



# AVODA ALUMNI BUGLE

THE BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CAMP AVODA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2006

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## You're In The Army Now

By Greg Lazaroff

Every year at alumni weekend, there's always a random Avodian name that pops up in conversation. You hear that he's in Arizona building houses, or in Costa Rica living in the rainforest, or god knows what else, but it's something different than most of us who live in the Northeast and stay in touch with each other on a more frequent basis.

J.D. Ravit, a member of the 1997 Bunk 14 (and one of the best Flagrush players in Avoda history), is currently serving in the Nachal Infantry Brigade, Battalion 50, Platoon 2, Unit B of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). He enlisted in a 14 month service program called "Machal 2000" that consists of 7 months of intense basic training and 7 months of service. Machal 2000 is a program that allows Jews from all over the world (non-Israeli citizens) to volunteer their services in the IDF. That's right, J.D. voluntarily joined the IDF.

Why do such a thing? Especially with all that is going on in the Middle East currently? After stints at University of Memphis, where he played on the soccer team and his eventual graduation from University of Vermont in 2004 (where he grew up), J.D. visited Israel for a week on vacation. He returned to the US, but decided that he wanted to move to Israel, study the Hebrew language and see where that would take him. J.D. completed the language study after 7 months and made the ultimate decision to serve in the Israeli

and contribute to the state of Israel last fall. As a soldier, J.D. is responsible for several tasks including normal infantry and commando units (anti-tank, intelligence, demolition, anti-terror). His unit is primarily responsible for the northern part of Israel, but does its training the steamy Negev Desert.



I was lucky enough to meet up with J.D. this past January while I was on vacation in Israel on a Birthright Israel trip. *\*Marketing plug: If you haven't been, it's an amazing experience and highly recommended.\** I was there for 2 weeks, and before I embarked on this journey, I contacted J.D. in the hopes that the two of us could at least hang out for an afternoon or something.

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## President's Letter

Well, it's official, Avoda nicknames certainly strike a chord. When I wrote the article about nicknames in the last newsletter, I thought it would get a pretty good response but it has been even better than I expected. Plenty of people got in touch with me about their nickname memories, and a few people politely pointed out that I missed some good ones. So, in the "better late than never" category let me give a shout out to The Grand Poobah, Kess, Mary Lou, Zabadoo, Yoda, Spaceman, Ger-moo-moo, Badoo, Mintz, Kaufee (and his brother Con Leche) and Waldo. Gary Epstein wrote in to let me know that it wasn't Danny Bauman who gave him the nickname Chubba. Instead it was Athletic Director Steve Mussman back in 1968 who saw a chubby little kid running across the athletic field and yelled out, "Let's Go CHUBBA". Perhaps the best response came from Bob Sokolsky, who attended Avoda for 11 years in the late thirties and early forties. As you can see on page five, he's got a whole slew of great memories and great nicknames. My favorite is definitely Mothballs. (Ed.— I liked Snoobin).

Bob's letter is just one of several highlights in this latest newsletter. Check out the great article by Greg Lazaroff on Israeli Army soldier, and fellow Avodian, J.D. Ravit. Ken Shifman gives us his glossary of Avoda "Sniglets", and Jeff Vetstein takes a look at the early years of Avoda through the eyes of Irv Kessler, an Avodian from 1939-1942. A special thanks to our esteemed editor, Sam Mirkin, for once again pulling it all together and for making it look so good.

Finally, I wanted to tell you about a recent gathering that included the Alumni Association Board and the Camp Avoda Board of Directors. Jim Singer, President of the Board of Directors, coordinated the event which brought the two groups together for dinner and to share thoughts and ideas about the Avoda experience.

After initial introductions and remarks and some retelling of favorite Avoda memories, the group focused on the upcoming summer. Paul Davis gave an update on the camper numbers for the summer, and from all indications it looks like it will be another strong year at Avoda. The group also spent some time generating a variety of ideas with regard to marketing, programming and training. Paul, along with his administration, will work to evaluate and implement some of these suggestions this summer. Overall it was a valuable evening and a lot of fun, which goes without saying when you have a bunch of Avoda guys together. It was an excellent example of the combined energy of the two boards, and the dedication so many people have to ensure that each summer at Avoda is better than the last.

Here's hoping I see you all on the shores of Lake Tispaquin in just a couple of short months for Alumni Weekend on June 23—25. It will be another great time. And, as always, remember if you can't make it for more than one day just show up on Saturday. You won't be disappointed.

Sincerely,

*Russell Sherman*

President, Camp Avoda Alumni Association

# Avoda dic·tio·nary

By Ken Shifman

Dear Merriam-Webster,

I know the dictionary is constantly growing, and you are adding new vernacular to the existing base of words. I suppose most of these additions are technology related, or some might be popular culture related, for example “fo shizzle ma nizzle.” I have been thinking about my summer camp and lifelong friendships that can be tracked back to that affiliation. Mostly these have come to mind from my having two boys who will go to Camp Avoda in a few years. Other “camp people” will certainly be able to relate to the new words I am proposing. Please review these proposals for the dictionary.

