

Who Would Have Known?

By Phyllis Shulman

Phyllis grew up in Newton as a member of this congregation. After graduating Northeastern she taught school in Sudbury and NYC before ultimately moving to Andover, where she spent a decade as the administrator for Temple Emanuel. Ten years ago, she and husband, Robert, returned to Newton and rejoined our Temple Emanuel. Her two children and four granddaughters live in Westchester, NY.



It's summertime 1961. I'm 12 years old attending Camp Young Judaea as a second-year camper. Israel is a little bit older than I, but I liked to think we were about the same age.

I could never have imagined just how transformative this and the 5 summers that followed would be for me, my Judaism, my love for Israel and my devotion to the Jewish people. Who knew?

Yes, of course, we played volleyball, had swim lessons, arts and crafts, tennis, archery, riflery, etc. but that served as the backdrop for the fervent Zionism that was ever present. As adolescents we even had a weekly scheduled period focused on Zionism.... Martin Buber's name was one of several mentioned as a pioneer of the new state...." we whispered, who is he?" Who knew?

We attended Shabbat Services among the pines both Friday night and Saturday morning. We sang songs and prayers but most of my bunkmates, including me, focused on the delicious Shabbat dinner that awaited us and where the cute boys were sitting.

The scheduled Israeli summer scout had not yet arrived. Who would it be? This scout would live among us and become the “influencer” for all the young and energetic Jewish campers. It’s the early 60’s and Israel is a very long way from Amherst, NH. So perhaps camp would locate an Israeli scout living more locally.

Yoni Netenyahu, may his soul rest in peace, would go on to be our scout and later the only fatality during the Raid on Entebbe, his brother later becoming the Prime Minister of Israel. Who Knew?

A generation later my daughter attended YJ for two summers. To this day she still scolds me for not insisting she attend as a younger camper. Maybe it was her brief exposure to this camp that led her to unrelenting passion for the State of Israel. Who knew?

October 7. A day that will go down in infamy in the Jewish calendar. On social media my daughter meets an IDF soldier. He is a paratrooper and has been recently called to duty several times. He has come to America to teach, inform, and raise money for the purpose of calling attention to the rising level of antisemitism in America and around the world. My daughter has become an integral part of these arrangements connecting him to clergy in the New York City and Westchester County area as well as helping to enlarge his on-line presence where he can message his mission. Who knew?

While in NY visiting my family for Passover 2024, I overheard Hebrew spoken at a nearby table. I could easily detect one person was Israeli and the other was not. They were strangers but they were Jewish strangers, so I turned and wished them Chag Samaech. I asked the American where she learned her Hebrew and she said she attended a Jewish camp. I responded, “so did I, which one?” She replied, “Young Judaea.” We jumped out of the chairs as we realized we had been camp friends. The nearby restaurant patrons were bewildered by these “older” women yelling and crying but it didn’t matter! The bond is that great. We hadn’t seen each other in over 60 years. Who knew?

And lastly, I would attend Temple Emanuel of Newton’s Hebrew school, become a Bat Mitzvah in 1962 (Haftorah Ki Tissa), and attend High Holiday services with my family. Years later my husband, father, and grandfather named

my baby girl here and then, decades after that, I would return as a member of our congregation. Who would have known?