

## MAINE - POCONOS

### CHANA SIMCKES (HANNAH FIEBERMAN)

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[At the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Jewish Educators Assembly in November 2001, Chana Simckes was awarded the degree of Doctor of Pedagogy, honoris causa, by The Jewish Theological Seminary.]

In the spring of 1949, our religious school principal, Harry Malin, ז"ל, announced that two scholarships to Camp Ramah would be awarded to the two students who received the highest grades in a test to be given. I was one of the winners! Alan Lovins was the other.

And so, early one morning in July, Alan and I boarded a train in New Haven (we were both from Bridgeport). We had difficulty finding the Ramah car but eventually found the other campers on their way to Mt. Vernon, Maine.

It was quite a long trip by train, followed by a bus trip. Upon arrival at the camp, the girls were assigned to a bunk (there were only three), and the boys went to their tents.

The camp experience was difficult, but nonetheless incredible. The responsibility for creating a ball field was that of the campers. We would throw stones from the field each day! The lake was pristine, clean, and beautiful. Hiking was invigorating. Speaking Hebrew was mandatory.

By far the most wonderful experience I had was spending that summer with incredible people: Dr. Solomon Feffer, ז"ל, our director; the Katzoffs, our head counselors; Yochanan Muffs, ז"ל; and on and on.

Ramah became my lifeline to my tradition, for I came from an observant home and found the Ramah environment very supportive. When the Maine camp closed that year, the Poconos camp was opened. I remained a camper, counselor, and teacher for years to come.

In 1953 while in New York City to interview for college, I stopped at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) to visit my Ramah friends. It was on that day that Dr. Judah Goldin put his arm around me, led me to his office, and revealed the signing that week of the contract with Columbia University, which led to the formation of the Joint Program. And the rest is history. I attended JTS and Columbia, married a rabbi, taught in religious schools for many years, and finally served as an educational director on Long Island for nineteen years.

For all of the above, I thank Ramah and the wonderful staff and teachers who had such a profound influence on my life so many years ago.