



ISSUE 2

Beyond the Bunk

Camper Name: Sonia B.
Current Age: 22
Hometown: Coral Springs, FL
Years as a Camper: 2013,
2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
Years as Staff: 2021

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

From Two Worlds to One: *Sonia's Journey to a Jewish Future*

Sonia grew up in Coral Springs, Florida, and from an early age, her life was split between two worlds. After her parents divorced when she was six, her family's commitment to Jewish life slowly faded. Though she attended a Jewish day school, the inconsistency in her home life made it difficult to maintain a Torah-true lifestyle.



Sonia as a camper in 2013

By middle school, Sonia transferred to public school, feeling freer but more disconnected from her Jewish roots. During this time, a teacher suggested she try CGI Poconos.

When Sonia arrived at camp in 2013, she found a place to be herself, surrounded by a vibrant Jewish community. Encouraged by her counselors and embraced by her peers, she felt inspired to reconnect with Judaism. She spent five summers at CGI Poconos, immersing in the camp's atmosphere, lighting Shabbat candles, and taking on mitzvot. But each year, the inspiration faded when she returned home.

At home, she felt torn between Jewish values and family pressures. With her parents struggling with mental health and financial instability, Sonia often felt like she was in survival mode. By ninth grade, Sonia hit a breaking point. Overwhelmed by family stress, she sat in class and broke down, whispering a quiet prayer: "G-d, what do I do now?"

continued on reverse

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That summer at camp, determined to make the most of her final year, Sonia immersed herself in activities, and felt deeply connected to her Jewish identity. She soaked in every lesson, every moment of inspiration, knowing this was her last summer as a camper. Then, Rabbi Shais Taub visited camp and shared a powerful message:

"Everything you're doing here in camp is great, but the most important thing is to impact others so they can learn something too."

I want to do that, she thought, but how can I inspire others when I'm still figuring out who I am? I need to transfer to a Jewish high school.

One of her counselors suggested Bader Hillel High, a Jewish boarding school in Milwaukee that felt like an extension of camp. With just weeks before school started, Sonia made the leap, stepping into a new chapter with excitement and uncertainty.

Looking back, she sees how that decision changed her life. After high school and seminary in Israel, she met Eliyahu and built a Jewish home in Milwaukee, where she now works at Bader Hillel High, guiding and inspiring students just as her counselors once did for her.

Sonia's story is a testament to the power of Jewish overnight camp. CGI Poconos gave her summers of fun—and the foundation for her family's future.

Sonia's Journey at a Glance:

- 2013** – *Attended CGI Poconos for the first time*
- 2016** – *Breaking point in her life*
- 2017** – *Last summer as a camper*
- 2018** – *Transferred to Jewish high school*
- 2021** – *Returned to CGI Poconos as a counselor*
- 2022** – *Sonia get's married*
- 2024** – *Sonia and her husband welcome their first child*



Sonia with her husband and child

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

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