Register for the Fall Conference
“A Summer to Remember”
November 9 – 10, 2013
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In this issue

“God First, You Second, Me Third”: An Exploration of “Quiet Jewishness” at Southern Jewish Summer Camp – Marcie Cohen Ferris – In the early 20th century, Jewish summer camps served as retreats from city life and as sites of Americanization for children of recent immigrants. Camps with political agendas sprouted in the 1930s, followed by non-denominational Jewish camps after World War II. Designed to provide children with a safe, supportive environment, these “cultural islands” continue to offer total immersion in southern-style Judaism.

Do I Really Have to Go? – Lisa Collis Cohen – Tearful and homesick as a young camper, this girl from Kingstree, SC, found spirituality and lifelong friendships at TYG and SEFTY camps.

Magical Camp Blue Star – Gale Siegel Messerman – A Walterboro, SC, native attending Camp Blue Star experienced, for the first time, a sense of belonging that gave meaning to her life, while connecting her with Jewish contemporaries across the South.

A Summer to Remember: Jewish Summer Camps in the American South – JHSSC Meets in College of Charleston this coming spring.

Blue Star: A Family Affair – Maxine Solomon Mclaran – Every summer the Solomon clan packed up the car and headed for Hendersonville, NC. Feelings of joy and excitement grew each year as close friends reunited at Camp Blue Star. After tragedy struck, those friendships became a source of comfort and healing.

Coming of Age – Paul Siegel – For this former camper, Blue Star was “the center of the universe” where he learned to believe in himself and become a “player.”

Fond Memories – Ann Meddin Helman – After six decades the author recalls the pride she felt passing Blue Star’s canoe test. The camp’s Jewish services are etched in her mind.

Choosing a Summer Camp – Janette Rosen Krupraw – This daughter of immigrants who settled in Asheville attended camps in the Blue Ridge to connect with Jewish youth and to escape a polio epidemic. As a mother, she made choices for her kids for similarly practical reasons.

BBYO – Rachel Lourie – Leadership training in BBYO summer programs broadened the horizons of a Columbia teen and confirmed her identity as a Jew and a citizen of the world.

Judeans Through and Through – Josh Lieb and Dana Lieb – Josh Lieb and his cabin mates delighted in stretching, bending, and breaking the rules at Camp Judea: “We were exactly why Jewish summer camps had on Jewish campers, to alleviate the isolation their children felt as a tiny tributary in mainstream society. This goes a long way toward explaining the profound impact of summer camps on Jewish campers, who sufficiently experienced what it was like to be in the majority, instead of the minority, and to be immersed in Jewish culture in all its forms—song, dance, spirituality, etc.—described so vividly by our authors.

With all this in mind, we chose for the theme of our upcoming fall meeting, “A Summer to Remember: Jewish Summer Camps in the American South.” Beyond summer camps, we also want to consider what Jewish youth organizations have brought to the table. Whether you participated in Color Wars at Blue Star, sang “Leaving on a Jet Plane” at a SEFTY event, enjoyed a “lock-in” at the Charleston JCC or Sumter’s Temple Sinai, or attended a Sweetheart Dance at a BBYO Dixie Council weekend, these activities filled a void, made us feel “the same,” and helped us find friends and even partners for life.

Letter from the President

My daughter just returned from Blue Star where she spent the summer as a Junior Girls’ counselor. Like generations of Jewish teens before her, Emily and her cohort took part in camp rituals that closely resemble the experiences recalled in the memoirs that make up this newsletter. L’dor v’dor!

For me, summers in the early 1970s in a small southern town meant hanging out with friends, sleepovers, parties at the lake, working in my family’s stores—all the usual ways for a kid to enjoy the teenage years. But many Jewish parents in small-town South Carolina looked to summer camps to alleviate the isolation their children felt as a tiny tributary in a Christian sea (in Summerton, in fact, we were the only Jewish family), and to instill in their kids a Jewish identity. Even in middle-size towns like Walterboro and cities like Charleston and Columbia, Jewish teens often felt “different” and saw themselves as outsiders (though not outcasts) from mainstream society. This goes a long way toward explaining the profound impact that summer camps had on Jewish campers, who sufficiently experienced what it was like to be in the majority, instead of the minority, and to be immersed in Jewish culture in all its forms—song, dance, spirituality, etc.—described so vividly by our authors.

