



ISSUE 5

# Beyond the Bunk

**Camper Name:** Leilah A.  
**Current Age:** 26  
**Hometown:** New Albany, OH  
**Years as a Camper:** 2012,  
2013

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

## A Jewish Spark Is Lit *How Camp Fueled Her Jewish Journey*

**Growing up in a traditional but non-observant family, Leilah always felt a deep connection to Judaism, but that connection remained distant—more of a feeling than a way of life. That all changed the summer she arrived at Camp Gan Israel Poconos.**



Leilah (left) as a camper in 2013

For the first time, she was fully immersed in an environment that supported and promoted Torah life, a warm and welcoming Jewish community filled with girls just like her. The experience was transformative. She embraced every moment at camp—the warmth of Shabbat, the joy of mitzvot, and the sense of belonging to a Jewish community that lived and breathed Jewish values. The camp environment brought her Judaism to life in a way she had never experienced before, making it not just something she felt, but something she deeply wanted to live by.

As her camp session drew to a close, she found herself with a sense of sadness she hadn't expected. The thought of returning home to a life where keeping kosher and observing Shabbat wasn't part of the daily routine weighed heavily on her heart. The spark that camp had ignited was too strong to ignore, so she made a bold decision: she told her parents she wanted to start keeping kosher at home.

*continued on reverse*

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*continued from reverse*

Adjusting to this new lifestyle was challenging, but she embraced the Mitzvot gradually, mindful of her family dynamics and careful not to disrupt home life. She took each step with patience. Though her home wasn't always supportive, she found strength in her experiences at CGI Poconos. When she faced struggles, she would reminisce about the immersive Jewish atmosphere of camp and reach out to her former counselors, who were always there to offer encouragement and support. Their warmth and guidance reminded her of the reasons she began this journey.

As the years passed, CGI remained central to her spiritual growth. After university, she decided to return to the immersive Jewish environment that had first inspired her. She made the life-changing decision to attend a midrasha in Israel, deepening her connection to her Jewish roots.

Now, more than a decade later, she has made aliyah to Israel and lives in Jerusalem. She continues to live a fully Orthodox life—a journey that began at CGI Poconos.

Looking back, she realizes it was more than just a summer experience—it laid the foundation for a lifelong commitment to Torah, mitzvot, and Jewish living. The lessons, friendships, and inspiration she gained at camp continue to shape her life.

*Leilah's journey is a testament to the enduring power of camp. CGI Poconos didn't just shape her summer—it laid the foundation for a lifetime of growth, rooted in Jewish values.*

## Leilah's Journey at a Glance:

- 2009** – Begins attending Saturday services at her local Chabad house
- 2012** – First summer CGI B-Me (Poconos) and starts keeping kosher
- 2014** – Moves from Ohio to California and begins observing Shabbat
- 2017** – Leilah attends an Orthodox midrasha in Israel
- 2018** – Attends university in New York to be part of a larger Jewish community
- 2023** – Leilah makes aliyah



Leilah in Jerusalem

*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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