



On April 27, 1988, the Israeli government issued a stamp commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of Israel that honored the Righteous Among the Nations. The portraits of five people were shown, and Sugihara Chiune was one of them.

杉原千畝

SUGIHARA CHIUNE

## Sugihara Chiune: 'Visas for Life' and the bond of humanity

During World War II, there was a Japanese diplomat who saved the lives of thousands of displaced Jews by issuing transit visas to Japan at the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania. His name was Sugihara Chiune, and he was also known as Sempo. The visas issued as a result of Sugihara Chiune's courageous humanitarian act are called 'visas for life'. With the support of others who also helped these refugees fleeing for freedom, the successive humanitarian acts would eventually save many lives and bring hope for the future.

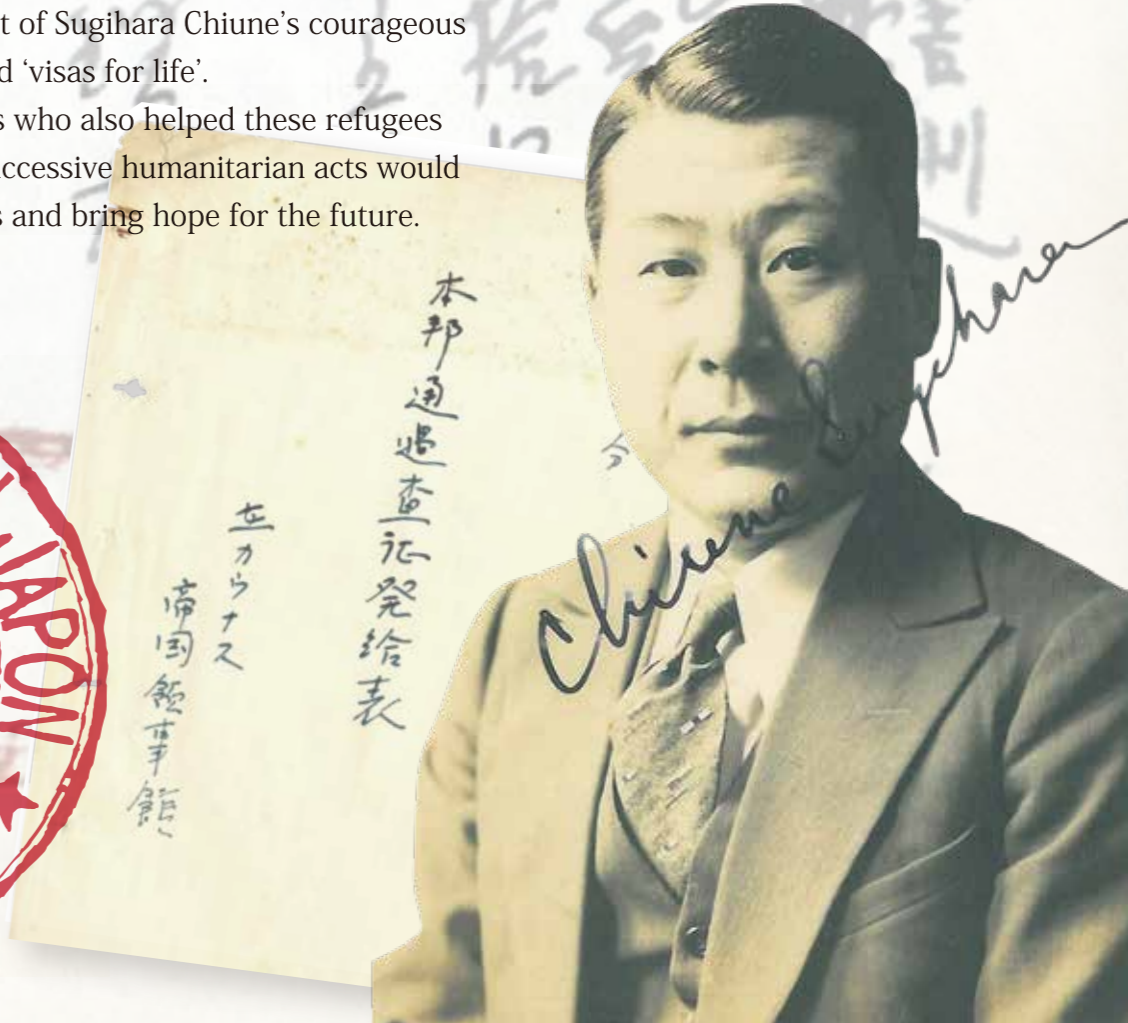


A reproduction of the Japanese Consulate office in Kaunas.



People onboard a ship bound for Vancouver, Canada, after transiting through Japan on "visas for life".  
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eric Saul

Sugihara Chiune's diplomatic passport issue document.



In alphabetical order, images courtesy of:  
 The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall  
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 Embassy of Israel in Japan  
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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Hiroki Sugihara

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# The issuing of the 'Visas for Life'

**1939**  
Assignment to the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas

On August 28, Sugihara Chiune became a vice-consul (acting consul) of the newly opened Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania. Soon after, World War II erupted.

**1940**  
Issuing of the 'Visas for Life'

A large number of Jewish refugees from Poland gathered at the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, in order to obtain transit visas that would allow them to pass through Japan and seek refuge in a third country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan instructed Sugihara to issue transit visas to applicants who had completed immigration procedures to their final destination and possessed sufficient funds to pay for their travel and stay in Japan. However, from a humanitarian point of view, Sugihara also issued transit visas to those who did not meet these requirements.



