

Camp Miriam changes lives

The full impact of Camp Miriam on individuals and the Jewish community is often felt decades after campers return from the Gabriola Island idyll.

Congregants at Temple Beth El of Hollywood, Florida, can thank Camp Miriam for setting their rabbi on a path decades ago that ultimately led him to their community.

“My family, we weren’t very attached to the Jewish community,” says Rabbi Allan Tuffs, who grew up in Vancouver. “I came from a mixed background – my mother was Jewish, my father wasn’t – and I really wanted to discover my Jewish roots.”

His family didn’t have much money and young Allan was able to join his friends each summer only because of camperships supported by members of the community.

“Camp Miriam was very welcoming and it was a warm and embracing kind of place,” he recalls of his time there in the mid-1960s. “It was run like a kibbutz and it instilled in us a love of the Jewish people and a love of Israel. It emphasized hard work and creativity and cooperation. It really brought me into the Jewish fold into a very serious way.”

He went on to work at other Habonim Dror camps, in Maryland and Pennsylvania. After returning from living in Israel in his early 20s, he decided to enter the rabbinate.

“I’ve been a rabbi now for 33 years and I believe that Habonim really gave me a pathway to embracing my Jewish heritage,”



Tuffs says. “I am forever grateful to Camp Miriam for that. It meant everything to me.”

The generosity of community members who made his camping experience possible is something that stays with him.

“The cost of synagogue membership and religious schools and other expenses to belong to the Jewish community are prohibitive for a family of modest means,” says the rabbi. “Camp Miriam made it possible for kids in all financial situations to be able to come. It basically did not say no to any Jewish kid who wanted to be a part of the camp.”

The impact on this one individual can be extrapolated across the Jewish community.

“There are alumni of Camp Miriam who have gone on to do great things in so many fields – in law, in medicine, in academics, in show business ... and one of them, at least, became a rabbi,” he says. “The kind of people who come away from the experience of Camp Miriam tend to be the kind of people who really want to make the world a better place.”