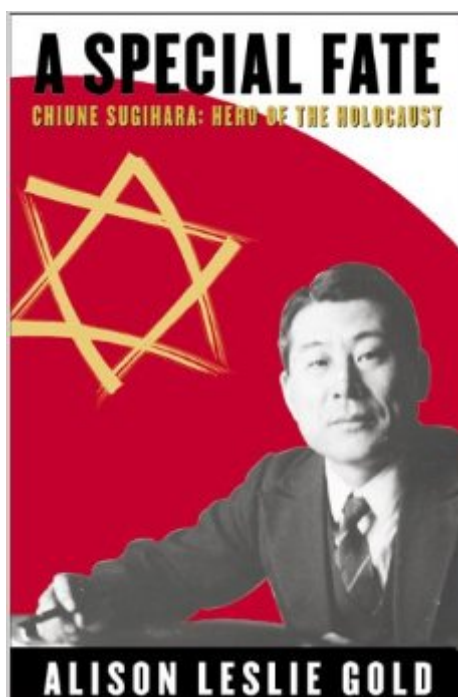


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# A Special Fate: Chiune Sugihara: Hero Of The Holocaust



## Synopsis

Award-winning author Alison Gold presents the little-known story of Chiune Sugihara (1900-1986), a Japanese diplomat who risked everything to save the lives of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. Sugihara chose to issue visas to Jews escaping Lithuania, despite the fact that his superiors strictly forbade him to do so. For the first time ever, his unforgettable story, as well as the stories of those he saved, are made accessible to adolescent readers.

## Book Information

Age Range: 9 and up

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## Customer Reviews

Alison Gold has documented with elegance the selfless humanity of Sempo Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat of the World War II era. Against the orders of his superiors, Mr. Sugihara wrote 6,000 visas in an effort to spare the lives of Polish and Lithuanian Jews. Through Alison Gold's brilliantly crafted accounts, we learn of the horrors and atrocities of the Holocaust, of the mixed fates of several families who were granted visas, and of the injustices to which the Sugihara family was subjected as a result of Sempo's courageous response to human torment. In several places throughout this magnificent book, Ms. Gold introduces Japanese phrases that do much to enrich our understanding of cultural concepts at the core of the Sugihara's way of thinking and living. We learn of the considerable influence that Mrs. Sugihara had on her husband's decisions. While this book was written for a young adult audience, most adults would find its content engrossing.

This is a beautiful book. I had to check the total number of pages after the first 10 pages, because I knew I would want to read the whole book in one sitting. "Hands reaching... for visas for life." Some people had never seen a Japanese person before. We hear the ice on rivers breaking up with loud cracking, we taste the Lithuanian pancakes with cheese filling and jam, we experience the shock of watching an American movie to then walk out into the light and see Russian tanks rolling down the street. The writer carries us gently through a lot of history, pain and beauty. I thought this would be a depressing book about the Holocaust, I was very wrong.

This telling of a story I never knew and one that should have been told and shouted. What a wonderful couple who stood up and did what was right and humane and so many others could have done. Incredible.

*A Special Fate* is the story of Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese consulate to Lithuania who, against the wishes of his superiors, hand wrote about six thousand transit visas to Jews fleeing the invading Nazi forces. His bravery saved many lives, but cost him not only his political career but also his youngest son's life. The author also weaves the story of two Jewish children who received visas from Sugihara into the main narrative. The book is very engaging, not at all like the dry lists of dates that typically pass for history. I usually don't find history books enjoyable, but I enjoyed this one and learned a lot, not only about how Sugihara's visas saved so many people, but also a bit about Japanese culture. The story moves quickly enough to keep younger readers from getting bored, but not so fast that the details are lost. Most older children will be able to read the book and understand what is going on as long as they have a basic knowledge of W.W.II history. I would recommend this book to anyone learning about W.W.II, and even though it is supposedly a children's book, I would recommend it to adults too.

