

WISCONSIN

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Looking back to my Ramah experiences, I can trace a clear connection to my years in Ramah and my eventual aliyah. I began a long (and still ongoing) career with Ramah in 1957 at the age of ten at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. In my seven years as a camper, I had the benefit of being exposed to a variety of Hebrew enthusiasts and Israelis who insisted that I talk to them in Hebrew. Although I went to Hebrew school, in those days we didn't learn conversational Hebrew. Yet I had counselors and *rashei edab*, as well as teachers, who insisted that I make the effort. Among those that I remember were Ruti, ז'ז', and Benni Mushkin. I also grew to love Israeli songs and dances.

When the opportunity arose to go to Israel with the Ramah Seminar, I did not hesitate. From the moment I arrived in Israel I felt I had come home. I was able to carry on conversations (on a basic level) in Hebrew with relatives, and I was familiar with the culture of song and dance. Later, during my years as a counselor at Ramah Wisconsin, some of us would talk about starting a kibbutz together in Israel so we could carry on the atmosphere of camp "forever." We weren't the ones who did that, but during my sophomore year of college, one of my camp friends, Avi Davis, called and asked if "we" were going to Israel for our junior year. Then the calls went back and forth, and eventually, several of us came as a group for our junior year to Hebrew University. Again, I felt that I had come home. Hebrew came to me easily, and I felt at home in the culture. Many a Friday night I would sit with relatives who had fought in the War of Independence and sing song after song together with them. They were always astounded at the broad repertoire of songs that we could sing together.

Through my Ramah experiences, I always felt a very deep connection to Israel and to its language and culture. When I came to Israel in my junior year, it became clear to me within the first month of *ulpan* that this is where I belong. That feeling has never changed. I stayed until I married my husband Ronnie four years later (we had met at Ramah), and we came back to Israel thirty years ago. We have been privileged to spend the last twenty-eight summers at Ramah Wisconsin and to give our children the benefit of integrating the best of the American Jewish experience into their lives.