

What Peacecamp meant to me...

First of all, I want to say that the peacecamp was a totally new experience for me. So I had no idea what the week would be like when I came to Rechberg on Sunday. As the weeks before had been stressful, I simply hadn't found time to think about the peacecamp and the people I was going to meet there. So it's quite difficult to describe the emotions I felt when I arrived at Rechberg: First of all, I was very curious and I was really looking forward to the camp. On the other hand, I was a bit afraid and nervous, just because it was such a new situation.

Most of the people I met were strangers for me, I even didn't really know their names. With one of the boys, Eilam, I had written e-mails for months. We really had talked a lot and knew much of each other but during the first days we didn't really have great conversations.

However, the days went by and I got to know the others quite well. I would lie if I said that I talked with everybody. A problem, for example, was that the Arab group didn't speak English as clearly and fluently as the Jewish and the Austrian group did. I also had the impression that some of the Arab group, especially some girls, were a bit afraid of talking. On the whole, the Arab guys were a bit shy. In my opinion this, of course, depends on the education. Jewish girls nearly have the same interests as Austrians but to the Arab girls many things are forbidden that are just normal for Austrians and Jewish.

Which leads me to another important point of the whole camp: How much did the political situation influence the relationship between the different groups? Were there any serious conflicts? Well, of course, we also talked about these "difficult" topics. That's very important, I think, because you can't ignore the conflicts between Jews and Arabs, even if you are in a peacecamp. So we really had some serious discussions. A fact that really frightened me was that the Jewish as well as the Arab Israelis didn't know a lot about their situation. They all had a certain point of view and didn't know an objective opinion. Sometimes I even had the impression that we, the Austrians, knew more about the "real" facts. When the Jewish told us what they learned at school, I suddenly understood that the whole school system, the newspapers use so much propaganda. For me, as an Austrian, "freedom of the press" and "freedom of opinion" are somehow natural and self-evident, so it's hard to believe that the situation in Israel is so different.

However, I have to admit that for me the political aspect of the camp wasn't the most important one. Of course, the discussions were really interesting but on the whole I rather enjoyed talking with all the people about "normal" things. The whole atmosphere was really relaxed: With the girls I talked about boys, going out, music - just the normal stuff. I also had some great and serious conversations, especially with Eilam, who became a really good friend of mine during the camp. Maybe it would have been better if I had thought more about the problems of Jews and Arabs but sometimes, I guess, it's also good and important to forget all the differences and think: "Well, we all are young people and will spend this week together, so let's simply have fun."

Last but not least I should mention the "identity-aspect" of the camp. This point was and is still very important for me because with the help of some activities I really got to know myself better. During the last days, for example, we got a big sheet on which we could draw everything that represented our identity in any way. I really started thinking about this item...

On the whole, I think the peacecamp was very important to everyone who took part. Of course, such peacecamps can't change the situation in Israel but they are a sign, a sign of peace and harmony.

By Manuela Wutte, Sept, 2nd 2004