With all this in mind, we chose for the theme of our upcoming fall meeting, “A Summer to Remember: Jewish Summer Camps in the American South.” Beyond summer camps, we also want to consider what Jewish youth organizations have brought to the table.

I hope you will join us November 9-10 in Columbia for a wonderful program. Meeting on the beautiful campus of the University of South Carolina, we will listen to an introductory talk by Professor Marcie Cohen Ferris and participate in a panel discussion involving former campers and camp directors. We are especially happy to welcome Eli N. Evans and Rodger and Candy Popkin, who will be on hand to share their memories and insights. At Saturday evening’s reception, sponsored by the Nelson Mullins law firm, we will meet and greet friends in USC’s beautifully restored Spigner House. Sunday morning, Macy B. Hart, longtime director of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, and Eric Singer, founding director of Camp Ramah Darom in the north Georgia mountains, will describe the origins and ethics of their respective institutions.

I want to thank Stan Dubinsky and the Jewish Studies program at USC for support and help with arrangements. I am deeply grateful to those who provided stories and photos for the newsletter, and to Gail Lieb, who has worked diligently to make this a memorable weekend. The full schedule and registration information is included in this publication and available online at www.jhssc.org.

The upcoming board meeting marks the end of my tenure as JHSSC president. I have truly enjoyed serving the Society over the past two years and, in turn, have been well served by Marty Perlmutter, Dale Rosengarten, Enid Idelsohn, and members of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors.

Thank you for the commitment and time you put forth for the organization. I encourage those of you who have an interest to get involved. The nominating committee has proposed a strong slate of officers, but an active, engaged membership is essential to our continued success.
Gary Zola describes Jewish camping “back-to-nature” work projects of the New Deal.1 American society through contact with the “great outdoors”), social reform projects affiliated with the Reform Movement in Judaism.2 The combination of education, food, music, physical activity, spirituality, tradition, and Judaism brought campers back year after year to experience the camp’s temporary, but powerful recurring community.3

Promoting Jewish education, community, cultural life, and most important, continuity—raising Jewish children committed to their faith and its long-term survival—was the model of private Jewish camping guided by religious pluralism rather than a specific political or denominational expression of Judaism.4 Non-denominational, private Jewish camps grew during the prosperous years of the 1960s at Camp Wah-Kon-Dah in Rocky Mount, Missouri, on the Lake of the Ozarks—a camp for Jewish youth, but not a Jewish camp. Camp Wah-Kon-Dah was “quietly Jewish.” To an unsuspecting visitor, Wah-Kon-Dah camp. Camp Wah-Kon-Dah was Jewish youth, but not a Jewish camp. Camp Wah-Kon-Dah was part of a summer camp craze in America that was shaped by the “cult of the strenuous life” (an anti-modernist ideology that sought to repair and strengthen American society through contact with the “great outdoors”), social reform movements of the Progressive Era, and “back-to-nature” work projects of the New Deal.1 Gary Zola describes Jewish camping as a “genuine hybrid of organized camping in America.”5 Jewish organizations founded the first summer camps in the early 1900s to serve both as a pastoral refuge for needy Jewish children in the urban Northeast, and as sites of Americanization for children of recent Jewish immigrants. During the 1930s, Jewish summer camps and retreat centers with political agendas sponsored by communist, socialist, Zionist, and Yiddish organizations grew in popularity. The majority of these institutions were located near the large Jewish population centers along the East Coast. A smaller, but important number of Jewish boarding houses, camps, kosher inns, and the summer location of the North Carolina B’nai B’rith Institute, Wildacres, were situated in the southern mountains. For the mid-South, Camp Wah-Kon-Dah represented a different model of private Jewish camping guided by religious pluralism rather than a specific political or denominational expression of Judaism.6

Non-denominational, private Jewish camps grew during the prosperous years after World War II and today dominate Jewish camping, North and South.1 From the 1940s to the 1970s, a new grassroots activism reinforced American Jewish communities, including those in the South, through regional summer camps and year-round adult education. As a “cultural island” in an isolated setting separated from home and parents, summer camp was the perfect place for a total immersion in southern-style Judaism.7 The combination of education, food, music, physical activity, spirituality, tradition, and Judaism brought campers back year after year to experience the camp’s temporary, but powerful recurring community.8

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Marcie Cohen (3rd row from the front, far left) and fellow campers at Camp Sabra, St. Louis, MO, 1970. Courtesy of Marcie Cohen Ferris.

