

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 341
By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Chiune Sugihara and to commemorate his humanitarian endeavors.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly find it appropriate to honor the august memory of Chiune Sugihara - a diplomat, humanitarian and hero to Jewish people everywhere; and

WHEREAS, assigned to the Japanese consulate in Lithuania in 1939, Mr. Sugihara was by all accounts a quiet, unassuming man, yet he defied his government to assist more than 2,100 Jews who were fleeing Europe and the terrors of the Nazi Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, in what has been hailed as a "conspiracy of goodness", Mr. Sugihara issued 2,139 visas from the Japanese consulate in then-neutral Lithuania from July 9 to August 31, 1940, allowing the bearers and their families to travel through Japan enroute to their ultimate designations in the United States, Canada and the Dutch colonies of Curacao and Surinam; and

WHEREAS, despite being denied permission from Tokyo on three separate occasions to issue such transit visas, Mr. Sugihara cast aside his fears of disgrace and retribution from his government and his personal aspirations to accomplish one of the greatest humanitarian acts of World War II; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara issued so many handwritten visas during the summer of 1940 that his wife had to massage the cramps out of his hands at night, and he was still issuing visas out of the window of the train as his family headed to Berlin in August; and

WHEREAS, included in this group of Lithuanian Jews that Mr. Sugihara saved were the staff and students of the Mirrer Yeshiva; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara made eye contact with the yeshiva boys who were begging for his help, and he could not abandon them to the trouble he knew lay in store for them; and

WHEREAS, never having had any personal contact with Jewish people previously, Mr. Sugihara received no personal gain for his moral righteousness, nor did he ever try to capitalize on his good deeds: he acted purely out of moral and humanitarian motivations; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara was forced to resign his government post in the Japanese Foreign Ministry after he and other consulate officials were recalled to Japan; and

WHEREAS, paying the price for his moral courage in Lithuania, Mr. Sugihara eked out a living selling light bulbs, and then for sixteen years he worked in Moscow, far from his family, importing oil for his native land; and

WHEREAS, upon being interviewed in the 1970s relative to his significant role in saving the lives of some 8,000 - 10,000 Jews, Mr. Sugihara stated that his loyalty was not to the foreign ministry, but rather to the Emperor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara said: "I could look the emperor in the eyes and say 'Lord Emperor, if you were in my place and this innocent boy asked you for permission to pass through your country - he will not bother you, will not violate your laws, will not hurt anyone, he's just passing through in transit so he could have an opportunity to live - what would the emperor do?' He would say, 'Be my guest. By all means, come through'."; and

WHEREAS, with the moral support of his family, and especially his then 5-year-old son, Hiroki, who compassionately pointed out that if his father didn't assist these people they would be killed, Mr. Sugihara disobeyed his government by answering to a higher moral authority of what was right; and

WHEREAS, according to his wife, Yukiko, Mr. Sugihara made this courageous decision in complete harmony with his normal character: he was always giving priority to other people and their needs; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara's saga belongs to that rarest species of Holocaust narratives: a positive story that ends well; Holocaust scholars believe that this good, moral man may have

saved as many as 10,000 Jews, and the descendants of those he saved are now estimated at 40,000; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, Mr. Sugihara received Israel's highest honor and was recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations", a non-Jew who helped save Jews during the Holocaust; and

WHEREAS, at the age of 85, Mr. Sugihara was too infirm to attend the ceremonies at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem; he died at the age of 86; and

WHEREAS, in November 1995, Jews and Japanese groups honored the man they call the "Japanese Schindler" with speeches, exhibits and a celebrity-studded tribute at Town Hall in New York City; and

WHEREAS, similar tributes have been held on the West Coast, in Japan and Israel and in a psychohistory "In Pursuit of Sugihara"; and

WHEREAS, in her moving memoir, "Visas for Life", Yukiko Sugihara tells the story of her husband's heroic decision to help these disenfranchised Jews to flee the concentration camps and gas ovens of Nazi Germany; and

WHEREAS, after Mr. Sugihara's death in 1986, Yukiko accepted a posthumous apology from the Japanese government for the way his career was destroyed at their hands; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Sugihara's great humanity and compassion went virtually unrecognized for nearly twenty years, and he suffered gravely, both personally and professionally, as a result of his heroic actions, yet he never regretted his services to the thousands of Jews who would have perished without his assistance; and

WHEREAS, according to his son, Hiroki, Mr. Sugihara was a humble man who would not have desired any special attention, believing that it was "nothing special to help people"; and

WHEREAS, by doing what was morally right, Mr. Sugihara saved thousands of Jews from the Nazi death camps; he also sacrificed his career and a safe, comfortable existence for himself and his family; and

WHEREAS, it is entirely appropriate that Chiune Sugihara be honored by this General Assembly for his great compassion and selflessness in making a difficult decision that saved the lives of some 10,000 fellow human beings; and

WHEREAS, from April 22-26, 1996, Mr. Sugihara's son, Hiroki Sugihara, will be visiting Nashville to participate in several events honoring his late father and his legacy of heroism; and

WHEREAS, a memorial service will be held at Congregation Sherith Israel on the evening of April 22, and Mr. Sugihara will present a lecture at the First Amendment Center on the evening of April 23, among other events; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly takes this opportunity to welcome Hiroki Sugihara to the Volunteer State; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we hereby honor the august memory of Chiune Sugihara, reflecting with admiration upon his indelible legacy of humanity, compassion and selfless heroism in assisting some 10,000 Jews to flee Europe to freedom, despite great personal and professional consequences and the refusal of his government to sanction this great humanitarian feat.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we welcome Hiroki Sugihara to Nashville, while paying our respects to the memory of his father as a fine, upstanding man who made a righteous moral choice that few others of his generation would have had the courage to make.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.

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