Ramah system. Every Shabbat afternoon when I was a camper, I would visit my parents at Lake Side C. I would walk over from A or B side, depending on the year, and my mother would be sitting on the porch waiting for me. We would sit and talk on the porch, but were often interrupted by her many fans among the campers and staff as they walked by the bunk. Her dual role as a camp parent and staffer was a balancing act but one that was cherished by her, and it was with bittersweet feelings that she finally ended her summers at Ramah. Among the many professionally engraved plaques and inscribed awards we found recently when going through my mother’s belongings, one that stood out in a place of pride was a handmade wall hanging, clearly a product of the *ommanut* (arts and crafts) studio at camp, that marked her twenty-five-year anniversary in the Ramah system.

My mother treasured her involvement in Ramah, perhaps above all of her other professional commitments. I will never forget that in the last month of her life, when her strength was waning, she made sure to visit camp for one last visiting day, both to visit her children and grandchildren there, and to see her beloved camp one more time. In my mind’s eye I can still see her on that day, and many others like it, surrounded by family and friends, once again holding court on the front porch of Lake Side C.

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**Dr. Saul Shapiro**, husband of Dr. Miriam Klein Shapiro, z”l, is a former National Ramah Commission president and a past president of the board of Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. Members of the families of Saul and Miriam’s children, Ephraim Shapiro, Sara Shapiro Shuter, Rachel Shapiro Kirzner, Sim Shapiro, and Rivka Shapiro, also contributed to this article. Shapiro family members have attended the following Ramah camps and programs: Berkshires, Canada, Connecticut, Israel Seminar, Maine, Nyack (both overnight and day camp), and Poconos.

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**SILVERMAN FAMILY**

**Gloria (Sussman) Silverman, z”l (1936–2008)**

Gloria (Sussman) Silverman, z”l, beloved wife of Rabbi Israel Silverman, z”l (whom she met at Camp Ramah), mother of five (raised at Camp Ramah), and savta of thirteen alumni of Camp Ramah (with three more to go), spent over fifty years of her life at Camp Ramah.
Gloria began her affiliation at Ramah in Connecticut and also worked at Ramah camps in the Berkshires, the Poconos, and in Canada, where she spent over thirty summers. Her roles at camp included yo’etzet, morah, and developer/coordinator of programming for visitors and for fine arts. During the rest of the year, she served as a winter director, recruiter, and board member for Camp Ramah in Canada.

Following her death in December 2008, we (her children and grandchildren), as well as Camp Ramah, received hundreds of tributes to her, some of which are quoted here. These reflections capture her dedication to the ideals and vision of Camp Ramah and to their practical application.

Gloria’s career at Ramah began in the late 1950s in Connecticut. One of her former campers, Gail Josephson Lipsitz, recalls:

It would be impossible to capture in words the positive influence Gloria had on me. I met her when she was Gloria Sussman, my counselor at Camp Ramah in Connecticut during my very first summer there, in 1958. . . . It was my joy and privilege to have this most amazing young woman as my guide on [my Ramah] journey. Gloria was warm, wise, spiritual, and earthy at the same time. She became a friend, mentor, and mother all in one. She conveyed to me and my bunkmates a deep love of Judaism and modeled how to live a Jewish life 24/7. I vividly remember her hugs, her beautiful voice when she played her guitar and taught us Hebrew songs, her staying in with us at night to read us The Diary of Anne Frank, her helping us understand one bunkmate’s social difficulties and how to deal with her compassionately, her sense of fun, her creativity. All the other bunks envied us and we became a little community, so bonded.

I kept in touch with Gloria, and I still have the book she sent me for my bat mitzvah. She had such an impact on me that I wrote my college application essay about her.

She went on to become rosh edah bet. Her dear friend and colleague, Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz, remembers her as a most warm and loving individual who always had a smile on her face and was beloved by campers and staff. She could diffuse a situation with her sense of humor and her smile. She also had a mischievous streak that played itself out at camp. She and the junior counselors decided to put a canoe in the swimming pool and remove all silverware from the dining room except for knives. They placed alarm clocks all over the director’s house set to go off at different times and removed the hinges from some of the doors in the house so they would fall when opened.

It was during the summer of 1962 that Gloria met her future husband, Rabbi Israel Silverman, z”l. They married the following summer and returned to Ramah camps together each summer until his death in 2003.
During the early 1970s, Gloria was a yo’etzet at Camp Ramah in the Poconos. Michael Miller remembers his early years with Ramah when, after his job application was initially rejected, he was invited to be the staff activities coordinator and part-time driver.

