

CALIFORNIA NEW ENGLAND - POCONOS

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What flashes in my mind when considering the impact of Camp Ramah on my life is that I became a Jewish educator because a significant teacher told me (and persuaded me): “You have the power to change the world.”

The teacher was Rabbi David Mogilner, ז"ל. The setting was Camp Ramah in the Poconos, my first summer as a counselor. A gift of having come of age in the 1960s was the optimism that one individual can make a difference and that a group of individuals with shared goals can change the world.

This “can-do” attitude with which I became imbued that summer was entwined with the deep meaning that living a Jewish life came to hold for me. We were encouraged to think about Jewish life in camp as a counterculture to the Judaism of the synagogues and homes that our campers (and we ourselves) came from. We were sent home to be revolutionaries within the Jewish communities in which we lived.

I can honestly say that since that summer, in my life as wife, parent, educator, community member, communal professional, colleague, and friend, I have very rarely accepted “no” for an answer or “we don’t do it that way,” or “that will never work.” In fact, I have always considered those kinds of statements more as a challenge to action than as a roadblock.

When I worked with teens at Camp Ramah in New England in later years, I pushed the limits of the conventional wisdom regarding what young teenagers would willingly engage in during the summer. I remember having a regular poetry discussion circle with the campers in my bunk, listening to Handel’s *Messiah* when preparing for Shabbat Naḥamu (when we read those same selections from Isaiah), and organizing evening programs devoted to discussions of civil rights and the Vietnam War, issues roiling our country at the time.

In my summers at Ramah in California, we demolished the idea that counselors wouldn’t come to class. We demanded it, provided good teaching, and they came. We recreated the Mador (counselor training program for twelfth graders) so that it wasn’t just “the next *edah*” but was a serious professional training program. When we decided that summer camp wasn’t only for kids, I dreamed about and fashioned a Ramah Family Camp that didn’t just bring families to camp but filled the experience with substantial Jewish content and quality time for the families.

Ramah also made an indelible mark on my personal life. I met my husband and many of our lifelong friends at Ramah. We raised our children at Ramah and saw all four become counselors and “roshes.” When we were a family with four young children and two careers and people asked me, “How do you manage it all?” I would say, “I can administrate anything, I was a *rosh edah* at Camp Ramah.” We modeled our home observance on the Jewish lives we imbibed at Ramah.

When I see my two-year-old grandson Yair, running free at camp, enjoying the action and excitement, and singing “hawuyaya,” his version of “Halleluyah,” learned from attending *tefillot* with Amitzim (the Tikvah Program), I know that camp is embedded in the DNA of my family, and I know the torch has been passed. My three-year-old granddaughter Eliana knows

the whole Machon song (and the California Ramah Machon song is very, very long)—she's ready for camp!

My husband likes to say that our family has spent a collective total of fifty-plus summers at one Ramah camp or another. WOW! Here's to the next 120!