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Provincials, his classic memoir of the Jewish South, “Herman and Harry Popkin . . . built a veritable camping empire in the South, whether for two weeks or two months. An intricate network of southern Jewish relationships created in the summer influenced college decisions, future careers, religious involvement, romance, and the next generation of Jewish youth. Many campers and counselors grew into future leaders of the Jewish South’s local and regional organizations, historical societies, museums, programs for youth, and synagogues. Campers took their summer experiences of Jewishness back home and revitalized the Jewish worlds from which they came. The Spirit of Fun, Friendliness, and Great Fellowship.” Courtesy of Marcie Cohen Ferris.

Many thanks to members of the Keeler family—Thom Lobe and Mike Keeler—who generously shared their family history and memories about Camp Wah-Kon-Dah with me. Thank you also to former Wah-Kon-Dah campers for their stories, including my sister, Jamie Cohen, and to Stephen Rich, for lending him camp photographs.

This article was excerpted from an essay originally published in Southern Cultures 18:1 (Spring 2012). http://southerncultures.org/read-by-issue/spring-12/ Reprinted with permission.

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Marcie Cohen’s Camp Wah-Kon-Dah diploma awarded for completing “a course in the art of Square Dancing,” and showing “the Spirit of Fun, Friendliness and Great Fellowship.”

NOTES
Do I Really Have to Go? by Lisa Collis Cohen

Growing up in the small Jewish community of Kingstree, South Carolina, my parents sent me to Jewish summer camps early and often. In summer 1965, I went to Charleston to live with my spinster aunt so I could attend Camp Baker at the JCC. I was not yet seven and terribly homesick. My camp day began with a bus trip from Dunnamen Avenue to West Ashley. After the dreaded Instructional Swim, the day improved, but my homesickness did not. Auntie quickly tired of my pitiful sobs and sent me home mid-session.

Summer 1966 brought a two-week stay at Camp Blue Star where my counselor Paula Grossman spent part of free time each day wiping away my tears. I still remember her kindness and compassion 47 years later. Blue Star introduced me to hayrides, Biltmore Dairy’s ice cream, salami and peanut butter sandwiches, the formidable, freezing Sliding Rock—which I had to conquer—and Maccabiah. My parents deemed the short session a success and sent me back to Blue Star the following summer for a month.

I really did not want to return to camp, but my parents insisted. So, at the tender age of eight, I boarded the charter bus in Charleston for my trip to Hendersonville. And here is my WORST camp story that I have ever shared. My mother—who was older than the moms of most of my friends—insisted that I wear a navy shirt and white tee shirts and white shoes. She insisted. So there I was, a little girl from the small town of Walterboro, South Carolina, driving with her grandfather and her mother up a long dirt road. She spots a huge freshwater lake, waves the car in. This was her introduction to the magical Camp Blue Star, her first overnight “home away from home.” We drove to my cabin in Pioneer Village, unloaded my “gear,” snared a top bunk, met my counselors and then, all of a sudden, I was surrounded by 12 girls who were to become bunkmates and, hopefully, friends for the summer. How to condense my memories, experiences and feelings into a few paragraphs? Not sure, but here goes.

My first strong Blue Star memory was shock upon realizing that every girl in the cabin was Jewish. I remember going around the cabin asking the same question of each girl: “Are you Jewish?” As the only Jewish girl of my age in Walterboro, this was quite an eye-opener to say the least! But this was only the beginning of my many-year love affair with Camp Blue Star as a camper, a CIT (Counselor-in-Training), and a counselor.

Blue Star introduced me to the spiritual, religious, and ritualistic aspects of Judaism. I learned to love the daily singing of the Hamotzi before and the Birkat Hamazon after each “kosher” meal, the special preparations for and celebration of services in the beautiful and ethereal outdoor chapel, the Shabbat meal with the singing of Jewish songs, the Friday night Jewish folk dancing, the special day of Sabbath observance, the walk to the lake for the Havdalah service to bid farewell to Shabbat, and then, last but not least, the Saturday night social and boys, boys, boys!! (But that is another story.)

