

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 3 Cars 5 Trucks 1 Dog Walker 1 Dog Runner 2 ISD#[197 1914](#) and 1916 1 Walker who again accompanied me

It was inevitable. A generation that gave the world the Whole Earth Catalog (1968), Our Bodies Ourselves (1970), and The (first) Jewish Catalog (1973), was going to give us a catalog type book about ageing. Yesterday we received a gift from two of our dear friends, R and S, who gave us the book, "Getting Good at Getting Old" by Rabbi Laura Geller and Richard Siegel(zl). The latter who co-wrote the Jewish Catalog, tragically died before its publication. This husband and wife team spent what they had imagined to be the beginning of their growing old together, planning a book to share with those of us who took possession of our planet(not so well), began to change gender and role stereotyping(a little better) and who did take possession of the Jewish lives (still evolving). When we opened the package and saw the book itself, with a cover that draws inspiration from that first Jewish Catalog cover, we anxiously wanted to open that cover and see what picture replaced the engaging picture that graced the inside pages of that first catalog. For those who do not have that implanted in their minds, upon opening the First Jewish Catalog, one sees a group of teenagers dancing at a Jewish summer camp and one immediately feels the hope of a generation filled with optimism and with joy. (The fact that the picture was from Camp Ramah Wisconsin and I knew those pictured mattered little).

In the first sentence of her moving introduction one realizes that a generation filled with optimism and joy is now facing the unfolding years with a different mindset—almost. In that opening sentence, "This is the introduction I never wanted to write", Rabbi Geller reminds us that while humanity plans, God laughs. In the midst of imagining the joy of growing old together, she and her husband had to face the reality of death visiting their home and redefining the contours of their lives. They worked together on this book until it was no longer possible, and then Rabbi Geller brought it to life is an enduring tribute to her husband's life and his communal work that spanned decades. It is also a stark reminder that getting good at getting old will have different time spans for each of us, but that none, of us, given the opportunity, are free to desist from its pursuit. I too look forward to sitting down and looking more closely at this work, but one of the powerful messages that I took from a quick perusal of the book itself and which appears to be imbedded in its manner and presentation is the importance of not living with fear. That message is so important in and of itself, particularly when some voices only address our fears and ignore our own hopes. Indeed, it is why I entitled these rambling talks as a response to communal fear. I always have seen my role, in

whatever I am doing, as fighting despair, not allowing fear and self-pity to predominate. It served me well in the pulpit, it has served me well in public service during these difficult days, and I think it has been a hallmark of my partnership and parenting.

[This morning](#) as Phyllis and I walked, it felt eerily reminiscent of the walks around the “garbage trail” that surrounds Ramah Wisconsin’s campus and which generations of young people have made into a path of shared serious discourse, humorous talks, and romantic moments. It has been the place where both life-long friendships were born and where summer loves came to an end. And sometimes involving the very same people. For Phyllis and me, never romantic partners at camp, it holds a special place where many of the chapters of our book, “Adolescent Advice” were talked through and re-written awaiting its printing. Fifty some years later we are still awaiting its printing. I tell you this because there is no setting that is healthier for children than the camp setting. And it pains me to imagine that camp may not happen this summer. On Sunday, the Times “Style Section” featured its cover article on camping. And what we imagined to be only a mantra for those of who endured separation during the schoolyear discovered that it is actually a mantra for many— “10 for 2”. Both parents and children it seems, understand that the each one puts up with the other for 10 months to find those 2 months of freedom. In truth, for some kids and some parents its “11 for 1” or even “50 for 2”. Whatever it is, parents and kids both need the break. As I always said on the Shabbat before camp, “parents remember—no dancing until the bus pulls away.” And so imagining a summer without camp is to imagine the relationships that will not happen, the lessons that are learned, the wisdom that is gained, the vision that is born. Imagining a summer without camp is to still the creative ideas of a person who will find themselves amidst a bunk filled with friends more than they ever could on a street in their town.

In a world in which there are no coincidences, a friend of ours who we have known for 51 years (from camp) contacted me over the weekend. When we were 16 and the oldest kids at camp, we had a counselor who gave his all for us and created bonds with many to this day. Our counselor is not doing well and my friend, who is in regular contact with him, thought a zoom visit with him would be in order. And what for us is our “White Christmas” moment, he is going about organizing such a visit in the coming weeks. It entails connecting with everyone else who was in our Tzrif (cabin), finding a SurveyMonkey time that works for most folks and a time that fits our counselor’s health situation. And it creates a connecting thread to the lives which we have led and the task which is now at hand. It is exciting to imagine getting good at getting old. And while it is more exciting in these days simply imagining getting old, and all too many people we know and love did not have that chance and may not have that chance, living in fear and feeling afraid ensures that many others will never have that chance. Embracing the moment and the opportunities with which we are provided is the only path that makes sense. For some of us we learned that on a garbage trail in Conover, Wisconsin and many others on similar paths throughout the country. So, my advice to parents and grandparents when given a chance to send your (grand) child to camp-- embrace it. Allow them to flourish and be reminded that for both they in their youth and you in your prime you are learning exactly how to get good at getting old. I pray that there is not a summer without camp—and from what I am hearing from parents with young children at home---I am not alone. Morris

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