

PARTING Thoughts

BY WINNIE SANDLER GRINSPOON

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My daughter was within earshot recently as I wrapped up a call about philanthropic support for Jewish summer camps. “By the way, Mom,” she began, “camp was the very best thing you did for us.”

Truthfully, I had been opposed to sending our kids to overnight camp. Our three kids were enjoying our local day camp, and I was relishing unstructured family time on weekends at the beach. For me, our summers felt just right.

One day my sister-in-law Alissa brought up the idea of overnight camp. “Wouldn’t it be great if our girls went to camp together?” she suggested. Alissa had loved her overnight camp experience as a kid, and our daughters were approaching camp age. I told Alissa that residential summer camp probably wasn’t right for our family, but she encouraged me to tour a few camps “just to see.”

I hadn’t been an overnight camper myself, so I didn’t feel the pull that Alissa felt. I didn’t understand what spending a summer with a bunk full of kids your age felt like, and how the experience of those days and nights together kept you close for years to come. I didn’t grasp the power of the memories formed at camp dances, or during an intense color war, or around weekly campfires, or at Shabbat services around the lake. I didn’t appreciate how the time away from home helped children gain confidence and self-reliance.

I agreed to visit a few camps and keep an open mind. It didn’t take long to see that camp would be our family’s future. We were touring a beautiful Jewish camp in Maine, and my son spoke up first. “Mom, this place looks amazing! Can I try camp next summer too?”

And that was the beginning of our family’s love of Jewish summer camp.



Winnie Sandler Grinspoon visits her daughter at camp in the summer of 2010.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINNIE SANDLER GRINSPOON

Camp gave our kids countless gifts: precious time in nature; close friendships forged without the distraction of phones or screens; opportunities to learn cooperation and teamwork through sports, theater, and communal living; joyful connections to Jewish ritual and celebration; independence; physical fitness ... the list goes on and on.

As they got older, two of our kids participated in a transformative camp trip to Poland and Israel that connected them deeply to their Jewish identity. Our daughter also worked at camp as a counselor, which taught her a lot about leadership, responsibility, and problem-solving.

I am so glad I got over my hesitation. Jewish overnight camp was great for my kids. It’s why I value the PJ Goes to Camp incentive program we provide in partnership with other donors. We hope that the financial encouragement we offer to PJ Library subscribers will move more families to try Jewish overnight camp for their children too.

Like their Aunt Alissa, my kids look back on camp with love. As my daughter told me, “I’d rewind the clock and go back to a summer at camp in a heartbeat.”

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