



Reviving the Lost Art of Writing Letters

celebrated on September 1st each year, World Letter Writing Day is a gentle reminder of the lost art of putting pen to paper. In an age dominated by instant messaging and emails, this day encourages people to slow down and express their thoughts through handwritten letters. Started by Australian artist Richard Simpkin in 2014, it celebrates personal connection, reflection, and the emotional power of words on paper. Whether it's writing to a loved one or a stranger, the act brings back a sense of intimacy and nostalgia that digital communication often lacks.

#RAKSHAT HOOJA

History, Devotion And Music

Flute Recital at Jagat Shiromani Temple Resonates with Monsoon Magic



Last week, the 400-year-old Jagat Shiromani Temple at Amber became the perfect setting, where the soulful flute recital by J.A. Jayant was held against the backdrop of rain-washed courtyards and monsoon clouds. Accompanied by

Kumbakonam Swaminathan, the music blended with the drizzle and the sound of rain-drops on colourful umbrellas. The recital, hosted by Jaipur Virasat Foundation and curated by heritage enthusiast Neeraj Chauhan, brought together history, devotion, and music in one of Jaipur's most revered temple complexes.

Unforgettable experience

“His performance was much needed in times when people are seeking solace and connection. What moved me most was the indomitable spirit of the Jaipurites who came despite the rain, their warmth and enthusiasm truly made the morning magical,” said Neeraj Chauhan, curator of the event.

Jayant, hailed internationally as a prodigy and the torchbearer of the Mali style of Carnatic flute, has over 45 international tours and nearly 2000 concerts to his credit. His performance at Amber, however, was described by attendees as ‘otherworldly,’ as the pitter-patter of the rains seamlessly blended with the flute’s melody, deepening the sense of serenity.

“Performing here was an unforgettable experience. The serenity of this temple and the devotion of the people of Jaipur, who came in such large numbers despite the bad weather, filled me with gratitude. The rain only added to the divine atmosphere,” said J.A. Jayant after the concert.

The morning repertoire was rich and diverse, moving between classical and folk traditions. Jayant played Hamsadhvani, Mishra Maand, Bhoopali, Kesariya Balam (folk), Kapi/Peelu, Mishra Khamaj, and concluded with Bhairavi, each piece flowing naturally into the ambience of the monsoon-soaked temple.

Audience in huge numbers filled courtyards with colourful umbrellas. As clouds sailed slowly across the Amber skies, the fragrance of fresh rain lingered in the air, and the time-worn textures of the old temple glistened softly, it felt like stepping into another world.

What stood out just as much as the music was the spirit of Jaipurites, more than 150 people turned up despite the weather, filling the courtyard with vibrant umbrellas and quiet anticipation.



A Jap Diplomat Defied His Government to Save Thousands of Jewish Refugees

PART:1

The exact number of people Sugihara helped save from the Nazis is unknown but likely numbers in the thousands. Some of his visas were used by entire households, while others weren't used at all. In recent decades, Sugihara has received recognition for his wartime actions, but the story of his bravery has been plagued by inaccuracies and exaggerations. Now, Sugihara's son, Nobuki, who was born in 1949, four years after World War II ended, is setting the record straight.

● Kshema Jatuhkarna

Nobuki Sugihara was 19 years old when, in the summer of 1968, an unexpected call came in from the Israeli Embassy in Tokyo. A diplomat was searching for his father, Chiune Sugihara, who was visiting family in Japan.

While on a break from his job at a trading firm in Moscow, in a meeting soon after, Joshua Nishri produced a piece of paper: a transit visa issued by the elder Sugihara in 1940, when he was serving as the Japanese consul in Lithuania. The visa had enabled Nishri and his brother to escape from Europe and survive the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of six million Jews during World War II.

Nishri was among the crowd of Jewish refugees who had gathered outside of Sugihara's home in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas (then known in English as Kovno) in July 1940, desperate to flee the growing menace of Nazi Germany. Sugihara chose to do what most other diplomats would not: He defied the directives of his government, issuing more than 2,000 transit visas that authorized holders to leave Soviet-occupied Lithuania and pass through Japan as they sought safety further afield.

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bravery has been plagued by inaccuracies and exaggerations. Now, Sugihara's son, Nobuki, who was born in 1949, four years after World War II ended, is setting the record straight.

