

My camp, in the early 2000s had two staff members who served as "staff trainers," though that title wasn't descriptive of their full roles. As licensed mental health professionals, they served as counselors for our counselors. They helped us navigate camper behavioral and social issues in situations we were able to handle, and they stepped in when a more seasoned professional was needed. The same two people served in this role every summer for a good several year run. But one of the two suffered from depression. And one summer, after camp had started but before that trainer made their way to camp, they took their life. The camp intended to keep the details private so that the camp community wouldn't learn the truth about the suicide. But an irresponsible camper parent told their camper on a phone call the morning after the tragedy and word got out immediately. It was not an easy piece of news to take. Many staff and campers had deep relationships with this staff trainers (who also had children as campers at camp at the time).

Now, how did we get through it? Lots of conversations, lots of time, but also a focus on Jewish mourning rituals. The children of the staff trainer went home for the funeral but returned to camp for Shiva and were given a beautiful space in a room that was dedicated for a week from breakfast through dinner to be their Shiva space where other campers and staff could visit them. It was a beautiful display from the entire camp community of providing comfort to mourners while we, also, were mourning.

At Maccabi Sports Camp, which is my most recent camp experience, we dealt with this a lot because of the nature of sports. During every period of Core Sports (which was a total of 4 hours each day) the campers missed countless shots, made countless mistakes, and yet had to keep going, continue learning and pushing and trying. I can try to think of a more specific example, or feel free to edit and just make up a quote.

One afternoon, a beloved counselor for our unit of rising 10th graders went for his hour off and listened to a voicemail saying his brother had suddenly died. Not knowing what to do, our camp leadership helped him decide to go home for a while mid-summer. My unit head and I (the unit's programming leader) rushed to gather our group in the art room.

In her haste, she drove the golf cart across camp too fast and tumbled down a small ravine with a camper passenger - so headed to the hospital they went. (They returned that evening on crutches but alright.)

Alone with a Rabbi who had just arrived at camp for the first time that morning, we shared the news with the rest of the counselors and our campers. Some more sad and angry for this counselor, their friend, is their role model. But mostly, all they wanted to do was learn how they could be supportive.

How do you build resilience? Your role model what it means to be a communal support net, that catches people and wraps them up when they need it, no matter how big or small.

After years of being in the camp play, I finally got a solo section to sing. It was my time to shine! Just a stanza, a simple phrase - but it was all mine. Lights down, curtains up. My cue came and I stood up and then... I froze. I couldn't remember the words and I didn't know what to do and I only had a split second to figure it out! And so, I repeated the stanza of the person before me. It made no sense and I tried to hide it and my bunkmates were supportive. After the show my counselors saw me beating myself up over it, but they had bought a bouquet of flowers and a cookie cake for our cabin to share in celebration. That sense of normalcy even when I thought my world, what I'd worked so hard for all summer, was crashing down - it didn't leave me time to let my sadness fester. The fun must go on!

When I was going into 6th grade, I went to my first overnight camp. I made friends, learned some Jewish stuff, and the first thing I said when I walked off the airplane after 4 weeks: Mom, Dad, I want to go back for the full 8 weeks next summer!

The next week, I learned that while at camp my dad had been diagnosed with cancer. Luckily it was able to be removed a couple months later - but I made my parents promise not to keep anything like that from me while I was away ever again.

The next summer, as asked, I went to camp for the full summer - made even more friends, bonded stronger with others, and spent free time either practicing for the camp play or my impending Bat Mitzvah Torah portion. When I got off the airplane this time, my dad met me with my aunt, sat me down in the airport lobby, and shared that my mom was ok but had had a stroke.

Fast forward only a couple months, my mom passed away from lung cancer. It was my friends from camp who showed up - via email and online messenger, in-person at the Shiva, and for months following. When camp rolled around, they kept showing up. They put their arms around me during the daily Mourner's Kaddish, the visiting Rabbis and other faculty helped me find Jewish readings to prepare during services, and my counselors allowed me just enough alone time to feel calm yet not too much space to ever question if I was cared for.

I never questioned going back to camp. Bad things happened in the real world, not at camp. The world didn't stop turning while I was at camp, but the people and the community allowed me to return to the harsher realities each Autumn with a thicker skin, more confidence, and a renewed sense of resiliency.

For the last two summers, KD had been my "camp boyfriend." We did the camp plays together, spent Shabbat after free time together, and we always hoped to be put on the same color war team. He was just the nicest - beloved by all. Leading up to the third summer, everyone was messaging me online asking if we'd be boyfriend-girlfriend again... Especially since his online profile said he was "in a relationship." When we got to camp, we weren't boyfriend-girlfriend (which seemed to be a much bigger deal to everyone else, so I spent a lot of time defending my feelings of acceptance). I was disappointed of course but there was so much more to do at camp, and my counselors and my friends who were interested in more than just gossip helped me redirect my energy. 20 years later we are still Facebook friends.

