Schools pioneer mourned

PETER KOHN

ISRAEL Kipen, Holocaust survivor, philanthropist and Jewish day schools pioneer, has passed away at 98. Kipen was among a small circle that founded Mount Scopus Memorial College, Australia's first Jewish day school, in 1948.

He once recollected to *The AJN* the concept of a Jewish day school was anathema to the Jewish establishment of the time. "They saw themselves as Australians of the Mosaic persuasion and didn't believe their children should go to a Jewish school."

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> **Rabbi James Kennard**
> Principal, Mount Scopus

More than a decade later, when Kipen had retired from his Mount Scopus presidency and was transforming Bialik College from a preschool to a fully-fledged school, after the sale of the old Carlton Cheder, he wanted Bialik to be different. "At Mount Scopus, Jewish culture was part of a religious curriculum. At Bialik, the Jewish religion would become part of a cultural curriculum."

Kipen personified the new wave of Australian Jews. Failing to persuade his parents in Bialystok, Poland to leave with him in 1939, Kipen fled to Lithuania. From Chiune Sugihara, Lithuania's Japanese consul, who secretly saved Jews, he obtained a visa ostensibly for Dutch Curacao, but was sent to Japan.

Before he left, Kipen personally saved lives. "I made copies of the visa, then pasted the names of many others into them."

From Japan, he was sent to the Jewish refugee colony in Shanghai, where he worked in a kitchen, serving some 250 meals a day to destitute Jews.

After the war, he discovered his mother and three siblings had also fled eastwards during the war, but were sent to a Siberian camp, which they survived. His father survived a Russian prison. But his grandmother, an uncle and a cousin were among family that perished in Bialystok.

In 1946, Kipen received papers from a maternal cousin in Australia and arrived in Melbourne. He married his late wife Laura and established a knitwear business. But communal involvement soon beckoned.

Kipen later completed a bachelor of arts in politics, history and Hebrew, and a master of arts. He became a philanthropist to tertiary institutions.

Mount Scopus College principal Rabbi James Kennard described Kipen as "an integral member of that group of visionaries and builders who created Mount Scopus Memorial College and indeed the Jewish day school movement in Australia".

Bialik principal Jeremy Stowe-Lindner lauded the school's board president of 17 years: "His vision for a vibrant, high-achieving Zionist Jewish school in our community has been fully realised. The growth and success of Bialik College is in no small part thanks to his visionary leadership."

Dvir Abramovich, who holds the Israel Kipen Senior Lectureship in Hebrew Studies at the University of Melbourne, described Kipen as "a towering leader of consequential intellect, generosity, and a deep love for the Hebrew language … a man of deeds who practised what he preached".

Kipen is survived by his children, Doron, a sound engineer, and Aviva, a Progressive rabbi.

Israel Kipen (foreground) with Bialik College principal Jeremy Stowe-Lindner at Bialik's 70th anniversary event in 2012. Photo: Peter Haskin