Danny Margolis [the director] suggested various options for me at Ramah, and he sent me to a woman I had not yet met—Gloria. Little did I know that I was being interviewed and needed her approval if I was to have a future in Ramah. We sat and spoke about my background, skills, interests, and educational philosophy. I was so impressed by her insights and knowledge of the educational process. I left that meeting convinced that this was the most insightful, thoughtful, sensitive, and maybe above all, honest Jewish educator I had ever met. No nonsense, no platitudes, no glib answers but an honest assessment as to what Ramah could and could not do, and how to best use the eight weeks we had.

Soon after, I became a rosh edah, and Gloria was my yo’etzet. She was the most wonderful sounding board you could imagine. She told me straight out what was good about my running the edah and what was not. She had no problem telling me, “Michael, that is a dumb idea” or “what you are doing is not going to work.” She taught me how to work and train staff, how to run a successful edah meeting (an incredible life skill), . . . how to delegate tasks and what to do myself, [and] above all she taught me how to evaluate, be critical and honest about my work, and yet at the same time always to be supportive of my staff. She taught me that my most important job was to be the madrich for my madrichim. She taught me what it meant to be a leader, to take responsibility, to admit when I did something wrong, and to always give the credit to my staff for our successes. Gloria kept me going after my failures, helped me save overworked counselors when they fell apart, and was ever present as our guide, mentor, mother, teacher, and friend.

Gloria has a very special place in my heart and my Ramah memories, and I consider her to be one of the two or three most extraordinary educators with whom I have ever worked. She truly has a place in the Ramah Hall of Fame.

Between 1975 and 2005, Gloria was a fixture at Camp Ramah in Canada, as much a part of the landscape in Utterson, Ontario as the badar ochel or Skeleton Lake. She continued to work as a yo’etzet for rashei edah and for directors. Shelly Dorph, the former director of the National Ramah Commission, recalls:

I have such fond memories of Gloria and Israel sitting on the porch of their “condo” at Ramah—reading, playing with the grandkids, or meeting with counselors and staff who needed consultation, support, good advice, or whatever. For me as National Director, having Gloria at camp was like...
having the best part of Ramah’s total wisdom and experience in support of the director and staff. Gloria was such a powerful, wise educator and nesbamat. Her memory is surely a blessing to the thousands who knew and learned from her, myself included.

Rabbi Neil Cooper, the director of Camp Ramah in Canada from 1981 to 1982, notes:

During my first years on staff, Gloria was a constant source of encouragement and advice. As I studied Talmud with Israel and learned Torah from him, I gained invaluable lessons regarding camping and Jewish education from the wealth of insights and expertise which she carried and shared. I remember that after directing a pe’ulat erev, after addressing the staff, or following a hanbalah meeting, I would shoot a glance at Gloria hoping for her sought-after approval and her loving smile. Indispensable to my personal and professional growth during those formative years was the impact of Gloria and Israel.

In the words of Judy Markose, the director of Camp Ramah in Canada from 1985 to 1989:

Gloria was a one-of-a-kind leader and role model, a mentor and advisor to me in ways that I will never forget. Even at my young age, she saw potential in me. Gloria challenged me to be strong and decisive, sensitive, and insightful. She taught me about the politics of working with lay people, about how to interact with the parents of our campers, and so many other basics of running camp. She was always honest and straightforward and also supportive and encouraging. Somehow I wasn't intimidated, but it did mean a lot to me to gain Gloria’s approval. For me as a woman trying to juggle career and family, Gloria represented the all-important value of balancing both spheres. It was clear to me that her husband and children came before anything else—though she could have gone down any career path she chose, as a creative, innovative, and fearless educator. It was a privilege to be taken under the protective wing of Gloria (and Israel) Silverman.

Rabbi Mitch Cohen, the director of Camp Ramah in Canada from 1990 to 2000, adds:

Gloria’s warmth and wisdom was a gift to me as director and to the camp community in numerous ways. Mostly, she was always there for me to advise me, to brainstorm with me, and to help me negotiate difficult situations. She was truly a remarkable woman who made Ramah, and so many educators including myself, better.

