

JAPANESE DIPLOMAT SPIRITED THOUSANDS OF JEWS TO SAFETY IN 1940

Jewish community honours Japanese hero

BY MIKE ADLER
Staff Writer

In the photograph, Chiune Sugihara is behind his office desk in Kaunas, Lithuania.

It is 1940. Sugihara is a dapper, thoughtful-looking man — a career diplomat of Imperial Japan, a shrewd negotiator who speaks six languages.

Japan's consul to Lithuania, he has just been ordered to leave. Why does he stay and write thousands of visas so 6,000 Jews can go to Japan?

Sugihara defied his own government, saving as many people as he could from certain death because he believed the desperate Jewish refugees who crowded around the consulate "were human beings and they needed help," said Joyce Borenstein, a York Region resident whose father was among those saved.

...my wife is here today because of Sugihara.

She and the rest of the local Jewish community had a chance to express their gratitude to Sugihara's visiting son at a Thornhill synagogue this week.

"My sister and I had the very best father in the whole world, thanks to your most wonderful father," Borenstein said to Hiroki Sugihara, who was a toddler when his father was posted to independent Lithuania in 1939.

Other Sugihara survivors of the Holocaust or their children were also at Chabad of Markham to pay tribute.

Rabbi Moshe Gerlitzky, now older than 80, recalled receiving his visa from Sugihara's own hand. He marveled that "against all odds, one young boy covered in mud" managed to escape the Nazis and became a father, grandfather and great-grandfather to 130.

"Isn't that a miracle in our time?" he said. "What we are honouring tonight is the ultimate gift, the gift of life."

Sugihara "stands as a shining example for all humanity," said Gerlitzky, who came from Montreal to greet Hiroki Sugihara.

"He was truly a light in the darkness."

Gerlitzky is the grandfather of Goldie Plotkin, wife of the synagogue's own Rabbi Abraham Plotkin, who was unaware of this personal connection when he invited Sugihara's son.

"When I think about it, I know my wife is here today because of

Sugihara," said Plotkin.

In 1940, an improbable escape from Lithuania through Russia was truly the last chance for untold numbers of Polish and Lithuanian Jews, who would soon be almost entirely wiped out in the Holocaust.

Sugihara lived in a time "of darkness, confusion and loss of faith," Plotkin said, but he and Raoul Wallenberg — a Swedish attache — are heroes to respect, not only because they saved thousands but "because they saved our belief in decency."

Hiroki Sugihara said his father's actions, making the impossible escapes possible, were his destiny at that time and place.

The elder Sugihara made three requests, all denied, to issue visas, then did it anyway. After the war, he was forced to resign, but never regretted what he had done, Hiroki Sugihara said.

"If he could see me standing here (speaking about his deeds) he would be overcome with humility,"



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Hiroki Sugihara accepts the Jewish community's thanks on behalf of his father, Chiune Sugihara, who helped 6,000 Jews escape Nazi persecution. Rabbi Moshe Gerlitzky (right) of Montreal received a visa from Sugihara's own hand.

Keswick family rescues man from lake

Family's boat jaunt turns out to be a safety cruise

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

A Keswick family out for a jaunt on their new boat last Saturday unwittingly found themselves heroes.

Doug and Vicki Janes, along with their two daughters, came across a capsized boat while out riding on their 17-foot Starcraft motorboat on Lorimer Lake near their cottage.

"It was really rough and we were giving the boat a run. We noticed a boat capsized," Vicki said. "You figure if you see a boat floating, it has escaped someone's dock. But if it's capsized, there's a body — there's a person — in the water."

Then they spotted a young man in the frigid lake.

Although waves suddenly started crashing over their boat, the Janes managed to pull in the man — obviously suffering from hypothermia — wrapped him in a tarp and put a hat on him to help him regain body heat.

Vicki said the man, who appeared to be about 18 years old, was barely able to talk because he was shivering so hard and his lips were white and skin was purple.

Doug, a Toronto Ambulance paramedic, knew what to do.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Vicki Janes (left) and her daughters Shannon and Brooke helped Doug Janes rescue some campers on Mother's Day weekend.

"Thank God for him," Vicki said. "He took control. It was boom, boom, boom, you do this, you do that — and the rest of us just fell into line."

A man in a canoe then approached the Janes to explain he had been unable to pull the water-logged man into his canoe. He told them they were camp counsellors, out with a group of teenagers, who were now stranded on shore.

The campers had been headed out for an overnight camping trip when the lake turned rough. A canoe capsized, ditching the man into the frigid water, about 35 min-

utes before the Janes appeared.

After rushing the young man back to the camp for a warm bath or shower, the Janes then came to the rescue of the campers, aged between 11 and 16, stranded on shore. They left their daughters, Shannon, 10, and Brooke, 7, at the camp while they shuttled back and forth with the campers.

The Tim Hortons Children's Foundation, which runs camps for disadvantaged children in the summer, allows other organizations to use its facilities off-season. These campers had been working toward Duke of Edinburgh awards.

REGIONAL News Digest



WHAT'S HAPPENING
Cedar Beach Saturday dances starting Saturday, May 27, 7 p.m. Cedar Beach pavilion Cedarvale Blvd., on Musselman's Lake

If all goes according to plan, music lovers will enjoy regular dances at the Cedar Beach Pavilion, as they did for a 53-year stretch that started in 1929. Expect Elvis, Garth and Frank (above) to perform great hits. Tickets are \$20. Call (905) 642-1700.

Residents help creek

Little German Mills Creek in Thornhill is getting a big helping hand these days.

The stream, which flows south from Hwy. 7 and feeds into German Mills Creek — a local tributary of the Don River — near Green Lane, can thank its human neighbours for getting involved. Deborah Martin Downs of the Don Watershed Regeneration Council said yesterday.

A Town of Markham plan for treeplantings, a depression to control stormwater runoff and a pedestrian pathway was prompted by residents' concerns about erosion and the disappearance of wildlife, she recalled.

"They came forward and said 'We think we could do something here'."

The town's restoration work, worth about \$88,000, likely will start within a month and finish this summer. Karen Boniface of Markham's recreation department said last week.

As well, a neighbourhood group, Friends of Little German Mills Creek, was recently given nearly \$6,000 to place a variety of plants and 15 birdboxes along the stream, under the federal government's EcoAction 2000 program.

—Mike Adler

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