments for the fledgling semiconductor industry in Silicon Valley. He left after the company's initial public offering and used the proceeds to start his real estate career.

Once he was established, he was called by Joseph Koret, the San Francisco apparel magnate who needed help diversifying the fortune he made inventing the permanent-press process. Taube helped Koret invest millions in property, eventually becoming his right-hand financier.

In 1969 he became an early-stage investor in Siltec Corp., which developed and later sold silicon wafers to Intel, HP and IBM.

In 1973, when the Koret Co. was heading for bankruptcy, Koret again enlisted Taube, who placated the bankers, restructured the company and in six years helped Koret sell it to Levi Strauss & Co. for \$100 million. When Koret's wife died, Taube persuaded Koret to shift her portion of the community property into a charitable foundation. Taube became president of the Koret Foundation in 1982 when Koret died.

"What I see in Tad is that he's turned adversity and a little luck into some enormous accomplishments," said the Commonwealth Club's Duffy.

"He has strong values based on his early experiences; he's a strong defender in core American values of free speech and capitalism, because he wouldn't be alive today if he hadn't been able to come here."

Outside the Taube Family Tennis Stadium, Taube is stopped by three ponytailed players.

"We won the doubles point!" they report.

Taube leans in to kiss each player on the cheek.

"Good luck! Now if you don't take the singles match, too, I'm going to be disappointed!"