“I didn't realize what my father did, what he was for the Jewish people,” until Nishri tracked him down, Nobuki says. “Some people say ‘hero,’ I didn't know why.”

Sugihara was born on January 1, 1900, in Japan's Gifu Prefecture. When he was a teenager, his father moved the rest of the family to Japanese-occupied Korea, leaving Sugihara behind to complete his studies. Sugihara's father intended for him to become a doctor, but he shrugged off the exam. Infuriated, his father told him to leave home, prompting him to enroll at a university in Tokyo.

While in school, Sugihara applied for a study abroad language program funded by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1919, he was sent to Harbin, Manchuria, a region in northeast China that held strategic significance for both Japan and Soviet Russia. He quickly achieved fluency in Russian and joined the diplomatic corps. He spent 16 formative years in Manchuria, marrying a Russian woman (they later divorced) and moving with ease among the multinational mores of this strategically coveted corner of China.

“Manchuria was a churning cauldron of political intrigue, all of these different people who were refugees there or vying for economic and land interests there or political influence, representing many different countries,” says historian Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, author of *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma*.

After Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established a puppet government known as Manchukuo in 1932, Sugihara helped negotiate the purchase of a critical railway system from the Soviets for a fraction of the price. But Japan's occupation of China was marked by brutality, Sugihara's disapproval of the Japanese soldiers' behaviour led him to request a transfer to Tokyo.

Back in Japan, Sugihara met and married a woman named Yukiko Kikuchi. He received a new assignment to Moscow, but the Soviets denied him a visa-retribution, he later speculated, for his interactions with exiles in Harbin and his role in the railway negotiations. Instead, he spent the next two years in Helsinki, Finland, where his family grew with the arrival of two sons, Hiroki and Chiaki.

Sugihara entered the world of European politics at an especially perilous time, made more complex still by Japan's tenuous alliances. The Nazis' military intentions were clear, but Britain and other European nations were hesitant to respond. In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria, followed a year later by Czechoslovakia.

Also, in 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact that effectively nullified an earlier agreement made by Adolf Hitler's government. In 1936, Germany and Japan had codified the Anti-Comintern Pact, which was formed on the basis of their shared antipathy to both communist and Western powers.

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#HUMANITY



The Sugihara family in the living room of their Kaunas residence in September 1939.

