

---

# A love story: Holocaust survivors celebrate seven decades of marriage

More than 70 years after Sigi and Hanka Siegreich laid eyes on each other in a Nazi slave-labour camp, the couple still make each other weak at the knees.

By Margaret Burin

Updated Wed 17 Aug 2016, 10:22am

---



**PHOTO:** Melbourne couple Sigi, 93, and Hanka, 91, say after all of these years they are still very much in love.

(ABC News: Margaret Burin)

Having virtually grown up in labour camps, the teenagers were both wasting away when their eyes first locked in the Czestochowa camp in Poland.

"I lost my mind," Sigi says.

"When I saw her, the whole world was turning around me. I saw a pair of beautiful eyes and I heard bells ringing."

It was New Year's Eve 1944, 18 days before the camp was liberated by the Red Army.

"I had no interest in girls, because I was a skeleton," Sigi says.

"There was a pair of beautiful eyes looking at me, with a smile like I never saw in my life."

He approached her and they talked.

Before returning to his barracks he gave her a kiss on the cheek.



**PHOTO:** Holocaust survivors Sigi and Hanka Siegreich have been married for 71 years.

(ABC News: Margaret Burin)

"I remember the first kiss," Hanka says as she puts her hand on her face.

That is exactly what she did on that first day, because she says, she wanted to hold onto it forever.

Sigi had stood out in an environment where the inhumane conditions had left most people shells of their former selves.

"At that time, the people in the camp were terrible," she says.

"He was very gentle."

Over the coming days this new love was tested.

Sigi had been working in the munitions workshop making bullets for the Nazi German army.

He says he had been sabotaging the factory line — making bullets too small for the gun barrels.

When he received word that the Gestapo were looking for him, he found a hiding spot in a nearby abandoned construction site.

He says only Hanka knew where he was hiding.

"She was the only person I could trust my life with," he says.

Hanka says she risked her life to keep him alive — smuggling him small pieces of her bread ration and a blanket that she had made to keep him warm on -15 degree nights.

Then one night, she came for a second visit.

This time she was smiling and had her arms out.

The camp was being liberated.

"They're gone," she told him.

"We are free."

The next day they were married.

### Tiny symbols of young lives lost



A Melbourne Jewish school is on a mission to collect 1.5 million buttons to pay tribute to each child murdered under the Nazi regime.



PHOTO: Sigi and Hanka Siegreich with their daughter Evelyne in 1946.

(Supplied)



PHOTO: Sigi holds an old photo of himself and friend Adam Frydman, a fellow camp inmate and witness of his marriage to Hanka.

(ABC News: Margaret Burin)



**PHOTO:** Sigi and Hanka Siegreich had their official wedding party on their 50th wedding anniversary. Amazingly, their witnesses were fellow inmates at the labour camp, who had also witnessed their 1945 marriage signing. (Supplied )

The year after Hanka gave birth to the first of their two daughters, Evelyne, the first baby born to Holocaust survivors in Sigi's home town of Katowice after the war.

Having moved to Australia in 1971, it wasn't until their 50th wedding anniversary that the couple had a proper wedding, in their daughter's Melbourne backyard.

"We've achieved a lot," Sig says.

"We've got so many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

"She charmed me. That was that, the rest was history."

Unlike Hanka and Sigi, only a handful of their classmates survived the Holocaust.

Their great-grandson's school, Bialik College, is currently collecting 1.5 million buttons to honour the children who were murdered under the Nazi regime.

Sigi is donating 180 buttons to the project this month, to represent the family he lost in the Holocaust.

The doting couple, aged 91 and 93, have already had their gravestones prepared, side by side, for when they leave this world.

The inscription also commemorates their immediate family who were never given a grave.

"We are inviting the souls of our exterminated family to rest in our grave."

**Topics:** world-war-2, judaism, melbourne-3000

*First posted Wed 17 Aug 2016, 6:12am*

[Contact Margaret Burin](#)