



ISSUE 1

# Beyond the Bunk

**Camper Name:** Jessica T.  
**Current Age:** 21  
**Hometown:** Mahwah, NJ  
**Years as a Camper:** 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018  
**Years as Staff:** 2023

*Stories of campers who took their camp experience and built Jewish futures.*

## From Camper to Counselor: Jessica's Journey of Jewish Growth

Jessica T. arrived at Camp Gan Israel Poconos for the first time in 2013, stepping off the bus as a shy 10-year-old. She had grown up in a loving home, where Jewish traditions were present but not always deeply felt. Camp, she thought, would just be a fun summer getaway. She had no idea it would change her and her family's life.



Jessica as a camper in 2013

That first summer, Jessica was captivated. Shabbat wasn't just a tradition—it came alive through singing and dancing arm in arm with friends, and watching the candles flicker as stories of Jewish pride were shared. The counselors weren't just staff—they were role models, young women who lived with an unmistakable joy and passion for their Yiddishkeit.

Each summer, she kept coming back, deepening her connection and strengthening her love for Yiddishkeit. She returned home inspired, holding onto pieces of camp. Every Friday night, she lit Shabbos candles, bringing a glow of inspiration back into her home. That small act—one mitzvah, one light—began to shape her family's journey.

Her two sisters joined her in CGI Poconos, carrying home their own sparks of inspiration. Slowly, their home transformed. Shabbat was celebrated with more intention, and Jewish values became part of their daily life.

*continued on reverse*

Shabbat wasn't just something [Jessica] learned about—it was something she felt, singing and dancing arm in arm with friends, and watching the candles flicker as stories of Jewish pride were shared.

*continued from reverse*

After high school, Jessica took a gap year in Israel, immersing herself in Torah study and Yiddishkeit. She then returned home for a year of college, but something inside her told her that her journey wasn't complete. She made a bold decision—she went back to Israel to continue her learning at Machon Alta Seminary.

But camp wasn't just part of her past—it was part of her future. She returned to CGI Poconos as a staff member, eventually becoming a counselor in 2023, guiding campers just as her own counselors had guided her.

Her connection to Yiddishkeit grew, and she fully embraced a frum life, surrounding herself with Torah and mitzvos. Her family's journey evolved alongside hers, deepening their connection to Judaism, all sparked by her summers at CGI Poconos. Last year, Jessica made Aliyah, committing to her Jewish life in Eretz Yisroel.

Last summer, inspired by camp, Jessica and her friends launched a program for religious high school girls, traveling the western U.S. to strengthen Jewish identity and inspire the next generation.

*Jessica's journey is a testament to the lasting power of camp. One spark. A lifetime of impact. The flame she first lit as a girl returning from CGI Poconos didn't just transform her—it ignited a Jewish future for her entire family, creating a ripple effect for generations to come.*

## Jessica's Journey at a Glance:

- 2013** – Attended CGI Poconos for the first time
- 2018** – Last summer as a camper
- 2022** – Spent gap year to study Torah in Israel
- 2023** – Returned to CGI Poconos as a counselor
- 2023** – Attended Machon Alta seminary in Israel
- 2024** – Made Aliyah and launched a Jewish summer program



Jessica (second from the right) as a counselor in 2023

*CKids Gan Israel Poconos was founded in 2012 to provide Jewish girls—regardless of background or affiliation—with an immersive experience of Jewish joy, pride, and connection. Over the past 13 years, we've welcomed more than 800 campers from 26 states and 8 countries, igniting a lifelong passion for Yiddishkeit.*



## Camp Gan Israel Poconos

Premier Overnight Camp for Jewish Girls located in the heart of the Pocono Mountains

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