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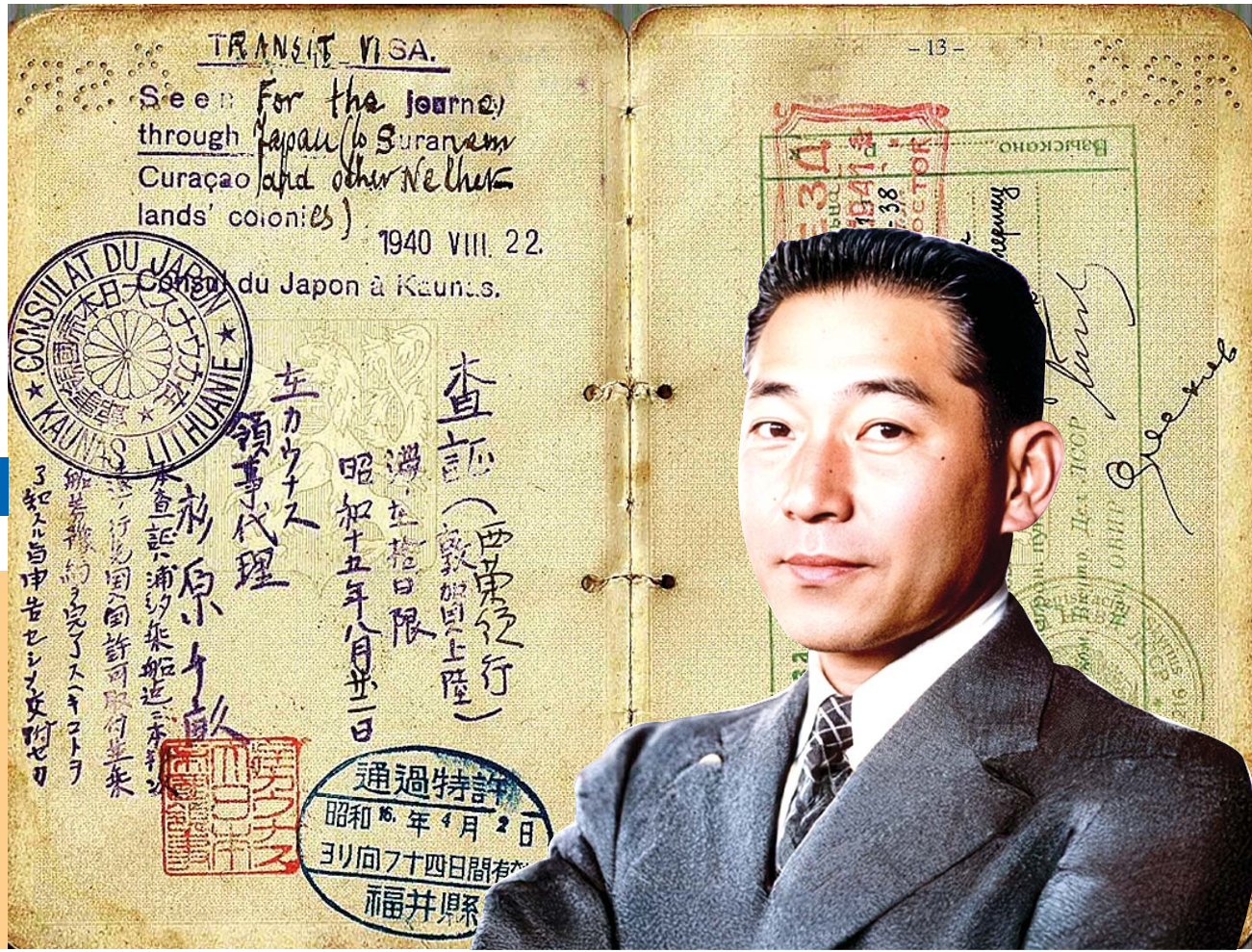
somewhere, but there was no particular place you could go because either it was under the Russians or under the Germans, and the war was in between,” said Lucille Szepenswol Camhi, who was a teenager when she and her sister escaped to Lithuania, in a 1999 oral history interview.

Poland was Bernard Salomon, who later received the 299th Sugihara visa. “He unfortunately was still there when the borders were closed, so, he had to escape across barbed wire, and he bribed border guards,” says Bernard's son Rick Salomon, who is a co-founder and board member of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. Like Nobuki, Rick only learned of his father's wartime saga as an adult.

Once in Lithuania, Jewish refugees hoping to escape even farther from the Nazis found themselves blocked by strict immigration quotas, including in the United States. The occupying Soviets ordered foreign consulates in Kaunas shuttered by August 25. In this tense time, most consulates were disinclined to yield to the pleas of the increasingly desperate Jews in search of a way out.

The division of Poland had placed Jewish refugees in a perilous position, trapped between the specter of Nazi aggression and the tightening grip of Soviet authorities. Many fled from Poland to Lithuania, which had long tradition as a hub of Jewish culture in Europe, with thriving synagogues, yeshivas and businesses. The country's Jewish population rose from a prewar estimate of 160,000 to roughly 250,000 by 1941.

“People tried to get out, to go



reassigned to the consulate in June.)

The documentation omitted a crucial detail: Admission to Curaçao and other Dutch territories ‘was the prerogative of the colonial governors, who rarely allowed it,’ the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum explains on its website. The Dutch ambassador and the consul ‘had reacted to the human crisis in their midst by issuing documents that were useless except for one purpose, they helped refugees flee from Lithuania.’

This is where Sugihara came in. To issue transit visas that allowed holders to travel through the Soviet Union and Japan en route to a different country, the consul needed the refugees to have a set final destination. The Curaçao permit holders' paperwork fulfilled this requirement, even if the refugees didn't actually intend to settle in the Dutch colony.

Though Sugihara never met them, the Dutch representatives' workload accelerated the need for Japanese transit visas. His was the final, critical piece in this link for those fleeing Lithuania.

