



# Video Story Transcript

## A TWICE SAVED LIFE: THE SOLLY GAYNOR STORY

**By: Storyteller Alton Chung**  
<http://www.altonchung.com/>

**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://youtu.be/QQCwf5DU6Kg>

---

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

---

Hello. My name is Alton Takiyama-Chung. The story I am going to tell you right now is called, “A Twice Saved Life.” It’s from a large collection of stories which I created and called, “Okage Sama De.” (“I Am What I Am Because Of You”) and now, “A Twice Saved Life.”

We, Jews, have a saying, “To save one life, is if to save the entire world.” Kaunas, Lithuania. Just a dot on a map for most Americans. But for me, it is where I grew up. I was 11 years old when Hitler invaded Poland from the West in September of 1939. Two weeks later, Russia invaded Poland from the east. And over the next several months, Polish Jews began streaming across the border into Lithuania. In December of that year, like many other Jewish children in Lithuania, I decided to give my Hanukkah gelt, my Hanukkah money, to the refugees who had nothing. And then, ah, wouldn’t you know it, the new Laurel and Hardy film came in town and I just had to see it!

I decided to go see my aunt who ran a gourmet grocery store in downtown Kaunas. When I walked into the store, there was an elegantly dressed man with strange, slanted eyes. I had never seen a Japanese man before! Well, I told my aunt what I needed. And the man laughed and reached into his pocket, and said, “Here, here. Take it. Take the money. Take, take it.”

I said, “Oh no, no, no! You a stranger. You’re not family. I cannot take money from you.”

“Well, for the holidays, why don’t you consider me to be your uncle?”

I took the coin. "Uh...Uncle...uh...my name is Solly Ganor."

"And my name is Chiune Sugihara." Chiune Sugihara. He was the Consul for the Empire of Japan to Kaunas.

Well, time went on. In June 1941, Germany invaded Lithuania. Eventually, my family was split up and I was sent to Bavaria, southern Germany, to a little town outside of Munich, called Dachau. I witnessed many...horrible,...terrible things... But I survived.

In 1945, the SS guards wrestled us out of our barracks and made us march off into the frozen night. And we marched...And we marched...And we marched. For six days and nights we marched. I was weak. I was exhausted and I collapsed into a snow bank by the side of the road where the guards just left me to die. I was drifting away and then I felt someone grab hold of me and pull me out of the snow bank. And I opened my eyes and stared into this face with strange, slanted eyes. And I remembered Sugihara had strange, slanted eyes. There were four of them. They were dressed in khaki uniforms and they were tired and unshaven and dirty. And although they were speaking English, I knew that they were Japanese. I thought to myself, "Oh, these Japanese soldiers are now here to kill me." By then, I didn't care. "Go ahead! Kill me! Just get it over with!"

They looked at me and said, "No! We're not going to kill you! We are Americans."

"Oh, no, no, no! You are Japanese! You're here to kill me!" We went back and forth.

And finally, this Japanese man, fell down on his knees, weeping. "You're free, boy! We are Japanese Americans. You're free!" I stared into this Japanese man's eyes. They were kind and gentle like Sugihara's. It was only then that I believed.

His name was Clarence Matsumura and he was attached to the 522<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Battalion, which was part of 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. The all Japanese American unit. They were amongst the first to discover and begin liberating the complex of camps around Dachau. I found it ironic that Clarence and his kinsmen had volunteered to fight and die for the United States for many of them had their families locked up in "American Relocation" centers.

Well, after the war, I moved to Israel. I didn't talk very much about my experiences except to other people who were survivors of the camps. Ever since my liberation, I had not been able to cry. Psychiatrists told me that the trauma of the holocaust had just dried up all my tears. That I was now an emotional amputee; I would never cry again.

In 1992, I received a phone call from a man by the name of Eric Saul. He was a historian from San Francisco. He said that he was here in Israel with a group of Japanese American men who were there at the liberation of Dachau. They had come from Hawaii and California to Israel to be honored by the Knesset. Would I meet them?

Well, I arrived at the hotel and there was this group of old Japanese men. They were all gray haired, in their 70's. They asked me to read an account that I had written when I had first met the members of their battalion. And as I began reading my account, we were joined by another Japanese man - gray hair, glasses. And when I got to the point where these Japanese men were pulling me out of the snow bank, I looked up at the newcomer. And there were tears in his eyes. I stopped reading. I couldn't go on. I couldn't speak. After years of suppressing the insuppressible, this tidal wave of emotion is erupted through me. And I began to weep. The little boy that I had hidden away all those years had come out of hiding. And it was he who was weeping.

All these old men gathered around me to comfort me. "Uh...Don't be ashamed. You are among friends now." It was the voice of the newcomer. "Solly, this is Clarence Matsumura." I looked at this man, the newcomer, - gray hair, glasses. How could this be? I couldn't tell. And then he smiled. Oh... Nothing could change that smile! We fell into each other's arms and the years melted away. I was weak and he held me up...just as he had done 47 years ago on the road to Waakirchen just south of a little town called Dachau.