

Start of Betar in Strathfield

One day in 1953 I had just started going to Betar and was asked by Bob Shteinman, Mefaked (head of) Sydney Betar if I could come with him to Strathfield to meet Mrs. Sekel to discuss the possibility of starting a Betar group in Strathfield.

I went with Bob to the Sekels' home and there met with Esther Sekel (mother of Ronny, Richard and Evelyn) and a few other parents from the Strathfield Shul, as well as Malka Weinberg, a WIZO leader who was visiting from Israel.

Mrs Sekel said they wanted a Zionist youth group to start in Strathfield in addition to Habonim. She would have preferred Hashomer Hatzair as she had belonged to it in her youth in Europe but had met some of the Betar madrichim and liked them. She asked Malka Weinberg what they should do, given the differences in ideology between Betar and Hashomer.

After a short discussion Ms. Weinberg advised the parents there to go for the madrichim they trusted as the ideology was less important for children aged 9 to 13. This was accepted and a few weeks later I became the madrich of Betar Maoz Strathfield, meeting at the Sekels' Croydon home or in a small garage near Strathfield railway station. I don't recall the correct order but definitely recall both places. Later we were allowed to use a room on the 2nd floor at the rear of the old synagogue building in Florence Street. Meetings continued at the Strathfield Shul every Sunday afternoon for the next few years.

The first members of the group included Ronny and Richard Sekel, Johnny and Aviva Ziegler, Henry Bishopverder, Lesley Lowe and Johnny Flachs, whose mothers had been at the meeting with Malka Weinberg and later were joined by Miriam Deston (now Briggs), Eleanore Blumenthal, Dina Marks and others.

A Habonim group met at the Shul at the same times and the relationship between the two groups was very friendly.

A large proportion of the Strathfield group later became madrichim and leaders of Sydney Betar, with Henry Bishopverder (now Ben Ezra) the head of Australian Betar in the 1960's.

by Danny Rosing (with help from Henry Ben Ezra)

Omer, Israel

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