“No one would pay any attention to us,” recalled Susan Bluman, who was 19 when Germany invaded her home country of Poland, in a 1999 oral history interview. “No one wanted us. We were desperate, absolutely desperate. We didn't see any hope, absolutely no hope. We just were a people with no land, nobody to turn to. And then we heard about Chiune Sugihara.”

In the early morning hours of July 18, 1940, the Sugihara family heard shouting outside of their home on the second floor of the Japanese consulate. They looked out to see crowds gathering.



Polish soldiers in Warsaw during the German invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Sugihara asked those assembled to send in a handful of representatives to speak on their behalf. The five men chosen by the crowd implored the consul to grant them safe passage through Japan, as the alternative was imprisonment and death at the hands of the Nazis. In response, Sugihara explained that he needed to seek permission from Tokyo to issue transit visas on the scale required by such a large group. This request would take several days to discuss, and its success hinged on negotiations for an alliance between Japan, Germany and Italy. “He was very sure that Tokyo would never give him permission to do anything that might jeopardize the pending agreement,” wrote Anne Akabori in her 2005 biography of Sugihara. “Looking outside, we felt much sorrow for them,” Sugihara's wife Yukiko later recalled. “Their ragged appearance, with tears streaming down their faces and women in the crowd crying, knowing that if they were to be caught, they would most likely be killed.”

After an exchange of telegrams in which Sugihara argued that the visas should be granted for humanitarian reasons, Tokyo twice denied its consul permission, citing public safety concerns associated with the influx of a large group of refugees. “Now, I was at a total loss,” Sugihara wrote in his memoir. He agonized over the decision, a lone diplomat in Lithuania, about to be further isolated from his headquarters, knowing he could be punished for disobeying if he moved forward with issuing visas anyway.

To be continued...

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#LOVE STORY

Usne Kaha Tha

“Jo mujhe ‘Usne kaha tha’ maine kar diya” (“I have done ‘what she told me’ to do”)

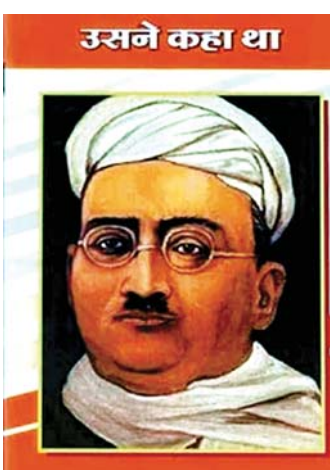


ehna Singh, a brash teenager, encounters this pubescent chit of a girl, Hira, in most dramatic circumstances. He is strolling along on the main

lane when he sees Hira and is totally bowled over by her. However, before he can exult on this miraculous revelation, he notices a wayward cart, horse charging headlong towards her, and, in a quick reflex action, he pushes her away in the nick of time and bears the brunt of the wayward horse's hooves.

Lehna Singh, a plucky lad, recovers from his severely bruised shoulder; his recovery hastened by his anxiety to meet her again in more congenial and less astounding an occasion. And that moment arrives soon when he meets her at the local grocery store.

Both are on a visit to their relatives at Amritsar. At the very first (in fact, second) sight, his adolescent heart again does



a flipping somersault and, putting aside the irksome formality of a proper introduction, he shoots off his mouth and audaciously asks her whether she is betrothed (‘teri Kudmai ho gayee?’). She raises her eyebrows at the intrusion, but, as she hesitatingly glances at him, her eyes acquire a soft glow. She

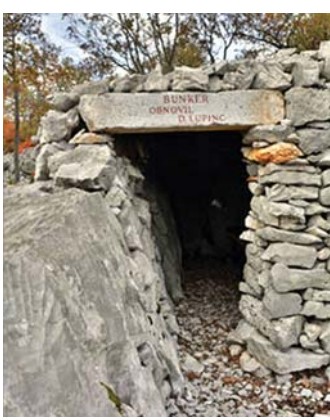
quickly looks down and silently departs. From then onwards, the grocery store becomes a venue for their ‘unscheduled’ trysts. And each time when he asks the same question, he receives a similar response; a shy smile and a hurried exit. However, one day, she astonishes him with a reply that puts paid to his hopes. “Yes, yesterday. Don't you see this silk-bordered shawl?”

