

POCONOS

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In April of 1951, I returned to the United States after a six-year stint in Europe. I had served as a U.S. Army chaplain in Germany and Austria and then as the chief emigration officer for the Joint Distribution Committee in Italy. During those six years, I had lost contact with the American Jewish community, including The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS).

I returned to the States and needed a job to provide for my wife and four-month-old daughter. Saul Teplitz told me about Camp Ramah. I approached Rabbi Bernard Siegel, then the executive director of United Synagogue, requesting a job at Ramah as a camp rabbi. “Mike,” he replied, “Rabbis we have enough. Lifeguards we need.”

I took out my Red Cross Life Savers card. Rabbi Siegel grasped the card, and noticing the expiration date of 1942, he said: “Get it renewed and you have a job as waterfront man at Ramah in the Poconos.” So at the ripe old age of thirty-one, I passed the test and immediately took off for Ramah.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten summer.

David Fish, the camp manager, and his family were our table partners and that relationship became a lifelong friendship. We made friends with staff members, and these relationships also lasted long after the summer program.

In addition to being the guest waterfront man, I also doubled as song leader in the dining room—introduced with the chant *anu rotzim me’ir*. As a confirmed egoist, I reveled (and still do) recalling that chant.

Also, as an added bit of excitement, I studied Gemara with some staff members who were preparing to take their tests for entry into JTS. In later years, meeting them as rabbis was a true delight. Ramah remained with me and my wife as a great highlight of our life.