When I was in oldest age group at my summer camp, I failed the advanced lifesaving class. Which I had completely planned on having as part of my summer and totally through me for a loop on a ton of levels including, I'm a failure! I eventually found my way. I survived, more than survived. I found my way to do other activities that summer that I hadn't planned on, including a lot of candy from the candy box.

I believe in 7th grade, our cabin went on our day trip which leads into an overnight. And we had been biking for a long time. It was supposed to be 3-5 miles and it had really been a long time and we finally asked, you know, "we're all very tired" and "how much longer?" and it turned out that we had biked 11 miles in the wrong direction. Our cabin ended up knocking on this woman's door and asked if she had some snacks so she gave us these 2 really large bags of Lay's potato chips and turned on the garden hose so we could have some water. It was a very frustrating experience as a kid being like oh my gosh, are we going to make it back to camp? Years later, we would laugh about this and I actually really enjoy bike riding and being in the woods now and it's been funny to look back on that and realize that even though it was not great in the moment, it's a really funny story.

My last summer as a camper. Every year there's this thing called intercamp, which is a multi-camp wide tennis tournament. I'm not a great tennis player, I'm not the worst. I had convinced myself that I was good enough to make the team for the intercamp tennis tournament. When I did not make it, I was very sad because I thought I had worked very hard at tennis that summer and pushed myself outside of my comfort zone as a more successful water athlete to be a better land athlete. And my counselor took me to the lake, she worked on the waterfront and we went on a row boat and we talked about it and I cried about not making the tennis team. I realized, it was way too big of a pipe dream to try to make the team and it didn't mean just because I didn't make the team, that I couldn't enjoy tennis and that I wasn't a skilled tennis player for the average human. And I also worked to be excited for all the people that did make the tennis team. I haven't even thought of that story in so long because I was ultimately able to internalize that tennis is fun and not super competitive for me.

This isn't actually about me, but it was a lesson that I learned about resilience. I just want to preface by saying that I think a lot of the times we see the stories of when someone stands out and we don't see the stories of someone who's being resilient just by being there. Just the fact that somebody is functioning and there. I was a 3rd year staff and there was this little boy, his last name was Floyd. Everybody called him Pink, like Pink Floyd. So pink used to run around shirtless and in rainboots all the time. His mom had died 2 weeks before camp. It was this 6 or 7-year-old little boy. And we sometimes say, "What would your parents say about that?" "Parent." And it happened twice where I said something about parents and he just said, "parent." And it took me a little while to process but to be able to turn around to an adult and calmly just say that and to just have been at camp. What does it take for a kid to be at camp moments after something that big and have the wherewithal to figure it out? That definitely stuck with me.

I'm completely floored by Newman and other camps this past year in California that burned down. Newman's capacity to communicate to their stakeholders and everyone and really share the pain, be in the pain and honor the pain all at the same time. Being present, protective and really, we got this, is really mind-blowing. Holding an entire community and realizing it was profoundly a space and remotely a place. It was not limited to the place. And then the director to help JC Shalom go through the same process.

The Parkland Shooting. A big community of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas go to my camp. One of the victims of the shooting was a camper so it had a very big impact on the community. We had counselors who flew down for her funeral, who came back to camp specifically for these campers. Part of what camp saw to do in this situation was it wasn't a space for us necessarily to comfort the students who were returning and everyone who knew the person who had died, but it was a place to help them forget for a while. Camp is not a place where you should be reminded of your grief but a place where you can displace it for a while. We brought in therapy dogs and social workers who were able to help the people who were affected by this to move forward and find ways to give them outlets.

I worked at camp when 100 campers had the swine flu. It was actually really amazing. The systems that they had in place and the systems they had to expand because of the number of sick kids. But how to deal with having such a large population of campers who were in isolation for a week or so. And the staff members that stepped up to do programming and work with them in their special side camp. It was horrible but it was also really amazing.

The way that camps work together during difficult circumstances. How they help support each other and communicate. I think that's a really amazing part of resiliency in the camp communities and this is really important for me to see in the Jewish camp world. That it's not just your camp surviving on its own, that it's really across the nation.

I really feel like a lot of my emotional abilities and resiliency as a human being comes from my cabin and our growing up together at camp. Throughout the 7 years total that we were there, a lot of people's parents got divorce, several of us had really severe eating disorders or problems with self-harm or other types of trauma go on. Some serious grief and loss experiences, even after camp. The way that we learned to support one another as a collective from ages 9 through 15 and beyond is part of the infrastructure of how I'm able to take care of myself, feel taken care of and reach out for support and help. I think the fact that we were able to create a language for emotional support at such a young age and continue growing up together at camp and had counselors that looked out for us and let us learn together how to have some kind of community care.