

BERKSHIRES - POCONOS

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I was a latecomer to Ramah. I didn't begin my Ramah experience until the summer of 1964 at the age of fourteen. I spent only two summers as a camper—during the first two years of Ramah in the Berkshires. For me, those two summers were critical to my growth as a Jew. As a day school graduate who went on to public high school, the unique experience at camp left a lasting impression. It was exciting to see many of my new Ramah friends throughout the year at United Synagogue Youth (USY) events and at Prozdor at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). Some of those friendships endure to this day, over forty years later.

When the time came to travel to Israel in the summer of 1966, I chose Ramah Seminar. It might sound surprising that the person who currently serves as the director of USY (and was a regional USY officer at the time) chose Ramah instead of USY Pilgrimage. The truth is that it was not an unusual decision. Our Seminar group of eighty-two participants included many active USYers. We saw no conflict. Memories of that summer are still fresh in my mind. We were the last Seminar group to spend the summer in a divided

Jerusalem. Whenever I visit Israel, I still recall the barricades and walls at various intersections in Jerusalem dividing Israel from Jordan.

The summer of 1967 was spent at Ramah in the Poconos in the Mador program. That may have been the most pivotal summer of my life. The intensive staff-training program, which included regular classes dealing with educational concepts, probably convinced me to become a Jewish educator. I still remember and use many of the concepts I learned that summer.

After having been on staff for two summers at Ramah in the Berkshires, many years later (in 1990), my family began to enjoy the benefits of Ramah in the Poconos. My wife Yehudit, who never had the opportunity to attend a Ramah camp, became the *gannenet*, and our four children became campers. Yehudit eventually became a teacher and spent fourteen wonderful summers at camp. Our children all went on to serve as staff members, and I became a staff spouse, often teaching during my visits.

For all of us, our Ramah experiences were an important part of our Jewish growth. Even though we each came to camp with strong Jewish backgrounds, the overall experience added a missing dimension.