

# CALIFORNIA NEW ENGLAND - POCONOS

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**C**amp is a series of snapshots: in the Poconos on the lake, in California on the mountains, at Palmer on the vast green. As a camper I enjoyed Ramah; as a staff member I loved it.

I'm sitting on the porch reading Bertrand Russell, my hero of the moment and the most persuasive atheist I have ever read. Walking by the bunk is Rabbi Michael Brown, who asks what I am reading.

"Bertrand Russell," I answer aggressively, ready for a theological fight.

"David, how old are you?"

"Seventeen," I answer.

"Well, I am glad then that you are reading Bertrand Russell."

I was shocked. "Why?"

"Because," he answered, "I would rather you grow out of him than grow into him."

The prediction came true, and for me that interchange summed up so much of what was wonderful about camp. Beliefs that were open to challenge, friendships leavened with humor and acceptance, the promise—even the certainty—of growth.

Camp memories range from learning Hebrew terms to misbegotten romances to astonishment that campers I knew are now CEOs and parents and rabbis. The magic quality that summer has in one's youth never leaves; everyone who has gone to Ramah, lived there, and learned to love so many things, feels the special glow of foreverness that summer plants in our hearts.

Ramah was instrumental in my Jewish education and in my decision to become a rabbi. Along with so many others, it was at camp as a staff member that I first had the opportunity to turn from a student into a teacher. The campers looked to us as role models, and as a result, we began to become what we were expected to be. Inside ourselves, we found the Jews we spoke about.

"Youth and black hair are fleeting," Ecclesiastes tells us, and so many of us who recall our time at Ramah see it not only as Ramah, but also as a tableau

of early life. Its preciousness is that we were lucky enough to spend that early life in a place that was warm, safe, nurturing, and Jewish. *Dayyenu*. For many of us at the beginning of our respective journeys, that was surely enough.