In addition to the work she did with the lay and professional leaders of Camp Ramah, Gloria actively recruited the youth of her home community, Hamilton, Ontario, where she was the principal of Beth Jacob Congregation’s
Hebrew School during the 1970s and 1980s. She targeted the usual suspects, to be sure, but perhaps more importantly, she drew others to Ramah.

Rabbi Arye Berk recalls:

I would not have ever worked at Camp Ramah in Canada except for “divine intervention” caused by a suggestion of Gloria Silverman. I never attended the camp as a camper, but I spent part of three wonderful summers at Camp Ramah in Canada in the mid 1980s as a driver. This was my first experience seeing the joy of Shabbat, and I know Ramah was one of the first stepping stones on my path to becoming a rabbi.

As the driver of the camp, I picked up the campers after their trips in Algonquin and Killarney Provincial Parks. One summer Gloria decided to join the campers on their hardest trip in Killarney Park, and I did not think Gloria would be able to handle this canoe trip. But, when I arrived at Killarney to pick up the campers, there was Gloria, a little tired but smiling at her accomplishment. I should not have been surprised—she had a very strong will! I will always be grateful to Mrs. Silverman for making it possible for me to enter the world of Camp Ramah in Canada.

Gloria was also responsible for bringing a group of celebrated artists to Camp Ramah in Canada to advance existing efforts for programs and activities. David Moss observes:

Gloria intuitively recognized the value of the arts, and especially the visual arts, for educating and inspiring Jewishly. She enthusiastically embraced not only my art, but warmly welcomed me and my family into the Ramah community and into her life. From the very moment we met, Gloria did whatever she thought necessary to make sure that my skills could be shared at camp—not only with campers and staff, but with other Judaic artists as well. Her warm, wise, and efficient structuring of the programs we created together truly brought about a flowering of the creative visual arts at Ramah. I cherish our years of working together and will always remember the excitement of the challenges, the pride of accomplishment, and the deep friendship and love that grew between us.

Karen Trager, Gloria’s camper in 1962, sums up what countless others have said:

I am indebted to her, and I will continue to miss her for as long as I’m alive. I credit her for so much of my own Jewish journey, and like so many of her former students, I know I am a Jewish educator today because of her example, her oh-so-subtle influence, her caring. She reached out to me and opened up a whole new world.

Gloria’s life was blessed by Camp Ramah, and she brought blessings to the Ramah Camping Movement as well. Gloria was afforded myriad
opportunities to learn and to grow, and in return, Ramah was a vehicle for her to teach and to influence.

_Yehi zichrah baruch_— may her memory continue to serve as a blessing for all who knew her.

**SILVERMAN FAMILY** members attend or are alumni of the following Ramah camps and programs: Berkshires, Canada, Connecticut, Israel, New England, Nyack, Poconos, and Wisconsin:

Judah and Margo Silverman, Daniel and Rachel, Tova, Leah
Lanie and Joel Goldberg, Rina, David and Rebecca, Joshua, Sarah
Aviva Silverman and Mark Smiley, Yael, Dov, Benjamin
Riva Silverman and Abram Heisler, Naomi, Jacob, Adina
Devorah Silverman and Reuben Rotman, Zachary, Dalia, Maya

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**ELIOT MALOMET**

*Rabbi Israel Silverman, z"l (1928–2003)*

Rabbi Israel Silverman was chairman of the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Law and Standards, a member of the Rabbinical Assembly’s Va’ad Hakavod, one of the deans of the Canadian rabbinate, and one of the most respected, revered, and admired rabbis of his generation. But for almost a biblical generation—forty years—we at Camp Ramah in Canada had the privilege of calling him our _rav_. Rabbi Israel Silverman, of blessed memory, had a lifelong association with the Ramah Camping Movement and from the mid-1960s to before his death in 2003, he was the _rav hamahaneh_ at Camp Ramah in Canada.

Naturally, Rabbi Silverman oversaw the kashrut of the camp and functioned as our decision maker in matters of halachah. But as _rav hamahaneh_ he understood that his role was much more than a _mashgiyah_ and a _posek_. He saw himself first and foremost as a teacher, and for many of us, he would be the single most important _dugmah_, religious-ethical-Torah exemplar, that we would ever have. He taught everyone, from those on the _hanhalah_ to the lay leadership, from teachers to specialists, and from counselors to campers. He mentored and guided us and modeled for us the life of Torah and the path of _mitzvot_.

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