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Obituary:

Ada Rapoport-Albert

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Ada Rapoport-Albert

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In the summer of 1966 I came as the director of sports to Camp Ramah in Ojai, California. Walter Ackerman, Ackie, as he was called by everyone, was the camp director who gave his senior staff lots of room to handle their duties as they saw fit. Soon after arrival I met Ada. You could not miss her: tall, striking, and always with a smile on her face, always very dignified yet accessible and warm. I don't recall what her role was in the camp, but it had something to do with teaching, possibly in Hebrew. We spent much time together. I learned about her great interest in Hasidism and Kabbalah, about the research she was planning in the future, her interest in the history of women, and much more. Ada was interested in my own studies, and offered advice when asked, but mostly I found out about her wide range of interests and knowledge, even at that early stage of her career, about anything that had to do with Jewish studies, women's studies, and much more. We were both recruited by a scholar from the University of California, Berkeley, Jacob Milgrom, who served as the camp's scholar in residence, to help on aspects of a commentary he was writing on the book of Leviticus. Our task was to question, but mostly listen to, his interpretations, and from time to time offer ideas or discuss the origin and meaning of Hebrew phrases (his book was later published). I don't know how useful any of this was to him, but we spent quite a bit of time with him and his wife, Jo.

Given the loose structure in the camp which offered plenty of free time, and the fact that I had a car, we also travelled outside the camp, going hiking or just walking and talking; Ada, of course, smoking much of the time. She had an endless sense of humour, and made everyone laugh. Often, while walking, she would make up stories which she would relate in a combination of languages. Of course, she wrote as beautifully as she spoke.

After camp was over we drove back across country with a couple of friends to New York. I was entering my last undergraduate year as a student in the joint program of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Columbia University, and invited Ada to attend some of my classes prior

to her return to London. She always made interesting observations after class about the content of the lectures, the lecturers, the reading materials, and often corrected statements made by the faculty or offered different interpretations. After she returned to England I saw Ada from time to time in Boston, New York, Israel, and London. My wife Shulamit and I invited her and her daughter Maya to spend a weekend with us in Gloucester, Massachusetts – I believe it was while she was a visiting scholar at Harvard; it must have been in the early seventies. I attended some of her brilliant lectures at scholarly meetings, including a couple she gave at Brandeis, and in 1988 contributed an article to a volume she co-edited in honour of our friend Chimen Abramsky.

She is greatly missed. A wonderful human being and a great scholar is gone.