The typical camp day began with attention to our cabin duties, including making up our bunks, attending to our respective clean-up chores, and getting to breakfast on time. The day was packed with activities: swimming, canoeing, boating, team sports, arts and crafts, target shooting, archery, “free time,” etc. I remember how helpful the counselors and instructors were and how professional the infirmary doctor and nurses were if a camper was injured or became ill. Evenings were filled with campfires, movies, dancing, hayrides, and singing.

Nature was all around us. We studied it and we explored it with daily hikes around the camp and overnight camping adventures into the surrounding mountain cabins. We cooked over campfires, sang songs, and slept under the stars. There were canoe trips, slides down Sliding Rock, tours of the Biltmore Estate, square dancing in Hendersonville, and memorable visits to the Cherokee Indian Reservation to learn about Indian culture and to see the wonderful outdoor pageant, “Unto These Hills.” Of course, I liked the activities and the natural beauty of the setting, but my camp summers meant so much more to me. The people I met and learned to love are still in my heart. It was the first time I had ever been surrounded by Jewish people. At Blue Star I was not an “outsider.” I did not feel “different.” I was comfortable with everyone I met and made lasting friends, several of whom invited me to visit them in their home cities across the South. As a direct result of these contacts, I was invited to bar mitzvahs and introduced to Jewish organizations. I met and dated Jewish boys, one of whom I eventually married.

The Camp Blue Star experiences gave meaning to my life as a Jewish girl and helped me to understand, for the first time, where I came from, where I belonged in the universe, and why I can never forget. I NEVER WILL.
Marcie Cohen Ferris is an associate professor in the Department of American Studies at UNC–Chapel Hill. Her research and teaching interests include the American Jewish experience and southern foodways and culture. From 2006 to 2008, Ferris served as president of the board of directors of the Southern Foodways Alliance. Her first book, Mattos Balls Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South (2005), was nominated for a 2006 James Beard Foundation Award. She is co-editor of Jewish Roots in Southern Soil (2005), was nominated for a 2006 James Beard Foundation Award. She also serves as editor of the Academic Journal of Southern Jewish Life, which provides rabbinic services and educational and cultural programs in communities where Jewish resources are limited. Beginning in 1970, Macy served for 30 years as director of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi. In 1986 he founded the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, which, in 2000, became the ISJL. From 2004 to 2008 she chaired the Council of American Jewish Museums. Macy received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Hebrew Union College, a Covenant Award for Outstanding Jewish Educators, a Jewish Cultural Achievement Award, and, in 2013, an award from the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference. Macy B. Hart is president and founder of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL), which provides rabbinic services and educational and cultural programs in communities where Jewish resources are limited. Beginning in 1970, Macy served for 30 years as director of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi. In 1986 he founded the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, which, in 2000, became the ISJL. From 2004 to 2008 she chaired the Council of American Jewish Museums. Macy received an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Hebrew Union College, a Covenant Award for Outstanding Jewish Educators, a Jewish Cultural Achievement Award, and, in 2013, an award from the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference.

Rodger and Candy Niman Popkin met while students at Boston University and began their careers as directors of Camp Blue Star in 1971, after their marriage in the Elmore Solomon Chapel. They are both members of the American Camp Association's (ACA) Acorn Society and Pioneers of Camping Club. Son of Blue Star founder Herman Popkin, Rodger served ten years on ACA's national board, including a three-year term as its national president. He coordinated the association's campaign against year-round schools, led ACAs anti-bullying March on Washington in summer 1990, and worked with his and Candy's friend Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul, and Mary) to launch the international “Don't Laugh at Me” anti-bullying campaign. Rodger currently serves on the board of the Foundation for Jewish Camp. Blue Star is now owned and directed by Rodger and Candy's daughter Lauren, and her husband, Seth Herschthal, who, like Rodger and Candy, were married in Solomon Chapel.

