

Eddie's simple life message: Just be my friend

By JOSH FRYDENBERG

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If we don't learn from the past, we will have no future." This was the message from Holocaust survivor Eddie Jaku, a remarkable Australian who this week departed this earth, aged 101.

Born in Leipzig, Germany, prior to World War II, Eddie experienced the horrors of the concentration camps, having been imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

With his parents murdered in the gas chambers, he was one of the precious few who survived to tell the sorry tale of humanity's darkest period.

The Nazis murdered millions of innocents; Roma, Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, the disabled – and six million Jews, including 1.5 million children.

After his rescue by the Americans in 1945, Eddie was a broken man. Frozen, starved and wounded. For decades, he could not talk about what he witnessed and endured.

But slowly, he would pick up the pieces; getting married to Flore, who would be his wife of 75 years, and starting a new life in Australia in 1950.

It was with the "miracle" birth of

his first son that he rediscovered life's meaning, saying: "In that one moment, my heart was healed and my happiness returned in abundance. I made the promise that from that day, until the end of my life, I would be happy, polite, helpful and kind. I would smile." Eddie opened his heart so that others could find theirs.

In the 1970s, he came together with a group of 20 survivors to "start talking about what happened to us – the world needed to know".

He would help create the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and, in 1992, co-founded the Sydney Jewish Museum.

For the past three decades, Eddie has taken school groups on tours of their Holocaust exhibitions, bringing the grainy, faded, black and white images to life for thousands of young students.

Sharing his personal journey, he would point them to a leather belt; his only personal item that survived with him through the camps.

"Never forget. Never again," he would tell the students, as he knew they would shape the world long after he was gone. Eddie was determined to see the next generation become a force for good.

"Hate is a disease," he would say, "it destroys first your enemy, but you also."

It was a powerful message from a man scarred by the past, but who

only ever looked forward.

Aged 100, Eddie took to print, writing an international bestseller and Australian Autobiography of the Year.

Titled *The Happiest Man on Earth*, Eddie shared his incredible journey of survival and hope.

He tells of the death, the darkness and the sorrow of those terrible years, but implores the reader to celebrate love and friendship as the cornerstone of life.

"Don't walk behind me, I may not lead," he says. "Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

It has been one of the privileges of my life to meet Eddie Jaku and call him a friend.

To feel his warmth, hear his wisdom and see his generosity of spirit was special.

It's something I will certainly never forget.

Eddie may now be gone but his legacy and memory lives on.

It is our duty to see that his story is known by generations to come, for he experienced the very worst but saw the very best in mankind.

For Eddie's sake, and for all those whose lives were tragically lost during the Holocaust, we say "never again".

Farewell, my friend.

Josh Frydenberg is the Federal Treasurer