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Life & Style

'The things she loves under one umbrella'

Camp Massad's outdoor activities include Jewish heritage, culture.

By: Carolin Vesely

Hadas K, with mother Karin, is eager to get back to Camp Massad.

Since moving here from Israel four years ago, Hadas K has discovered a formula for the perfect Manitoba summer vacation.

Start with 20 acres of private forest and one big lake. Add dozens of kids aged seven to 16 and mix well, making sure to remove any parents. Combine with a variety of sporting, cultural and artistic activities and leave under open skies for three weeks.

Wait, isn't that a long time for a 10-year-old to be away from her family?

"I got homesick maybe once," says Hadas, who already has three seasons of Camp Massad under her belt.

"Every time I came home I was really sad because I wanted to stay longer."

Right now she's counting the days until she can return to Winnipeg Beach and dig into another Big Mac --which is how veterans refer to Maccabia, the camp's most popular program. Campers are divided into two teams. Over the course of two days, each tries to outdo the other by coming up with the best team name and putting on the best themed dinner and drama production.

"It's a really big competition and it's a lot of fun," Hadas, who just finished Grade 4, says. Her brother, who recently graduated from high school, spent two summers at Camp Massad.

Leaving home for weeks at a time, let alone heading off into the woods, wasn't an option for the kids before the family emigrated to Canada, their mother says.

"In Israel, I never thought of sending my kids to camp because it's not very safe there," says Karin K. "Here, I really wanted that for them, especially since the winters are so long.

"Summer in Israel is so hot, but here I find the weather is like paradise."

Massad, now in its 56th year of operation, is a Hebrew immersion summer camp -- the only one in Western Canada. It observes kosher dietary laws and gears programs and activities toward giving campers a deeper understanding and appreciation of their Jewish heritage and cultural traditions. Hebrew is the working language of the camp, from morning prayers to games and campfire singalongs.

Karin says she felt it was important that her children attend a Jewish camp. "I want them to remember where they came from."

But trying to build a new life in an adopted homeland doesn't leave much room in a family budget for such extras as tuition at a specialty camp.

Karin has the Sunshine Fund to thank for the fact that Hadas is able to spend her summers at a place where "the things she loves are all under one umbrella."

Her daughter readily admits that one of those things is time away from home.

"You get to learn a lot of stuff without your parents' help," Hadas says.

The Manitoba Camping Association//Winnipeg Free Press/ Sunshine Fund enables children who do not have the financial means through parents, guardians or agencies, an opportunity to attend an accredited Manitoba summer camp.

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