

## **REPORT ON OPEN HOUSE SUMMER PEACE CAMP, JULY 2010**

**by Dalia Landau**

The OPEN HOUSE Summer Peace Camp took place from July 4 to 22 at Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salaam, the mixed Jewish-Arab community several kilometers from Ramle. There were 97 children taking part, 77 Arabs and 20 Jews, aged 6 to 13.

The reason for the considerably smaller number of Jewish campers this year was the “Turkish flotilla” tragedy, which engendered fear among the Jewish parents, especially. Many of them preferred to keep their children close to home and in a more homogeneous environment.

The peace campers came from Ramle, Lod, Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salaam, Kibbutz Gezer, Beit Hashmonai, Carmei Yosef, Gizo, Eshtaol, Kfar Uriah, Ein Hemed, Abu Gosh, and Beit Nakuba. The transportation we provided included two buses and a minibus; in the large buses there were always adult staff members present.

As in the previous year, the Peace Camp coordinator was **VIVIAN RABIA** and the Camp director was **COSTA MANSOUR**.

**The Program:** As usual, on the first day we used all our special techniques and exercises to get children to know the others in their age group and their group leaders. The particular challenge is to help new campers feel safe. Those who came back from the previous year were very helpful in making new campers feel at home. We organized the overall camp program to include both activities at Neve Shalom/Wahat as-Salaam and day trips to other sites.

Educational activities included exposure to other cultures through art, music, and dance (guided by our own staff and professionals from outside); designing costumes; theater, juggling, and magic; creating sculptures; making huge bubbles; recreational sports; a treasure hunt; periods in the swimming pool; and a special session learning about birds and their migration routes. We especially want to thank **BEADS FOR PEACE** for approaching us and offering a creative workshop with beads. The children loved making beautiful white bracelets with two doves, symbolizing their hope for peace. Many of the campers offered the bracelets to their mothers as gifts.

Through the initiative of synagogue **NEVEI KODESH** members in Boulder, Colorado, art work from the Peace Camp (and from our head-start nursery school for Arab toddlers) was chosen to create **note cards** to help raise funds for OPEN HOUSE. In this way the children knew that they were helping the project that was helping them! NEVEI

KODESH members launched their effort on behalf of OPEN HOUSE together with Christian and Muslim Palestinian-Americans in their local dialogue group.

**Day Trips:** We spent a magnificent day at the Latrun Trappist Monastery, with which OPEN HOUSE has a long-standing relationship. There the children prepared their own pita bread on the beautiful grounds of the monastery, picked grapes which they squeezed barefoot in the ancient wine press, rode donkeys, and did art work conveying the meaning they found in the archaeological layers of this ancient land.

As in years past, our visit to the water park was great fun, as was another visit to an exciting amusement park. The beautifully crafted animals from dinosaur times to this day evoked the imagination of the campers, as they reflected on the process of evolution.

A special-effects 3D movie was another fun-filled outing.

We had our day of “rope challenges” in a forest, which included walking on ropes and snapping. Learning from last year’s experience, we knew that this particular activity takes time and patience and needs a lot of individual attention. Many of the children are both afraid and very eager to go through the trial of treading on a rope in mid-air. While the children were waiting their turn on the ropes, other activities going on included cooking, baking, and using natural materials found in the forest to make fire, or create a bow and arrow along with other needed utensils. A respectful relationship with Nature is, we believe, an integral part of living a wholesome life and developing respect towards each other. The Native American model was taken as an example.

The last day of the camp was joyfully spent in the swimming pool, with music and huge inflatable toys.

**Letters from parents** to Vivian Rabia and Costa Mansour:

*Vivian and Costa, SHALOM! I wanted to say that Ismail enjoyed the summer camp very much and he also said several times that he is missing the camp and wishes to return as soon as possible.*

*Ismail said that he enjoyed the trips and also the activities at Neve Shalom.*

*I believe that the warmth and love he received from the counselors added to his good experience, and I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart.*

*It is clear that the staff did its work out of love and respect for the children, without tiredness, complaint, or criticism, which I do not take for granted.*

*We will be happy for Ismail to be part of your summer camp next year, and he asked if you can add activities with animals, like going to the zoo.*

*With blessings, **MANAAL ABU-HAQ***

*SHALOM, Costa. I am Tal Barak, the mother of Lior from Carmei Yosef.*

*I wish very much to thank you for the successful management of the summer camp. Lior returned happy every day and enjoyed the camp very much.*

*The activities you chose were very successful. He enjoyed American Indian Day, with the bow and arrow. He also enjoyed the Day Around the World and the Capuera.*

*He very much enjoyed the days you traveled to Cinema City, Superland [amusement park], and Shefayim [water park].*

*The counselors were very good because I understood that Lior was very happy with them.*

*The bus service was good. The drivers were polite and responsible. We had direct communication with them, and I was favorably impressed.*

*We were pleased that the summer camp took place at Neve Shalom. In their School for Peace there are shady places, sports grounds, a very beautiful swimming pool, and to me it seems an ideal place for a summer camp.*

*I think that the summer camps was successful in every possible respect. We will be pleased to send Lior next year as well.*

*Wishing you a continuation of your blessed work,*

**TAL BARAK**