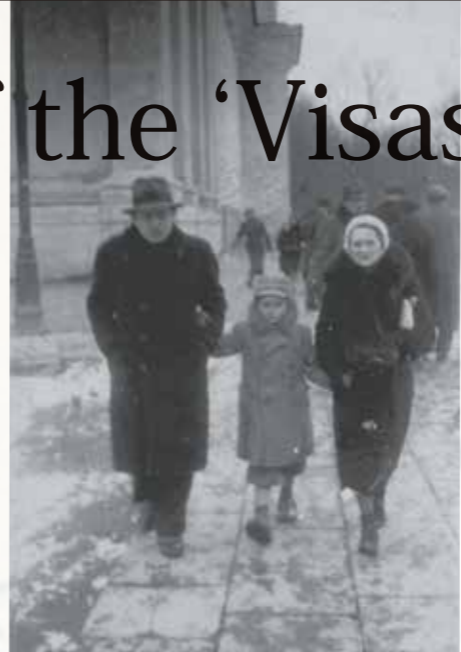
The visas were issued in Kaunas from July to the end of August, when the consulate closed. The visa list remaining today contains 2,140 names. Considering that all family members were granted entry with a single visa granted to the head of a household and that there were some visas issued without being noted on the list due to lack of time, the actual number of saved lives is thought to be in the thousands.

The visa issued to Aleksander Hafftk, said to have been kept with care by daughter Dr. Sylvia Wassertheil-Smoller, a medical doctor living in the United States.

LIST OF VISA-GIVERS BY THE CONSULATE TO PORTUGAL (1939 - 1940)

NO.	NATIONALITY	NAME	RESIDENCE	DATE OF ISSUE	STATUS	REMARKS
1.	Berlin	SIGMUND ROYER	Prussia	5/VII	2	
2.	Lithuanian	MOSES KAJAR	Kaunas	15/VII	2	
3.	"	DAVID FELDMAN	"	16/VII	2	
4.	"	CHAIM FISCHER	"	16/VII	2	
5.	"	OSWALD LICHTENBERG	"	16/VII	2	
6.	"	ROSE LEVY	"	16/VII	2	
7.	Berlin	SOLOM FINKELSTEIN	Prussia	16/VII	2	
8.	"	SOLOM FINKELSTEIN	"	16/VII	2	
9.	Lithuanian	SOLOM FINKELSTEIN	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
10.	Polish	JOSEF BLOCH	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
11.	"	OSWALD LICHTENBERG	"	16/VII	2	
12.	"	JULIAN BLOCH	"	16/VII	2	
13.	"	JOSEF BLOCH	"	16/VII	2	
14.	"	JOSEF BLOCH	"	16/VII	2	
15.	Lithuanian	ALFONSO KILGUS	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
16.	Swedish	WOLF ROSENTHAL	Stockholm	16/VII	2	
17.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
18.	Swedish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Stockholm	16/VII	2	
19.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
20.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
21.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
22.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
23.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
24.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
25.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
26.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
27.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
28.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
29.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
30.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
31.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
32.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
33.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
34.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
35.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
36.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
37.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
38.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	
39.	Lithuanian	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Kaunas	16/VII	2	
40.	Polish	ANNA ROSENTHAL	Warsaw	16/VII	2	

Chiune Sugihara



The name of Leo Melamed, who is said to be the pioneer of the financial futures market, is also on the list. This family photo was shot one year before the visas for life were issued – Mr. Melamed is the boy in the center.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Leo Melamed, Photo by Max Reid

In 1985, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, honored Sugihara Chiune with the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations', a title bestowed upon non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from the Holocaust. In 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan established a commemorative plaque in honor of Sugihara Chiune's humanitarian acts, which is still on display to this day at the Diplomatic Archives along with other documents related to the 'visas for life'.



The plaque and related documents are on display at the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.



## The Japanese people who supported the refugees



The refugees traveled from Kaunas, (1) taking the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok, (2) crossing the Sea of Japan to Tsuruga Port, (3) passing through Kobe and Yokohama, (4) and onward to destinations such as the United States.

(※ There were also non-Japanese people involved in the evacuation of Jewish refugees via Japan, such as Jan Zwartendijk, acting consul of the Netherlands in Kaunas, who issued numerous so-called "Curaçao visas" for refugees in Lithuania and Tadeusz Romer, then Polish ambassador to Japan, who helped the refugees with Polish citizenship to obtain visas to enter North America. However, many Japanese people also assisted and the main ones are featured below.)

**Nei Saburo, Acting Consul-General of Japan in Vladivostok**

Many of the Jewish refugees with 'visas for life' fled to Japan via Vladivostok using the Trans-Siberian Railway. Nei Saburo, Acting Consul-General in Vladivostok, worked hard to enable the refugees' departure for Japan.

**The people of Kobe**

Many of the refugees are said to have made their way to Kobe, where the Kobe Jewish Community that served as their guarantor was located. They spent anywhere from a week to several months here, before leaving for their next destination, such as the United States or Canada.

**The people of Tsuruga**

It is said that each time a ship with refugees docked in Tsuruga Port, more than 300 refugees would disembark. Though official records from the time were lost to fire, there are stories about how the people of Tsuruga warmly looked after the refugees, letting the refugees use a public bath for free for a day and distributing apples to them for free.



Refugees newly arrived in Kobe on 'visas for life'. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eric Saul



Pastors handing out apples to refugees. Photo courtesy of Masato Saito

The transit visa allowed the refugees to stay in Japan for 10 days, but many of them were in no condition to leave the country during this period. At the request of the Kobe Jewish Community, Kotsuji Setsuzo, a scholar of Jewish religion and culture, negotiated persistently with the relevant Japanese authorities to extend the refugees' period of stay.

