

# CAMP MIRIAM

## – Decades of connection

It was 50 years ago this summer that Dr. Shalom (Alex) Preker last saw Camp Miriam. But the memories of those formative summers on Gabriola Island remain vivid.

Preker retired two years ago as an economist with the World Bank in Washington, DC. He now works with Israeli companies to find American investors, is a tutor for the Technion/Cornell Post-Doctoral Entrepreneurial program in New York and a Professor at Mt. Sinai Hospital and Columbia University.

But through his decades of success, his reminiscences of those long-ago summers demonstrate the power of the camp to set a person on a positive life's course.

Young Shalom, his mother Frida and two sisters Myriam and Noemi had just arrived from Denmark to Vancouver, where his father Salo (Slomo) had immigrated earlier to settle the family. His father, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, had a difficult time finding his footing in the world and he was determined to put his kids on a positive path.

"When we came to Canada, one of the first things he said was, 'to survive, you've got to learn English.' So he shipped us off to Camp Miriam," Preker says, laughing. "It was in the deep end quickly."

Like others in need, the family was referred to the camp by Jessie Allman, z"l, of the Jewish Family Service Agency, an individual who did much to ensure the inclusion of everyone in the community.

"I have this very poetic memory," Preker recalls. "The boat ride. The arrival. The good weather. It was like ending up in paradise."

In addition to English and Hebrew, they were immersed in the warmth of a community of Jewish and Israeli culture. In Denmark, given the struggles of the family and the small Jewish community there, they had not been deeply exposed to Judaism.



Dr. Shalom  
(Alex) Preker

"Camp Miriam was also our initial introduction to being Jewish," says Preker. "We kind of mirrored the early settlers in Israel. The camp tried to create an atmosphere that made us feel like we were early olim to Israel."

Preker, who went on to get numerous degrees, including an MD and a PhD, recalls the Habonim movement and Camp Miriam as having had "a dramatic impact in every way you can imagine." And, for a family like his, it was possible only because of the Campership Fund, which represents the camp's commitment that no Jewish child will be turned away for lack of funds.

Half a century later, young people continue to build memories and connections to Judaism and Israel thanks to the support of community members who fund camperships.

In 2014 alone, 120 of the 300 campers were assisted by the Campership Fund, including two sisters whose family fled Russia after their brother was violently attacked and many for whom the time on Gabriola Island was a respite from lives that are more challenging than young people should face. Many would never have the opportunity were it not for the generosity of Camp Miriam's supporters.



To help provide camperships to enable Camp Miriam to maintain its motto "No child turned away for lack of funds," please contact the Honorable John Fraser, Chair of Camp Miriam Finance Committee. For further information regarding registering your child for camp, please contact Leah, Camp Registrar, 604-266-2825 or [camp.miriam@gmail.com](mailto:camp.miriam@gmail.com) or visit [campmiriam.org](http://campmiriam.org).