Chiune Sugihara's story needed to be told. In a dark period of Japanese history, one man listened to his conscience, discussed the consequences with his wife and children, and chose to do the right thing. In the early days of WWII, Sugihara, a diplomat to Lithuania, issued thousands of life-saving visas to the Jews of Europe against the direct orders of his superiors. After the Russians took over Lithuania, Sugihara was forced to close the Japanese Embassy, but he continued writing visas until the last possible moment. The rest of Sugihara's story is anti-climactic, dealing with his diplomatic career throughout the war. After the war, the Soviets sent the Sugihara family to a Siberian detention camp. When they were finally repatriated, Sugihara was immediately dismissed from

government service for disobeying orders. He spent many years in obscurity before finally being found by some of the grateful Jews that he had saved. Near the end of his life, he received some well-deserved acknowledgement by both the Japanese and Israeli government including being recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations." Alison Leslie Gold, who has written several other non-fiction books of the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, tells the story of three families. Besides Sugihara's story, Gold describes the experience of a Jewish family from Poland and another from Lithuania who received Sugihara visas. Gold focuses on Solly and Masha, children from those families. She interviewed them as well as Sugihara's widow, Yukiko, for first hand accounts of the heroic and tragic events described in this book. Masha's family used their visa to travel to Japan and survived the war. Tragically, Solly's family repeatedly delayed using their visa until it was too late to use it resulting in many family members' deaths at the hands of the Nazis. Solly found it quite ironic that a Japanese man tried to offer his family assistance at the beginning of the war and the first American face that he saw when he was liberated at the end of the war was a Japanese American soldier. The photographs in the book help readers understand that this is a true story that happened to real people. There are photographs of all three families and additional photos from the time period. The photos are separated from the narrative in two clumps. Though this distracts from their impact, they are still powerful. This is an easy to read introductory book on the incidents in Lithuania. However, I found information on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum web site that was not included in the book. In the web site's section on Sugihara, I learned about the interesting larger story involving the Dutch council, Jan Zwartendijk and his involvement in helping the Lithuanian Jews. I also learned that Yukiko was Sugihara's second wife. Gold is non-judgmental towards Japan's involvement in WWII and of Sugihara's father's involvement in occupied Korea. However, she seems to lose some of that impartiality when she adds comments on Sugihara's conversion to Russian Orthodoxy. She adds the comment that he did not forget his Buddhism and Shinto religions from his youth (10). I wonder how she knows that detail of his conversion. The research that went into *A Special Fate* could have been better documented. Gold's sources are summed up in an author's note at the beginning of the book and an author's acknowledgement at the end. The book does not include a bibliography for further reading or works consulted. It is estimated that Sugihara wrote 6,000 visas. Now there is a group numbering over 40,000 descendants known as "Sugihara Survivors." Even in later life, Sugihara remained a humble man and once said, "I didn't do anything special....I made my own decisions....I followed my own conscience and listened to it" (175). Yukiko also should be commended, because had she dissuaded her husband, he might not have written the visas that saved so many lives. Karen

Alison Leslie Gold is also the author of "Memories of Anne Frank". One of the great Holocaust rescue stories.

I FIRST LEARNED OF THIS JAPANESE MAN VIA VHS VIDEO, I WAS GREATLY INSPIRED BY HIS CONCERN FOR OTHERS AND AT GREAT RISK OF HIS REPUTATION AND CAREER. HE PASSED AWAY 2 YEARS BEFORE I MYSELF FIRST WENT AND LIVED IN JAPAN IN 1988. I WOULD HAVE LOVED CONVERSING WITH HIM ABOUT HIS LIFE. WHAT A STORY OF WW2 THAT ALL STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT.

We are unfamiliar with the many people who helped Jews escape Hitler's death camps. Sugihara should be in our history books. He put his life and his family's lives on the line in order to save thousands. Amazing that a Japanese citizen at war with the west had compassion for people whose traditions, language, and religion were so opposite from his own upbringing.

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