

Jewish summer camp started with the Borscht Belt—Jewish family experiences in Upstate New York in the Catskills. These camps, popular in the 20s-60s were a Jewish response to exclusive, WASPY country club vacations. Around the 20s, modern Jewish sleepaway camps also became popular. These camps were created as a counter to the camps Jewish kids couldn't go to. Ramah, a project of JTS saw educational potential for an immersive, fun, traditional summer.



"Our kids really need camp. They need their space from us to become who they're meant to be, to solve their own problems, to suffer their own setbacks—all in a society whose ruling authorities are mostly only a few years older. Our kids need to wear the same clothes for days on end if they want, eat nothing but cereal for weeks if they must. To make friends and break up and form cliques and make other friends and not make others feel left out—but also to figure it out, how to have fun alone, sometimes wandering in the woods or canoeing in a lake or making a lanyard in the shade. They need to scrub a toilet once in a while, endure a cold shower. And to sneak a first kiss behind a tree, be part of a team that doesn't depend on athletic ability, learn the hand signals to the Birkat HaMazon. They need to sing their throats dry at a Shabbat song session, they need to hear a few Hebrew words like "Hadar Ocheil", they need to meet an Israeli soldier, maybe even learn the meaning of Tisha B'Av." "Let there be camp—please!"
By Judi Rudoren, The Forward

"The ambassador Jared Kushner's as a credential interviewed on NPR just before Jewish-summer-camp experience for Middle East peacemaking" via @etarmykim on Twitter



אין עוד מקום בעולם כמחנה רמה

A Meditation on the Role of Jewish Camp
In my Life and for American Jews



HOA RABIN



CHILL ON THE HILL



WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER

(2001) was a star-studded

film about a loosely Jewish summer camp with classically Jewish looking characters with Jewfro's and dark hair. The film is a huge cultural touchstone. An even Jewish prequel series came out in 2013 on Netflix.



"It's hard to think about how a place so beautiful could be gone. So many bunkhouses with names scribbled on them, stages where lip sync battles were performed, and spaces where we all prayed for peace." — "My Summer Camp Burned Down in the California Wildfires" By Laura Schultze, HeyAlma



Lots of Jewish celebrities went to camp. Broadway star Ben Platt went to mine! It's in tv shorts. A HAIM song references popular camp song "Lo Yisa Goy" (Summer Girl).

My favorite thing to teach was the "oreo lesson" (ages 9-10). I made it my first year.

- Each kid gets an oreo
- They go around showing how they eat it, each eating it differently
- And then I say, "see? It's just like God. We all consume the same thing differently and that's why it's cool talking about it"



The New Library

THE NEW LIBRARY IS ACTUALLY OLDER LOOKING THAN THE OLD LIBRARY. THE OLD LIBRARY JUST GOT REMODELED. THE NEW LIBRARY IS THE BASE FOR YAHADUT. I TAUGHT INSIDE, OUTSIDE, NEARBY, FAR AWAY, AND ON THE PORCH (MY FAVORITE). IT'S FULL OF BOOKS, MANY OF WHICH I READ DURING GUEST SPEAKERS AND MOVIE SCREENINGS. I TAUGHT OVER 150 KIDS OVER 3 YEARS, AGES 9-15. WE LEARNED ABOUT GOD, FEMINISM, TORAH, JUSTICE, LITERATURE, CULTURE, LITURGY, RITUAL, and MORE.

Girls' Shetach

The Girls' Shetach is a fun and empowering place where girls can succeed. Here girls are told they can do anything. Many tents don't have mirrors. Each day has a group bonding activity. There is collective responsibility. We laugh and celebrate. Girls exist without the pressures and burdens of being around men and boys.

GIRL
YOU GOT
THIS



TIYULIM



I led a hiking trip with two outdoorsy male counselors. On our first hike, my camper got behind the group - she said her new shoes hurt her feet. I stayed back and the more outdoorsy counselor (who camped alone on his days off, eating lizards) stopped checking back with us. We got lost for 3 hours, just the two of us, without cell service or a satellite phone. The good news is it was a great camper and we're closer now!



Sunburnt shoulders + sunscreen in my hair



TEFILLAH



This is where the 14 year olds pray →



One time my co-counselors and I had the Rosh tefillah lead a hagboch workshop for our tent bonding!

I started wearing tefillin at camp so the girls would feel empowered to try it. Nobody gave me tefillin for my Bar Mitzvah. I wore my Dad's. And then I started always wrapping tefillin. It even wore down so much I had the straps replaced in Meil Shearim.

I wasn't a camper - camp is really expensive. But my family went for years to Ohr Lanu, the family camp for families with a child with special needs.



Me and my siblings participating in "mud hugs," a tradition where the oldest age group covers themselves in mud after their tiyul and hugs everyone with mud before Shabbat.

THINK HAPPY*



One year, three of my cousins were at camp, me, and my siblings. It's fun having family at camp!

The view
When we took my campers to the bench to pray at sunrise one morning



THE BENCH OF GOD



My 9 year olds begged me to hike to the bench with them, so I did. From the bench you can see all of camp and beyond. It's like a "God's eye view." But the bench is just a bench.



EXCERPTS FROM CAMPER NOTES AND TEXTS

Hi! Would you be willing to write a recommendation for me for the Jewish Women's Archive Fellowship?

Miss you and I want to go to List.

You're honestly the funniest person and you always provide great snacks.

Although I can be annoying, you always keep your cool.

I'm uncomfortable with one of my teachers and don't know what to do about it.

It's not happening if it's true

שבת



We sing, pray and rejoice



WEEKEND

On Shabbat the schedule is different. The food is different. We spend most of the day relaxing on the hill or in the pool.



Shabbat lunch is always the same, but everyone eats something different. There's salad bar, bread, avocado, fritos, tomatoes, cold cuts, and cholent. I mash my avocado to have on bread with fritos on the side because I'm vegetarian and also afraid of cold cuts.

FRI YAY

What media misses

Camp is magical. There's so much the media doesn't get and so much I don't really know how to articulate. I love my campers and my friends. I love how camp is one of the best models of inclusion I've seen. I love that it's all Jewish. I love the scenery. I love watching the kids learn and grow. I love the place. And I am unable to imagine camp outside of it. We always say people make a place special. But what if the place makes the people special?



Thank you for teaching me about the secret life of an American Yonahut teacher.

Noa I fully failed my Jewish Law test :c

So far I've had some amazing days where I feel like I'm on top of the world and some that are basically the opposite.

Hi I know it's late, but I was wondering if you had any ideas of feminist texts/interesting gemaras on Vashti?



I'm drinking water in my water bottle from camp, and I don't want to finish it, but I know I'm going to have to

Thank you for being my mother.

☺ Me and some of my youths!

טוב ז' במחנה הרמה

