

Leopold "Ziggy" SIGELLAK, Australia

b. 17 April 1909, Nyéresháza

Courtesy of

Hanna (née SENDEROVICH) HOFFMAN, USA

Humanitarian Ziggy Sigellak dies at 85



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Maurice Rassaby

HUMANITARIAN Leopold Sigellak died in Sydney last week. He was 85.

Known to his friends as "Ziggy", the small, bustling figure devoted himself to assisting the post-war immigrant community and operated as if he were a one-man welfare agency.

He was born to Herman and Ozsenon Sigellak on April 17, 1909 in the Hungarian-speaking part of the former Czechoslovakia, the fourth of nine children. At the start of World War II he was married and the proud father of four sons and two daughters. However, when war began, he was separated from his wife and children (ranging in age from a few months to 13 years) and sent to a series of forced labour camps. He survived the war only to learn that his wife and children had all perished in the Holocaust.

His response was to devote his life to helping people in distress.

Mr Sigellak arrived in Australia in 1948, where he had a few relatives, determined to rebuild his life. He put his energies into his profession as a glazier and his unceasing efforts to help people in less fortunate circumstances.

It was a time of heavy immigration from Europe and, despite his meagre personal means, he helped hundreds of people to obtain permits to enter Australia. Once here, he assisted them with accommodation, covered their immediate financial needs and guided them towards suitable work. Large numbers in Australia today attest to being helped by him — some when they arrived and others when he reached out in times of hardship.

Among those for whom he arranged permits were Elizabeth and Leslie Parker. A

great friendship developed and he lived in their home for most of the last 40 years.

Mr Sigellak was recognised in the book *Australian Unsung Heroes & Heroines* in which Yeshiva dean Rabbi Pinchus Feldman is quoted as saying: "Always behind the scenes he is there whenever needed, a simple, humble man whose goodness is legendary."

Addressing the large crowd at Mr Sigellak's funeral, Shimon Parker said: "The Nazi atrocities stole most of Ziggy's immediate family and left my generation of Jews with a scarcity of grandparents. Ziggy replenished that scarcity, not with his physical size, but with the size of his heart and not only for my sister and myself, but for countless other Sydney Jewish families.

"There was no friend that Ziggy would not move Heaven and earth to help. He was everybody's friend. Ziggy simply loved people and people could not resist loving him. As a boy, in my excursions with him in one of his clapped-out trucks, it would be rare that Ziggy would drive more than a half-a-mile without stopping to chat with somebody in English, Yiddish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Russian, Italian, Greek or Chinese. And it wouldn't matter if we were in Vaucluse, Bondi, Bellevue Hill, Mascot, Marrickville or Ashfield, *everybody* knew and loved Ziggy.

"At a time when good role-models were rare, Ziggy was exemplary with his kindness, generosity, tolerance, humility, intelligence and understanding. His pride in himself, his work, his community and Judaism was apparent in all his deeds. My mother would joke that because of his height, he was only half-a-Jew, but we all knew that he was one of the most complete Jews we could ever hope to know."