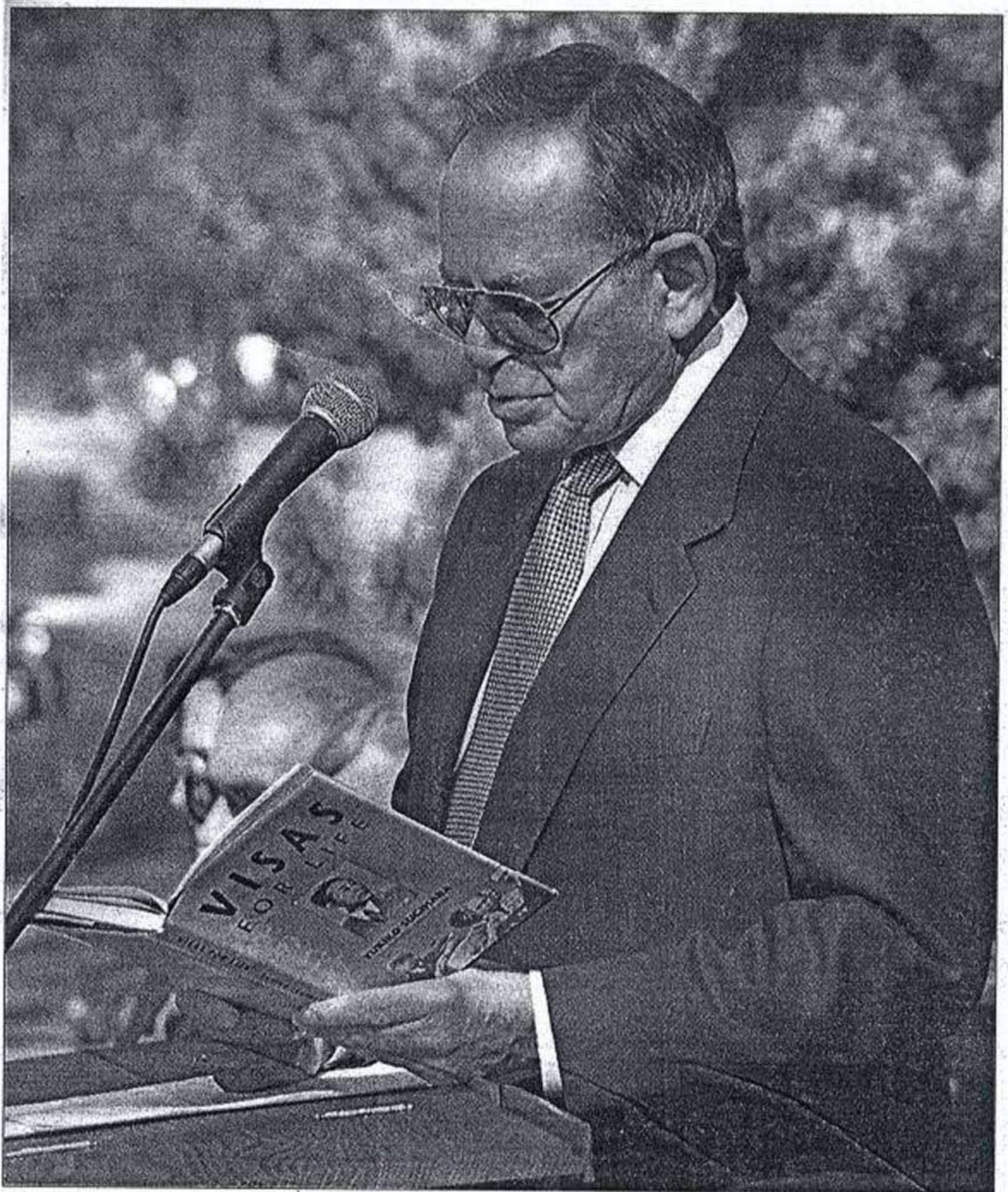


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Charles Fryer/For Pioneer Press

Honoring a good man

Glencoe resident Leo Melamed reads from "Visas for Life" at the ceremony Sunday honoring Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara. Page 9

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'Righteous' man honored for lives saved in WWII

By SUSAN BERGER
STAFF WRITER

More than 300 people gathered Sunday afternoon at the Evanston Civic Center's Avenue of the Righteous to honor Japanese diplomat Chiune, who in a great act of courage and in direct violation of his nation's orders risked his life by signing 6,000 exit visas for desperate Jews trying to escape the Nazis.

Mark Salomon, 9, and his sister Eve, 7, of

Glencoe, fidgeted a little but mostly listened attentively to Hiroki Sugihara, Chiune's eldest son. In fact, if not for Chiune Sugihara, there would be no Salomon children. In 1940, Sugihara issued an exit visa to their grandfather, Bernard Salomon. He escaped Lithuania and the Nazis, becoming Sugihara survivor No. 299.

The Avenue of the Righteous is the only park of its kind in the United States, created
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■ 'Righteous'

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by an interfaith board to remember and honor those who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. At Sunday's event, a tree was dedicated to Chiune Sugihara.

Rabbi Harold Kudan, one of the founders of the Avenue of the Righteous, gave the invocation. He noted that Sukkot, a holiday during which Jews give thanksgiving for the harvest, began that night.

"This afternoon, we are thankful for the harvest of memories . . . the memory of Sugihara," Kudan said.

Leo Melamud, chairman emeritus of the Chicago Merchantile Exchange and himself a Sugihara survivor, spoke about his family's ordeal during the Holocaust. Melamud, then 7, and his parents were fleeing the Nazis and the Bolsheviks, when the Gestapo captured them in 1939.

"Somehow my father, who is probably the smartest man I ever met, knew enough to get himself, his wife and his only child out of the clutches of the Gestapo," Melamud said. "Were it not for that act, we were doomed for the gas chambers. But his brilliance wasn't enough. Because it required an immeasurable amount of good luck, the help of the Almighty and a man named Chiune Sugihara, Hiroki's father."

Melamud went on to explain that while Chiune debated whether or not to help the Jews, it was his son, Hiroki, who after seeing the children in the courtyard begging for help, pleaded with his father to help the children. Hiroki's mother, Yukiko, tells the story that it was this plea that convinced Chiune to disobey his government and issue the exit visas to the Jews. In her book, "Visas for Life," she remembers her hus-

band's words: "My choice is clear. I may have to disobey my government, but if I don't, I will be disobeying my God."

During his introduction of Hiroki Sugihara, Melamud thanked Chiune Sugihara for his own daughter and four grandchildren.

Starting with a light touch, Hiroki mentioned the Chicago Cubs loss the day before. He then explained that his father's actions were both simple and complicated. "The simple answer is that it was just the right thing to do," Hiroki said. "The complicated answer is that my father believed we all belong to one great family of man . . . that people are more alike than different and that we should all help one another."

After his address, Hiroki was asked how it felt to meet the survivors. He mentioned his own family's experience after the war, when they were held in a concentration camp for 18 months.

"I feel like I am meeting my relatives, especially when I meet the children. After my experience in a concentration camp, I understand and share the same feelings," Hiroki said.

The ceremony Sunday was emotional and many wept as the Sugihara story was told. In a moving closing benediction, the Rev. Robert H. Oldershaw, pastor of St. Nicholas Church, said, "Bless Mark and Eve and all children with memory of the one person that can make a difference."

"I consider this hallowed ground," said Ruth Goldboss, one of the founders of the Avenue of the Righteous. There is a saying, Goldboss told those there, that "only in silence or in song are the most profound thoughts uttered. When I come here, it is in silence and in song."