



## Camp Ramah in Wisconsin

...where the best of Jewish life meets the joy of camping

# מחנה רמה בוויסקונסין

Shalom Ramah Families,

During the winter in Chicago on a cold windy day, I will catch a brief break and walk over to the Art Institute a few blocks from the Ramah office. One favorite picture that helps soothe the winter blues is Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte by George Seurat:

I was looking out the window today from my camp office and I saw the same picture! One hundred twenty-five years later and across the ocean it was Thursday afternoon at Camp Ramah on Lake Buckatabon. It was late afternoon and the sun was casting shadows across the upper and lower kikar, the central grassy area. The costumes were different but the shadows were spread across the campus in and around clusters of campers and staff. (Only the sun umbrellas were missing!)

One can learn a lot about kids and a lot about our camp by watching campers sit and play in the shadows on the kikar.



In the waning hours of the afternoon you can watch a blanket of shadow roll down the southern exposure of the kikar and slowly climb the opposite northern side. Campers and staff strategically position themselves to enjoy the lake views and feel the sun's warmth.

I watched a group of 5th graders play in the shadows on the kikar before their evening activity. Three boys kicked a soccer ball back and forth. No one said much but all three chased after the ball. Over the space of about five minutes another five campers joined the game. After a few minutes they put aside the ball and started playing leap frog. They jumped high, laughing and shouting. This continued for about 15 minutes. Their counselor was nearby and with a short hand motion and nod of his head the guys collected themselves and headed off to their

evening activity.

About 30 feet away closer to the beach three campers were watching the sun set. One of them stepped forward toward the lake, turned her back to the water and stretched out her arms. The wind off the lake blew through her sleeves. She stood there with her friends for about five minutes, enjoying the quiet beauty.

Back up the kikar, two older campers sat down at the edge of the rolling shadow. One camper was facing the sun and shielded his eyes. The other fellow lay on his side facing away from the sun. After five minutes another two guys joined them and then three more. For the next 15 minutes three of them lay on their stomachs facing uphill, three sat facing down hill and one fellow leaned on his side. All remained in eye contact with each other and all were animatedly talking to each other. I could hear their laughter from time to time.

These quiet moments happened amidst a huge week of programming including our campwide Yom Sport and a Machon program simulating post-pogrom Kishinev circa 1906 with the Jewish community deciding to immigrate to America, Palestine, or stick it out in Russia. The Shoafim opened our Ramah theater season with a terrific production of The Little Mermaid, campers and staff swam to the island, kids played in basketball leagues, went on overnight hiking and camping trips. The Bogrim enjoyed an evening with the Israeli staff learning about being a teenager in Israel, the Solelim did evening aerobics and Nivonim campers were busy with counselor-in-training

preparations and casting for their upcoming Broadway show. Garinim campers enjoyed their turn on the high ropes course (ask them about the flying squirrel!). Our annual Performing Arts Festival begins today featuring over 12 different performances including the Tikvah lunch theater.

When all is said and done, I love the fact that kids of all ages find time to relax together. The camp setting is gorgeous; it enhances and encourages hanging out together. Younger kids don't always spend a lot of time talking with each other. Instead they invent games and play together. The older kids, both boys and girls, find time to talk together. The younger campers can argue about game rules and often end up rolling around, kicking balls, and are constantly in motion. The older kids really like to talk together and share the camp experience with their friends.

It is so wonderful to see the campers feeling so secure and at home. They can walk the trail around camp, sit by the lake, roll down a hill or two and chase their shadows.

Our youngest campers head home on Monday. They are having a great session. Two thirds of our campers are with us for the full eight-week season. In many ways the first month is like the first stage of a huge building project. It reminds me of the end of last summer, when we took down the old kitchen and dining halls, prepared the ground for the new construction, and raced to get it under roof before the snow. This enabled construction to proceed through the winter and spring. The first month of camp is like this pre-construction phase. It is now in place. The next four weeks is the time for these wonderful relationships to flourish and for our campers to take ownership of their community.

A theme of our program this summer is the celebration of 100 years since the founding of Tel Aviv as a new Jewish city. Our campers and staff resonate with this idea of building a new community, just like our unique Jewish neighborhood in the woods.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Soloff, Director

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