Eric Singer was born in Columbus, GA, to a family with deep southern Georgia roots. The Singers moved to Atlanta during his teen years. Eric earned his B.A. in Religious Studies at Washington University in St. Louis and an M.S. in Decision Science from Georgia State University. He was an instructor at the National Outdoor Leadership School, a wilderness guide in Alaska, and an executive in the wholesale distribution industry. He served as senior vice president of real estate for Pull-A-Part, Inc., in Atlanta, and is currently a partner and senior vice president at O&A Development. Eric has held leadership positions in several local and national non-profits. His proudest role, however, is as founding president of Camp Ramah Darom. In 1996, together with other volunteers from the region, he helped create a new type of institution—envisioned by his father, Sol Singer, some 40 years earlier—to provide year-round Jewish experiences for youth and adults, families and congregations from across the South and beyond.
Blue Star: A Family Affair  

by Maxine Solomon McLarman

I have so many memories of Camp Blue Star I could write a book. It's been difficult to narrow them down! First of all, those summers—stretching 8 to 15 years, depending on which Solomon you're talking about—were a family affair. Not only did my brother, Robert, and sister, Nancy, attend camp, but also Mama (Aunt Elsie) ran Senior Girls and Daddy (Uncle Elmore) volunteered to help anywhere he was needed—transportation, organizing luggage, and taking trips into town. I remember several years when we had 12 first cousins with us. Of course, many of their children and grandchildren have also loved Blue Star, as did my daughter, Stephanie, who spent five years there making her own memories.

The Popkinds are like family to us. Our relationship goes back to the 1930s when Mama and Daddy met Uncle Harry and Uncle Herman through the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association) and AZA (Aleph Zadik Aleph) in Augusta and Charleston. Along with their brother Ben, Harry and Herman founded Blue Star in 1948. My first memories are of "helping" Daddy pack our trunks in a U-Haul, then the nostalgic ride to Hendersonville on a two-lane highway. We always pulled off the road near Honea Path, South Carolina, and ate lunch at the Blue Star Café—our last civilian meal. As a special treat for Robert, Dad stopped in North Carolina to buy sparklers and little fireworks—illegal in Georgia! Nancy and I went crazy with excitement as we spotted and turned off on the White Horse Road exit, drove one hour into Flat Rock, then a couple of miles to Kanuga Road. Fifteen long minutes later Daddy turned left and drove slowly up the drive into camp as we sang "Welcome You to Camp Blue Star." I felt my heart would pop out with pure joy. To this day, when visiting and attending alumni reunions, we relive the same emotions, and as we leave camp, we still shed tears. Here are a few of my most outstanding experiences:

- Sharing life and making the best friends, most of whom remain my closest friends today
- Raiding the dining hall at midnight for peanut butter and jelly and a container of "bug juice"
- Our United Nations Project in which each cabin was a different country and, using the correct protocol, we discussed problems of the day and tried solving them. I loved using the library for background information and I loved seeing my friends acting serious and really having to think. It was a school setting, rather than camp, for a few days.
- Maccabiah Games (Color Wars) where the entire camp was divided into two teams that competed in all sports in age appropriate groups, and played games of strategy and creativity. The closing ceremony was much like the Olympics; all the participants gathered together in friendship to salute the winners and remember a wonderful day of competition.
- Real box and bagels on Saturday mornings after services!
- Making fires with no matches
- Three-day, two-night co-ed camping trips
- Zimreah—more friendly competition throughout the whole camp. Each cabin had to write its own camp song and choreograph a dance. Watching the boys try to be coordinated and sing without their voices cracking was such fun.
- Out-of-camp trip to the Cherokee Reservation, where the story of this brave Indian group was performed in a show called "Unto These Hills." Over the years, I know Mama saw it at least 15 times. We had to wear camp uniforms; I could not stand the beanie because they messed up one's hair. It was so cozy riding the bus back to camp, in the dark, sitting next to your boyfriend.
- Sliding Rock—we took a trip to these huge rocks you would slide down into breathtaking, freezing water. Believe me, we were carefully supervised with counselors standing on the rocks every couple of feet holding poles, which made the whole adventure even scarier, but also made you so proud of yourself. Everyone was "showing off"—I know I was.
- Uncle Harry and Uncle Herman's psychology lectures, especially Harry's "Birds and the Bees"
- I loved Shabbat—cleaning up and decorating our cabins, dressing in white, praying with your friends.
- Israeli folk dancing!
- Of course, Saturday night socials were the best!! Borrowing someone else's cute clothes and dancing to "Summer Night Love," Johnny Mathis, "Sealed with a Kiss," "In the Still of the Night," and "Stand by Me." Sometimes the adorable cooks from the kitchen sang for us; those young men became The Tams, a very successful recording group on the college and concert circuits. They sang Doo-Wop and early Motown.
- What can I say about the waiters? All smart, cute, talented, cool—adorable!!!
- My CIT year was a dream come true—four cabins of girls and four of boys learning outdoor skills and the philosophy and psychology of becoming a good counselor made for a meaningful and fun summer.
- When our co-ed CIT Israeli folk dance group entertained in Hendersonville, Asheville, and at Little Switzerland, I was so proud to be Jewish; Judaism took on a much deeper and richer meaning for me.
- Falling in love on Day One (CIT year), lasting throughout the summer and beyond. On the last day, as the buses pulled out, your heart really hurt—part of it was on the bus.

In February 1961 Daddy unexpectedly passed away. He was only 42. I felt I could never go back to camp—not without him. It seems I saw a lot of Harry and Herman that year. They wrote inspirational letters and we had many comforting conversations. To this day I don't know how they collected all the condolence letters and cards and had them beautifully bound in two very large monogrammed blue books. It took a while, but now we love reading them and sharing them with our children, and in a few years with Daddy's great-grandchildren.

The Popkinds talked with Mama about the honor of dedicating the new chapel in Daddy's memory: the Elmore Solomon Chapel. Can you imagine? Never in a million years can we express the gratitude we feel. After that it was never sad returning to camp. Daddy was there.

As I remember the rain hitting the tin roofs and the wonderful storms and the rustling of the wind through the trees and the sound of the doors in the dining hall slightly slamming and George leading us in songs and slams and his Sermon on the Mount and on and on, I think my mind lives at Camp Blue Star—I know my heart does.
Coming of Age  
by Paul N. Siegel

I went to Camp Blue Star for at least five years. It was my coming of age experience and provided my first positive Jewish memory. I almost hate to admit it because Mother and Daddy and the rather amazing Walterboro Jewish community tried valiantly to do the job, but the truth is, I was walking the cultural ledge without a zipline.

I started in cabin P-12 after the train ride from Yemassee. The train stopped for about five minutes to pick up Ruby Novit and me. If I am not mistaken, Sandra Altman (now Poliaff) was already on board with the Charleston contingent. I recall a white bag lunch and we were away!

My saga began that day in June. A month later I returned home to the relative solitude of my rambling old home in Walterboro, a different person. For the first time, being a Jew made sense outside the confines of Temple Mt. Sinai and the conflicted emotions of an apprehensive preadolescent boy. Hey, being a kibbutznik with comrades had its rewards! Being Jewish could mean being strong.

Being Jewish could mean being strong.

I once again returned to Blue Star, this time on visitors’ day. Since my kids, who are now in their 50s, were 13, when they went on bar and bat mitzvah pilgrimages to Israel and other Jewish sites, they knew their Jewish heritage and had mixed feelings about it. My parents, Jacob and Bessie Rosen—who had immigrated to the United States in 1920—supplied the camp with food from their grocery store. They wanted me to be with other Jewish children and not just with “the maid” all summer. I have few other memories about it.

My next experience was as a counselor at Blue Star—also near Hendersonville—soon after it opened. There was a polo epidemic in the area and my brother was a young doctor, so he became a volunteer at the clinic.

The thing that was the most difficult about it was the center of the universe while I was there and I began to believe. Camp Blue Star did that for me in an era of post-Holocaust haze. I began to believe. Camp Blue Star did that for me in an era of post-Holocaust haze.

Choosing a Summer Camp

by Janette Rosen Krupsaw

I began my last year in high school in 1946 and the last year in high school meant one thing to me: summer camp. I started attending Blue Star for about six summers, starting when I was a five year old and this may seem a little young by today’s standards, but my mother felt that since my older sister, Eve, was there, it would be okay. Eve wasn’t the only person she knew who would be looking out for me. Mama’s best friend from her childhood days in Augusta, Georgia, was Elsie Tunkle Solomon, and Elsie was in charge of Blue Star—or so Mama thought.

Among my fondest memories were swimming in the lake, canoeing, archery, and horseback riding. Canoeing on the lake was great. Before you were allowed to take a canoe out by yourself, you had to pass a test which included swapping the boat and getting it back to the shore. I am proud to say I passed and was authorized to go canoe out by myself. The thing that was the most difficult for me at camp was changing divisions every other year. Because I started school early, my friends were a year older than I was. Blue Star changed divisions by age, not grade. I was with a different group every other year, causing difficulty in making lifelong friends.

It was my Jewish experiences at Blue Star that are truly etched in my mind. Camp was the only place I ever studied Hebrew. Shabbats were heartwarming and were carefully choreographed to set the pace apart from the rest of the week. We wore all-white shorts and shirts, or blue shorts and white shirts—everything was different. Havdalah was the prettiest service ever.

More than 60 years since my first experience at camp, my granddaughter, Mia Hellman, attended Blue Star this year for her first time. No, she isn’t five and a half, but she is looking forward to going back next year. As Mia says, “Camp was awesome!”
Judeans Through and Through

by Josh Lieb

I spent almost every summer after the age of eight at camp, but only the first two at Jewish camps—unless you count the time me and Eric Jablon, Brian Milman, Kyle Reeves, and others took over a cabin at a YMCA camp in Spartanburg. I was a member of the Ofarim and Sofim—the first and second year campers—at Camp Judaea in Hendersonville, North Carolina. This would have been in the summers of 1983 and 1984, thereofabout. CJ is an old-fashioned, hard-core, religious, Zionist camp, overseen by Hadassah. We sang “The Star Spangled Banner” and “Hatikvah” every morning at the flagpoles. My sister, Dana, had already been attending for several years when I first started. I think she might have gone to Ed Yehudah afterwards—the camp that CJ kids “graduated” to—which was up in New Jersey somewhere. I know my cousin Rachel Cohen, granddaughter of Carl and Helen Posner of Greenville (they owned Cancellation Shoe Mart), went to TY after CJ. There’s now a “Denny Cohen Memorial Darkroom,” named after Rachel’s photographer father, at CJ.

Camp Judaea was fat with campers when I attended. I know because, while I was there, they had to add a new “class” of campers, the Chalutzim, whose age was between the Sofim and the older Keshers. The campers came mostly from the Southeast. The Tennessee kids seemed a lot like us South Carolinians. The Puerto Ricans seemed more sophisticated (Josh Gold taught me how to swear in Spanish). The Floridians were softer and more spoiled than those of us from South Carolina, except for Marc Braun, whose father, I was told, owned a nightclub. Marc was tough and loud. I was always a little scared of him, until one day I found out it was important to him that I like him. He was a nice kid. After that I wasn’t scared of Marc Braun.

There was a fat kid from Florida who was pretty intolerable—he’ll go nameless. Mouthy, spoiled. Even worse was the skinny kid from Florida who did nothing but whine. Again, I won’t name him (but I do remember), because he probably grew out of it. I don’t remember any of the Florida kids having southern accents.

One year there was even this weird, absurdly skinny kid from New York. Big mop of black hair, big nose. He looked like a Jewish scarecrow. He had one of those Queens accents you don’t hear anymore. He used the word “freakin’” as an adjective, probably five times a sentence. We were all pretty scandalized.

Our big joke was to ask the counselor if he wanted a lollipop, then pull down our pants and show him our private parts. This is exactly the kind of memory that should be preserved by the historical society. Honestly, I can’t imagine a job more thankless than trying to wrangle a cabin full of smart-ass Jewish eight-year-old boys. We were horrid, horrible people. We were exactly why Jewish parents sent their boys to camp.

CJ kept a strictly kosher kitchen. They tried to keep kids from smuggling in candy from outside, but my mom was on the board (she was a macher in Hadassah), so I pretty much got away with murder. The camp was (and I’m sure still is) Shomer Shabbos. The cabins were dark all Shabbat, with the light left on in the bathrooms. Most of us weren’t so strict in our observance at home, so it took getting used to.

We benched after every meal—it was like a big, wild, fun sing-along. I’d never benched before, really, and I remember having absolutely no clue what the hell everyone else was singing. But I caught on pretty quickly. It’s amazing what sheer repetition can do. That was definitely a useful thing I took away from camp.

The Israeli folk dancing we did every afternoon was less useful, but pretty fun. Maybe we didn’t do it every afternoon. It sure feels that way.

This camp was situated in the hills of Western North Carolina. It’s green and wooded, all that stuff. Beautiful, I’m sure, but of course all that beauty was wasted on us. It was hot as the devil. Lots of bugs. But I think that’s what summer camp is supposed to be like.