Sincerely, Ken Shifman, Camp Avoda, 1984 Bunk 14

Main Entry: **Grand-Counselor**

Function: *noun* : the special, often unrealized, relationship between someone who was a counselor’s counselor. So for example Mike Roth, my former counselor would be Jon Starr’s grand counselor since I was Jon’s counselor. There will be a certain bond between these people as they had similar “upbringings.”

*Derivations: Great Grand-Counselor, Grand-Camper*

*Slang: Co-Co, Gramco*

Main Entry: **Luckid**

Function: *noun* : any child whose parent went to summer camp, especially Camp Avoda. I see a lot of camp friends with kids, and I can’t help but think how fortunate their kids are! I mean, to spend a whole day, week, life with your favorite counselor is simply awesome.

*Usage: 1: [facetious] Look at that luckid; he gets to do lines and grounds EVERY morning before school.*

*2: [sincere] That little boy is a great athlete and has a lot of character; he must be a luckid.*

Main Entry: **parallelselor**

Function: *noun* : the wonderful phenomenon that my kids’ counselors (follow closely) will be my former counselors kids! It’s like déjà vu! How weird is that? Louie Dennis’ son, Jake, could be a senior counselor when my sons are at camp! (**synonyms: nextgenselor**)

Main Entry: **campceive**

Function: *verb* : the act of unconsciously reproducing at the same time as others from your bunk so that your kids will be in the same bunk. We can almost fill the 2011 Bunk 1 with Avoda Alumni: Jeff Keselman, Mike Roth, Russell Sherman, Ken Shifman, and Mike Alter all have boys that age!

Main Entry: **homecamp**

Function: *verb* : to teach your child camp rituals and practices “for fun”, but really to give them an upper hand so they’ll be ready for day one at camp. This can be used to teach songs and cheers, prayers, and such important lessons as, “Does this cake smell funny?”

*Usage: 1: [lame] 2: [silly] 3: [very serious]*

Main Entry: **socnuptial**

Function: *noun*, *Etymology: Latin “nuptialis”, and Jewish “social” as in “trying to score”* : a marriage of two people from related summer camps. For example, a Pembroke – Avoda marriage. Dan Reiser and his wife Allison are an Avoda-Pembroke socnuptial. Sources have it that their extra curriculars didn’t occur while at camp. [see related: checkplease]

Main Entry: **checkplease**

Function: *command* : description of the feeling when you get word that your child “got together” with a camp alumni’s daughter from Pembroke at a social. Even though there would be no connection and not that there’s anything wrong with that – it’s still an odd and noteworthy event.

*Usage: 1: [urgent] Yes I have heard that Tim got together with Marissa last week; Checkplease!*

Main Entry: **flamin-go-girl**

Function: *noun* : daughter of a father who went to an all boys camp – such as Camp Avoda. It’s important to remember that these girls are just as into sports, Red Sox and spirit as boys. This is simply an extension of the “Pink Team.”

## Heard it Through the Grapevine—Alumni Happenings

### Birth Announcements

Scott Udell — Ariel Guarconi, September 29, 2005

Larry Crasnick — Aubrey Serena, October 10, 2005

Jay Yampolsky — Lily Grace, November 28, 2005

David Shaff — Adam—Born March 9, 2006

Richard Vetstein—Abigail Rose—April 25, 2006

### Weddings

Josh Chadajo – married August 28, 2005 to Barbara Birch

Justin Kaufman – married October 8, 2005 to Beth Yates

Larry Rubin – married November 12, 2005 to Inna Kaplan



**Adam Shaff, Born March 9, 2006**



**Avoda's gridiron greats (l to r): Ken Shifman, Josh Fox, Bobby Zuker, Rick Hyman, Steve Peters, Seth Jacobs, Jeff Vetstein, Jason Starr, Sam Mirkin, Seth Peters, Bubba Miller, Andy Geller, Mike Weinstein**



**Future Avodians (and Pembrokeians?): Benjamin Wertheim, Owen Sherman, Lily Yampolsky, Ethan Shifman, Alex Shifman, Josh Keselman, Hannah Keselman**



**Eric Steinman, Matt Traiger, Barry Morgan, Adam Silevitch & Josh "Moose" Schneider ring in Halloween**

**Share your news with us: [campavodaalumniassociation@hotmail.com](mailto:campavodaalumniassociation@hotmail.com)**

## Avoda Nicknames — Part II

By Bob Sokolsky

I really enjoyed Russell Sherman's feature on Avoda nicknames in the latest edition of the Alumni Bugle. It brought back a lot of memories. I thought you might be interested in some of the labels we placed on people during Avoda's Jurassic years.