The boy stomps his feet in annoyance and dashes away in a vicious mood. On his way, he upturns vendors' pushcarts; deliberately jostles passersby; stoness a pariah dog, and on reaching his relative's house, flings himself on a cot utterly dejected. With passage of time, the pain subsides as the wound heals, although with a permanent scar in some vulnerable corner of his bruised psyche. The flame lingers and flares up whenever there is talk of his marriage. He remains a bachelor.

25 years later

The World War I is raging across continents. Lehna Singh is a Havildar in 77 Rifles under Subedar Hazara Singh; who's only son Bodh Singh, is also a Sepoy in the same platoon. Their battalion is ordered to move to a foreign locale for action at the 'front'. Before their departure, Hazara Singh asks Lehna to meet his wife. “Apparently, she knows you and wants to see you.”

Lehna is somewhat puzzled, but the instant he enters Hazara Singh's house, he recognizes her as the 25 years gap dissolves as if it never was. Hira is in a sombre mood. She reminds Lehna of the incident in which a horse,



drawing a cart, went berserk and headed for her. And he



pushed her away, in the nick of time and bore the brunt of the wayward horse's hooves. With teary eyes, she beseeches Lehna, “Please protect them from harm just like you did to save my life.” Lehna silently nods. The scene shifts to the bunker at the battlefield. The platoon under Subedar Hazara Singh has repulsed the enemy attack but has sustained heavy casualties. Sepoy Bodh Singh, Hazara's son, is seriously injured and Lehna is mortally wounded, both requiring immediate hospitalization. He knows that the enemy (Germans) would soon regroup and retaliate with a decisive counter-offensive.

Deliberately underplaying his injury, Lehna offers to stay on as he persuades the reluctant Hazara to accompany his son Bodh Singh, and other soldiers requiring urgent medical attention, to the base hospital.

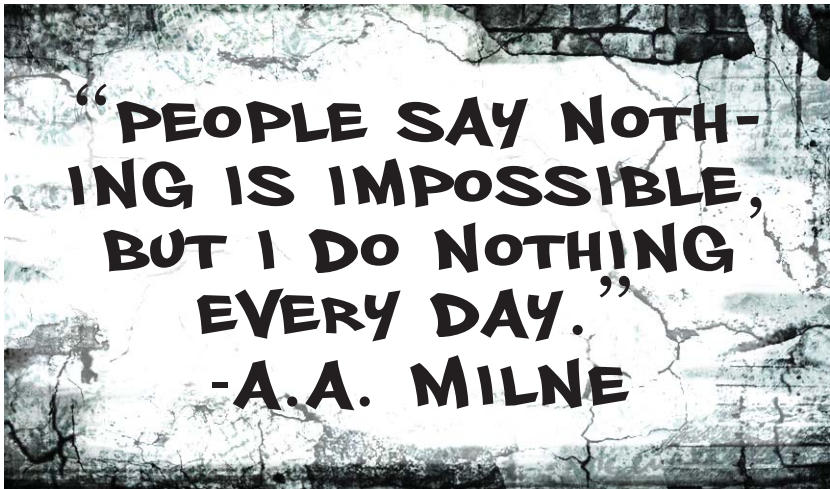
“And, in case we do not meet again, when you write a letter to ‘Subedarniji’, please give her my profound regards.

And, when you return home, tell her this:

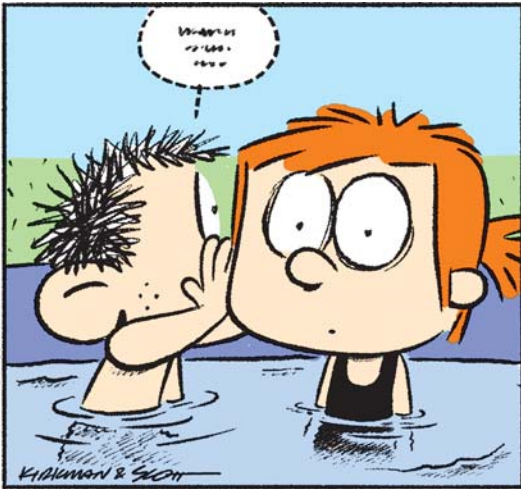
“Jo mujhe ‘Usne kaha tha’ maine kar diya.” (“I have done ‘what she told me’ to do.”)

Lehna died fighting his last battle.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman