

OBITUARY

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A true 'mother in Israel'

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Heather (Hedva) Rosing was born in Sydney in 1941 and lived there until the early '60s when she moved to Israel, firstly based in Tel Aviv and then, for many years, in Omer near Beersheva. It was there where she and her husband Danny were joined, in their retirement years, by Heather's parents, Jules and Susi Cohen, formerly of Castlecrag (Sydney) and Elizabeth Bay.

Visitors to their Castlecrag home were met by a haunting Yosl Bergner painting of a gaunt, concentration camp drummer boy, and a bust of Beethoven. Together they epitomised the Cohens' guiding sensibilities: a profoundly Jewish sense of social commitment and an emancipated belief in individual human creativity.

Susi had been born in Essen, Germany, where she had witnessed and endured the rise of Hitler. She arrived in Sydney as a teenager with her parents, Ester and Ephraim Catts, in the late 1930s. She married Jules, and with him was involved in an early venture in what would now be called the organic health foods industry, and in progressive politics. Among Heather's cousins was Barry Cohen, later a notable federal politician and minister, and his sister Reyna (Caron), an early 1960s popular music celebrity.

Heather became deeply involved, socially and politically, in Betar in the late 1950s and early '60s. In those pre-1967 years, Betar presented a paradox. In a Sydney Jewish community that was not yet inclined to Zionism, and certainly not to the nationalist Zionism of Betar and Herut (now Likud), Betar was perhaps the most dynamic and successful of community youth groups.

Its great appeal was built upon two things. First, it was historically "ahead of the curve". Its young members might or might not have religious inclinations, like those drawn to Bnei Akiva, and they might or might not consider themselves socially progressive, like the Habonim crowd. But they knew that for them, as children of the war and the immediate post-Shoah years, including the birth of Israel, Jewishness had fatefully become a modern national political identity – and that, they intuited, was the script that was now shaping Jewish historical development. The appeal of that orientation to intelligent and well-attuned young Jews was compelling. Many from the Betar of those years were to become leading citizens of Israel and Australia, and make notable contributions to public life.

Second, it was the magnetic appeal of an outstanding resident Israeli shaliach and mentor, Gad Pedhazur, later a distinguished academic researcher in the USA, and of the local leadership headed by Danny Rosing.

Born in mandatory Palestine, Danny had been sent to school in Switzerland, and then suddenly to complete his secondary education in Sydney at Sydney Boys' High School. From there he went on to become one of the early engineering graduates of the University of New South Wales. Austere, dedicated, at times remote but at others capable of an enveloping warmth and sense of fun, Danny came to personify Sydney Betar in that period.

After her graduation from Sydney



Heather (Hedva) Rosing

1941-2019

University, Heather and Danny were married and left for Israel, via Canada. They lived and worked in Israel as a partnership and team: she teaching English, privately, and he working in Israel's aircraft, technology and defence industries. In addition to his main work, he was often entrusted with significant "second-level" political and defence missions overseas. Heather was his support in all these endeavours, as well as his senior managing partner in maintaining a vast worldwide network of connections, personal and political.

She anchored, tenderly and with discretion and deep human insight, a network of connections across continents, decades, political divisions and contending imaginations. She nurtured not only this vast cast of often unruly characters but also her own family. She was truly "a mother in Israel".

She passed away in Israel on January 27 this year, and is immediately survived by Danny, her brother Peter Keeda of Sydney, by four daughters and one son, and eight grandchildren. She died bravely and calmly, with courage and enormous dignity.

In their funeral tribute her children said: "You modelled tolerance and acceptance. You had this amazing talent for letting people feel seen, heard, and understood. Even at the end, your grace and your ability to see others with so much selflessness and kindness, was astounding. You were there for each and every one of us and helped us say goodbye. Thank you most of all for this last lesson."

"Despite the intolerable pain you were in, throughout this time you were so gracious. You had accepted your imminent death. You were very clear about what you wanted and what you did not want. You were patient and caring with all of us. You said your goodbyes and made sure to ask each of us how we felt about your death. You spoke with humour and wisdom, acceptance and calmness. So strong! So inspiring!

"Part of this great gift that you gave us is the feeling that in your last moments – everything is okay. Your state of mind was very peaceful. At the end, you were grateful and happy for the life you had. There was no fear. No regrets. No clinging. You did not need us to escort you, Mummy, you guided us through your last moments."

Written by Clive Kessler.