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FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CAMPING, INC.  
Scholarships are made possible by a grant from the Foundation for Jewish Camping and Hadassah.



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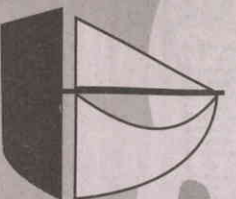
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By Jilian Fenton

I was recommended to participate in a wonderful camp experience by Rabbi Ralph Mecklenburger of Congregation Beth-El in Fort Worth. Camp CommUNITY, sponsored by the Multicultural Alliance (formerly known as the National Conference of Christians and Jews), offered me an unbelievable experience. Formerly known as Camp Anytown, Camp CommUNITY focuses on individual and cultural differences which celebrate our uniqueness. This leadership institute has been in existence since 1982 and is staffed by amazing college counselors and adult advisors who take time away from their jobs and schooling to spend a week with us.

I learned a great deal about myself and respect for others. One topic that had the most impact on me personally was flash judgments. A flash judgment is something that everyone does. Upon meeting a person, it only takes seconds to make an initial judgment about them, most of the time without even speaking to them. During this activity, we were shown a series of pictures of people and asked if we would be friends with them (judge them positively), not respond to them (judge them neutrally) or try to avoid them (judge them negatively). Afterwards, we went back through the pictures and heard the stories of the people. I was surprised that my flash judgments were almost always completely wrong. Most of the people I wanted to befriend based on their looks, once I learned about their stories, I did not want to associate with them; the people I judged I would want to avoid, after hearing their stories, I wanted to get to know them better. This taught me that judging by appearance is not the way to go because of all the amazing people whose acquaintance you could miss out on.

Another huge part of Camp CommUNITY was family group. Each delegate was placed in a "family" for the week. These families were used to discuss issues in our lives and general issues as well including family life, friends, our personalities and the choices we make. In this group we were able to get to know each other, both delegates and staff, on a more personal level.

Each evening there was a different program to learn about diversity. Culture night was by far my favorite because it is interesting to learn about cultures which are different from my own. I was surprised to hear that the Hispanic group was willing to talk about the immigration situation in see **COMMUNITY, pYS**



## CAMP continued from pY3

solely impart skills will not last. Setting can bring depth. As the girl in the anecdote remembered, they performed Havdallah outside under the stars. Such a model is of ancient origin, for we know the rabbis of the Mishnah (Berachot, Ch. 5) prayed outside at sunrise

and sunset. Many of us have beautiful porches and backyards which could be used to create the ambience of depth needed to make prayer and study memorable. Kids love doing things outside — why not Jewish things?

**•Emotion:** Jews are very comfortable with the cognitive aspects of Judaism, yet we often struggle with expressing ourselves emotionally. Our children live in an emotionally topsy-

turvy world saturated with friendships, hormones, romantic interests, victories and failures. Judaism must speak to that part of their lives or it risks irrelevance. A camp experience is essentially a "story" in their lives and their Judaism is a major part of that story. The truth is sharing emotions and our personal stories in Jewish contexts is the most Jewish thing we can do, hearkening to the essence of the Torah itself. Such emotional expression should not be canned or forced, but should embrace genuine feelings that drive and inspire us. Just as

there are thoughts that guide our lives, there are also feelings that guide us.

**•Community:** The paramount force that sweeps children into whatever they are doing is community. Camp offers a true community for children. The fact that there are hundreds of other Jewish kids (and counselors) who are just like them is perhaps the most exciting component of the Jewish camp experience. Having a Jewish community at religious school or day school and at synagogue that involves activities together, spending time together,

communicating with one another and keeping Shabbat and holidays together is the most important part of one's Jewish experience contributing to Jewish identity, period.

There is much to learn from Jewish camping. Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn is to maintain the camp connection to Judaism all year round.

Rabbi Paul Senberg is director of Jewish studies at Levine Academy and author of "Celebrating the Jewish Year."

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## COMMUNITY

continued from pY4

the United States today. I had no idea how many sides and faces there are to the immigration issue.

Camp COMMUNITY was a powerful experience and in some ways difficult to articulate. I met people I continue to see, people I would not have normally met or interacted with. I know I will always remember our shared experiences and people's willingness to trust me. Before camp I tended to hang around people like myself. After my experience at camp, I feel more comfortable reaching out to people of different backgrounds as well as similar ones.



Jewish campers at Camp COMMUNITY (l-r): Ma'ayan Krompass, Jillian Fenton and Laura Zenick

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