

Papers of Promise: Chiune Sugihara (1900 – 1986)

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In the blinding morning sunlight,
His car slices through the crowd,
Roads overgrown with vines that crawl
Up the sides of buildings,
Tracing silhouettes of Jews
That cover the streets like Nazi propaganda.
Through narrow, wizened eyes,
He can see their desperation,
And as hands reach out for freedom,
For an escape,
His wrinkled palms wring papers
Soaked with promise.
Windows closed,
Head bowed,
He stares at the visas in his lap,
Eyes brimming with tears

As the car rolls to a stop,
And he steps out onto Lithuanian soil,
Train whistles blaring,
Drowning out the sounds
Of children crying in their
Mothers' arms.
He is but one man,
Yet they cry out for him
With a sorrow that covers the city in smoke,
Ashes to ashes of a battered people,
And he mourns for them,
Weeps for the faces he can see,
Coated in fear and shame.
Their heartbeats are his own.
With a flick of his wrist,
Papers flutter from his
Palms like glitter,

Confetti visas raining down

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On the oppressed

As he watches them

Grasp for the hope of a better future,

People holding out passports

As he furiously stamps

His seal upon their documents,

Ink staining pages

With the promise of life.

As he steps onto the train,

He turns,

Tossing the stamp to the crowd.

"They are the masters of their own fate,"

He tells himself.

"They have the right to live."

And as he moves into the train car,

He glances back at the lives

Saved by the kindness of one simple man.

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