

MY DEAR FRIENDS: THE LIFE OF RABBI DR HERMAN SANGER

By John S. Levi

Ormond, Vic.: Hybrid Publishers for the Australian Jewish Historical Society Victoria Inc. and The Progressive Jewish Cultural Fund, 2009. viii + 248 pp., plates.

Rabbi Dr Herman Sanger (1909–80) was the leading figure in Melbourne's Reform community, from his arrival in Australia from Berlin in 1936 until his retirement in 1974. Upon his arrival he found himself the fourth rabbi in six years of a new, tiny, and highly marginal congregation which had teetered at the edge of collapse.

In less than four decades he built Temple Beth Israel into what was arguably the largest single Jewish congregation in Australia; he himself became one of the best-known figures in the Australian Jewish community. Sanger's biography, written by his esteemed successor, is a genuinely outstanding piece of work – deeply researched, highly intelligent, well-informed, and continuously gripping – as befits a work by one of the leading historians of Australian Jewry. Levi traces Sanger's unlikely evolution from an up-and-coming spiritual leader among the great pulpits of Berlin, forced to leave as German Jewry was being destroyed, to one of the leaders, when he arrived in Melbourne, of a virtual Jewish wilderness, which would subsequently become a respectable, even major, centre of Jewish life.

Both poignant and inspirational, *My Dear Friends* is also extremely valuable for the light it sheds on the history of the Australian Jewish community of his time. Although I have written extensively on this subject, I learned a great deal, for example, about the reprehensible sacking of Rabbi Max Schenk by Temple Emanuel in Sydney in 1948 after he was critical of Ernest Bevin's Palestine policies, and about Sanger's continuously poor relations with Schenk's successor, Dr Rudolf Brasch, whom Sanger regarded (p. 107) as 'shallow and self-centred'.

The latter part of the book is necessarily taken up with the continuously frigid relations between Orthodox and Reform, a cold war which began earlier than the one between America and Russia and has long outlasted it. There were some aspects of Sanger's career and achievements about which I would have liked more information, for instance about the backgrounds of the hundreds of people who joined Temple Beth Israel during Sanger's service there: one assumes that many, perhaps most, were refugees from the *Reich*, attracted by their German refugee rabbi, but many others would have been native-born Australians, attracted to Liberal Judaism. Sanger also appears to have had little trouble in being allowed to speak on both the ABC and commercial radio, despite all the pressures one assumes must have existed against giving air time to a controversial, foreign-born Jew. It is also rather startling to realise that Sanger was only in his twenties when he arrived in Melbourne, and died at 71, not a great age despite his many decades of service.

Herman Sanger also emerges as a man who was uncannily correct most of the

time: about Jews in Germany having no future, about Zionism (which he always strongly supported), about the communist proclivities of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and anti-Semitism, and about the positive future of Australian Jewry. Perhaps only on Jewish day schools – he opposed the establishment of a Liberal Jewish day school, the establishment of which was delayed until the 1970s – did his wisdom lapse on the big issues of the day. Rabbi Levi's fine biography complements his other excellent study (1995) of *Rabbi Jacob Danglow* and his many other highly valuable works on Australian Jewish history, written over a long period. It is a model of its kind.

William D. Rubinstein

NOT WELCOME: A DUNERA BOY'S ESCAPE FROM NAZI
OPPRESSION TO EVENTUAL FREEDOM IN AUSTRALIA.

By Sue Everett

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Although the story of the HMT *Dunera* was not a major event against the enormity of World War II, it did blot England's record in relation to the rescue and treatment of German and Austrian Jewish refugees, and also Australia's.

This most recent account, *Not welcome: a Dunera boy's escape from Nazi oppression to eventual freedom in Australia*, is a combined biographical/autobiographical work telling of the experiences of one of the 'Dunera Boys', told by his daughter-in-law, Sue Everett, in combination with his own writings.

Ludwig (Lutz) Ernst Eichbaum was born in Nuremberg in 1923 to a well-to-do moderately Jewishly observant family of self-employed toy importers/exporters. His father, Fritz, had received several military honours for special service to his country in World War I, but like others, the Eichbaums were caught up in increasingly discriminatory and restrictive Nazi edicts from 1933 on.

Lutz Eichbaum's life of holidays with his mother, his education and bar mitzvah, social activities with family and friends, was not affected at first, save that he was compelled to move from a government to a Jewish school. But soon restrictions increased until *Kristallnacht* on 9 November 1938, which proved the defining moment in deciding to leave Germany. England, through its *Kindertransport* program, saved around 10,000 children (mostly Jewish) from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Lutz Eichbaum, sixteen at the time, was sent on one of these *Kindertransport*s. He departed on 31 July 1939 and, on reaching London by train, was taken to Westcliff-on-Sea, a quiet seaside resort where Lutz was to board. Here he was unhappy, unaccepted and lonely with a distant uncle, Hans, and his highly unsympathetic great-aunt, Bertha.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September, tribunals were set up to classify refugees into three categories of aliens, whether refugees from Nazi