

# CONNECTICUT NEW ENGLAND - POCONOS

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**S**ays she will go anywhere for the sake of the movement.” I read this statement during staff week at Ramah Poconos in the summer of 1976. As a member of the *hanhalah*, I had access to the camp personnel files, and I was reading the notes that Rabbi David Mogilner, ז”ל, had placed in my file after an exit interview with me in 1960, when I was seventeen. I had spent that summer as a counselor-in-training (CIT) for a bunk of ten-year-olds in the Connecticut camp. Suffice it to say that it had not been a great summer for me. I was about to leave for Israel for a year as a representative of United Synagogue Youth (USY) to the *machon lemadrichei hutz la’aretz*. I told David that I wanted to return as a counselor after the year in Israel but not to Connecticut and definitely not to work with ten-year-olds. He said, “Okay, you’ll come to my camp.” I did, and he made me a counselor in the Machon at Ramah in the Poconos. That is how I, a New Yorker, came to be at the Poconos camp during the summers of 1962 and 1963.

I must confess that as a child I refused to go to Ramah, having heard that they had classes every day. I ended up in Massad from the ages of ten to fourteen because nobody told me that *sihot* were actually classes.

During the summers of 1962 and 1963, Mogilner taught a counselor education class several times a week. None of us would ever be the same. To this day I can hear him exhorting us to be “honorable and accessible role models.” I can close my eyes and see him in his red jacket in the *hadar ochel* reminding all of us to dress warmly because “*im kar li, kar lachem*” or moving us along to the next activity by saying “*hasha’ah achshav, lefi she’oni, shehu be’etzem she’on hamahaneh. . .*”

During those idyllic summers, there were two full counselors and two Madorniks in every bunk! Counselor musicals were directed by the multi-talented Rabbi Efray Spectre, ז”ל. Professor Gershon Cohen taught one of the counselor classes, and Dr. Israel Francus taught another. It was during the summer of 1963 that I became seriously involved with another Machon counselor—Michael Monson. One day we came late to Mogilner’s class. This was a serious infraction. We explained by saying we had been up late studying gemara for Rav Francus. From then on “studying gemara” became a euphemism for behavior that usually took place in the bushes!

Michael and I were married in June of 1964. In June of 1967, we went to Camp Ramah in Palmer, he as the administrator of the lower camp and

I as a teacher. What a summer! We had a super group of teachers working with Rabbi Neal Kaunfer as *rosh hinuch*. We taught the Joseph stories to the upper camp and ate, slept, and drank Joseph for nine weeks. All of us read the Thomas Mann version in *Joseph and His Brothers* and had the great good fortune to study the text with Professor José Faur.

Following camp we left for Israel for Michael's fourth year of rabbinical school. It was just after the Six-Day War and an amazing time to be living in Jerusalem. We stayed the next summer to be counselors on Ramah Seminar. I became pregnant with our older son Uri that summer. I went to the group leader and asked if I could be excused from climbing Masada as I thought I was pregnant. "That's too serious a decision for me to make," said the *rosh kevutzah*. "You'd better ask David." Yup, David Mogilner was directing the Israel Seminar program. Our lives were still running in tandem!

Several years later, in 1976, Michael and I were living in Philadelphia. I got a call from David. He was coming to America to direct Ramah in the Poconos for one summer. He wanted me to be *rosh hinuch* and Michael to be an advisor in the Mador. "But I don't know how to be a *rosh hinuch*," I replied. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll help you." And so he did until that terrible day at the end of the sixth week of camp when he collapsed, and we, the *hanhalah*, had to absorb the shock, break the news to the campers and staff, and manage the camp for the remainder of the summer. I remember walking around the campus with Michael Brown, who was directing the Mador. We were all in shock. Every place we looked we saw David's shadow. And I still do. Quite regularly, a word, phrase, or action by an educator or other leader triggers an automatic response in me, which I know was instilled by David Mogilner. And I am not the only one. A whole generation of Jewish educators, rabbis, and lay leaders were shaped by his dynamic personality and charismatic teaching. His memory is more than a blessing, it is an on-going inspiration.