

Beginnings. The role of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin in my career began with a Hebrew test and an interview with Rabbi Burton Cohen at Ner Tamid Congregation in Chicago. I was seventeen and one of three sisters from Fairbury, Illinois: population 2,500. Ours was the only Jewish family in a 100-mile radius. I passed the test that qualified me to be a junior counselor. My knowledge was a result of tutoring during the first thirteen years of my life by my father, Seymour F. Dolgin, ז"ל, who taught me Hebrew, holidays, and history in the playroom of our house. At camp that summer, I worked hard, played hard, and did all I could to fit in with the campers and my colleagues on the staff. I discovered a wholeness, a completeness that came from being part of a community that shared Jewish activities, ideas, and values. I treasured the feeling of belonging and living a life in which Judaism was a part of everything I did. And I learned that I could even contribute to the community that came to mean so much to me.

Teachers. The greatest influences on me during my camp years were the teachers with whom I was privileged to study: Louis Newman, ז"ל, Dr. Yochanan Muffs, ז"ל, Rabbi Nathan Gordon, and others. The formal classes and informal exchanges with these great teachers shaped my career. I cannot underestimate the significance of a few moments on the porch of the newly constructed *sifriyyah* talking with Seymour Fox, ז"ל, about the meaning of *veshinantam levanecha*.

Role models. As a counselor, I was influenced by individuals with whom I worked, people who continued their Jewish education away from camp and became rabbis and teachers: Jerry Zelizer, Leon Waldman, Jeff Tigay, Joel

Roth, Phil and Barbara Spectre, Helen and Moshe Davidson, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Barry Chazan, and Michael Gratz. They not only attempted to live the texts we learned but made it possible for others to do so. They taught me to see Jewish learning and teaching as a part of life—not apart from it.

Hebrew. At Camp Ramah, Hebrew also came alive. Hebrew was the language of sports, bunk activities, drama, and the arts—not isolated drills in a classroom. Yet, it was also the holy language of the prayer book and Jewish texts. I still find myself singing songs from *South Pacific*, *Showboat*, and *Oklahoma* and longing for *kabbalat shabbat* on the lake.

Israel. After three years together as counselors, Michael (Rabbi Michael Katz) and I had the privilege of being on the staff of the Ramah Israel Seminar just two weeks after our wedding. It was a memorable experience, considering that it was our honeymoon and our first trip to Israel. I will always carry with me first impressions of our land. Some of my deep-felt connection to Israel and my political inclinations come from standing on Mount Zion in 1964 and trying to follow the guide's instructions so we could locate the *kotel* somewhere below us.

Preparation for a career in Jewish education. As a junior counselor I went to The Jewish Theological Seminary prior to camp to learn from Dr. Joseph Schwab how to run a bunk like a home. At the University of Michigan, I taught Sunday school and studied with other Ramahniks. Because of a Ramah connection, specifically Seymour Fox, z"l, Michael and I went to Ohio State University for graduate work where I met another Camp Ramah leader, Dr. Saul Wachs, education director at Congregation Tifereth Israel. Returning to Chicago after graduate school, I had to choose between becoming an English teacher and becoming a Jewish educator. The Ramah factor—and my father who said “there are a lot of English teachers in the world but not so many Jewish educators”—influenced my decision.

Lifelong learning. Camp Ramah was not just for the campers. It was also a center of learning for all the adults who were there, and learning became an integral part of my life. I continue to study today. As the director of the Florence Melton Mini-School, I shared my love of learning with Jewish adults across North America. What started at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin became my lifelong pursuit, my passion, my career, and, as I hoped when I was a junior counselor, a way to contribute to a community that means so much to me.