When it rained, one of the hills turned to pure mud. We would slide down it like it was a water park. We’d strip off and rinse clean before we came into the cabin, but our muddy clothes were generally kicked under the mounds to mildew. That smelled nice.

Maybe as a result of this kind of fun, I caught walking pneumonia at the end of my second summer at CJ. I was burning up, and this kid named Lance from Georgia felt my forehead and told me I should see the camp doctor. Man, was I sick. They pumped me full of some brutal antibiotics, and I spent about two full days puking into a bucket. My parents came to pick me up a day early. I couldn’t go to the final dinner—I’d asked this beautiful girl named Naomi to be my date—but by that time I felt so separate from the rest of camp, I just decided to go home.

In general, though, they’re all wonderful memories, and I’d gladly send my kids to such a place, when they’re old enough.

by Dana Lieb

I attended Camp Judaea in Hendersonville, North Carolina, for several years in the early 1980s. Thanks to my mom being an avid Hadassah leader and member of the Camp Committee, I was pretty much destined to attend CJ—and happy that I did. A Judean through and through, I started as a camper and eventually returned as a counselor and arts-and-crafts assistant. As a kid I naturally gravitated to the camping experience. I loved having my own bunk space, organizing my camp clothes—with name tags written with a Sharpie—and having a crew of friends completely separate from my life at home. That said, I will always recall with dread the nausea, mildewed showers, cabin chores, and swimming classes in CJ’s freezing, black water “swimming pool.”

Although as a youngster I had no interest in attending a semi-religious camp (this was an extra facet of Camp Judaea that I simply endured every summer), I now value the Jewishness of this experience. I still remember the after-dinner prayers, Hebrew songs and dances, and history lessons disguised in programs. I am not particularly observant, but I think having this knowledge helped me better identify with my religion. Camp Judaea was a bit different from other Jewish camps in that it also had a strong Zionist component that found its way into almost all aspects of the camp. To this day I appreciate this unique facet of CJ and believe it has affected my personal and political beliefs as a proud, Zionist adult.

I am embarrassed to say, CJ was so long ago that I can’t recall too many particular stories or moments (almost makes me wish I had been better at keeping a journal, growing up). No matter—memories of my Camp Judean times will always evoke a smile.
Southern Jews and Civil Rights
SJHS Meets in Birmingham, Alabama • November 1–3, 2013

For the first time in 25 years, the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHJS) will meet in Alabama’s “Magic City” this November. In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Birmingham Civil Rights Campaign of 1963, the conference will explore the relationship between Jews and African Americans in the struggle for justice and equality.

The conference begins Friday morning, November 1st, with a guided tour led by longtime leaders of Birmingham’s Jewish community. After lunch at the 16th Street Baptist Church, conference-goers will walk across the street to tour the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, one of the nation’s leading civil rights museums. In the afternoon, attendees return to the church, site of the infamous bombing in September 1963 that killed four young girls, for a roundtable discussion with the nation’s leading civil rights activists. In the evening, the conference concludes with a “Meet the Authors” session highlighting three new books on southern Jewish history. For more information, go to: http://www.jewsouth.org/upcoming-conference.

Zola Joins Jewish Studies in Spring 2014

In the spring of 2014, Dr. Gary P. Zola will be in residence at the College of Charleston as the fifth Norman and Gerry Sue Arnold Distinguished Visiting Professor of Jewish Studies. He is executive director of The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) and a professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati. Founded by Professor Zola’s teacher and mentor, Rabbi Marcus, the AJA is the world’s largest free-standing research center dedicated solely to the study of the American Jewish experience.


At the College of Charleston next spring, Zola will teach a full-credit course on southern Jewish history that will be available as a distance learning opportunity for HUC students in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and New York. He will also present a Sunday morning lecture to the Charleston community.

Dr. Zola is preceded as an Arnold Visiting Professor by Gershon Gorenberg, Jeffrey Gurock, Allan Nadler, and Linda Gradstein. These individuals, each distinguished in his or her field, have had a powerful impact on College of Charleston students, on the community, and in broadening the Jewish Studies curriculum.
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Join or renew online at www.jhssc.org.
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Make checks payable to JHSSC and mail to the address above.

Register now for the November 9–10, 2013 meeting in Columbia.
See pages 10–11 for more information.