The nickname that comes most readily to mind was attached to my good buddy, Sooky Wolk. The name came from a popular comic strip character. He had an older brother, also a camper and later a counselor, and also called Sooky. So we had a Big Sook and a Little Sook.

Then, of course, there was the earlier Rosey, Dave Rosenberg. He grew up to be best man at my wedding. There was also Mutt (hey, we certainly weren't going to call him Myron), and Smokey (so named because he was always "in a fog"). There was a nice kid named Bulldog who preferred that to his given name of Jerome, though his mother did not.

There was Schnitzel who was production chief the year I was editor of the camp newspaper. He had friend named Snoobin (what else would you call Donnie Rubin?). Other nicknames included Cutaway, Taj Mahal, and Screwy Louie. Naturally, there was a Slobbo (whom I remember as being fairly neat). We had Bunzie, Bingo and Popeye, a second cook who really looked like the sailor man.

Not to be forgotten was Mothballs. He was there during one of the World War II years and was older than most of the counselors, although there were a few us mature enough to shave twice during the season. I never remember him saying a word, and he wandered around campus in very long shorts and high socks. He took a day off and never returned. There were many rumors, none ever confirmed.

Avoda, incidentally, was the first to give me the nickname Soko, and it stuck through my college years, my military service and my newspaper career. I picked up a few other nicknames after becoming head counselor, but let's not go there.



**The original "Soko", Bob Sokolsky**

*Bob Sokolsky has been an entertainment journalist for forty years, and currently serves as the Arts and Entertainment Editor of the public radio station KVCR and as a Correspondent for the San Bernadino Sun. Bob attended Avoda as a camper from 1938 to 1942, as a C.I.T. in 1943, a counselor in 1944, Freshman Group Leader from 1945 to 1947, and Head Counselor in 1948.*

**Editors Note:** Once again, it is our pleasure to present the semi-annual Avoda Alumni Bugle. Special thanks to our contributors—Ken Shifman, Jeff Vetstein, Greg Lazaroff and Bob Sokolsky. Thanks also to Irving Kessler and J.D. Ravit for sharing their stories with us.

We are always looking for good stories to publish in the newsletter, and would strongly encourage you to email us at [campavodaalumniassociation@hotmail.com](mailto:campavodaalumniassociation@hotmail.com) if you have an Avoda related tale you would like to share.

On a personal note, my nephew will be attending Avoda this summer for the first time. I am so excited for him and a new generation to discover Avoda, and know that if he gets half of what I did out of it he will treasure the place and the friends he makes there.

*Sam Mirkin, Editor*



# Avoda's Greatest Generation

By Jeff Vetstein

The last day of Irving Kessler's Avoda career was a defining moment in his life. "We all left camp that day, two truckloads of us, and registered for the armed services. I knew our lives would change dramatically, and I was in basic training a couple of weeks later."

Irving was a camp counselor at Avoda from 1939 to 1942. There were only three other Jews in his graduating senior class at Somerville (MA) High, so Avoda was Irving's first chapter in a life of Judaism for all intents and purposes. Camp gave Irving a sense of Jewish community, and little did he know it would push him into life-long Jewish communal service. At 84 years young, Kessler looked back to his days at Avoda and his service in World War II.

Kessler's last year at Avoda was in 1942, and World War II was only a few months old. Pearl Harbor had been destroyed in December of 1941, and the draft board lowered the required enlisted age to the age 18. This made the entire staff of Avoda draft eligible, and almost guaranteed that they would go overseas to fight in the War.

Kessler went through basic training, only a few weeks after the 1941 Avoda season had ended. He spent many a day on "Mess Duty" washing pots and pans, and was quickly assigned to the Army Air Corp. where he earned his Wings. He never piloted a plane, citing that the government was a little cautious because of his hay fever vulnerability. Since Kessler was of

such high intelligence, he joined a secret unit in the army that specialized in high altitude bombing sorties. After finishing Pathfinder School, his unit was flown to Europe to help the Allies in the fight against the Germans. He was involved in seven major battles in the European Theatre, most notably a disastrous air-strike in Sicily.



**Greatest Generation Avodian  
Irving Kessler**

This secret unit employed some of the most high tech instrumentation ever used in warfare. Radio, radar, and microwaves were used to help guide the bombs of the Allies. Irving was one of the first soldiers to use and master the art of bomb guidance and navigation. These would be the same techniques that the Allies would use to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. Incidentally, the microwaves are the same

waves that are found in today's popular kitchen appliances.

He thought about camp while he was overseas. "I loved socials with Pembroke, loved playing pranks on other counselors. We once carried a sleeping counselor, bunk bed and all, out to the swimming docks in the middle of the night. While he was still sleeping! The next morning the whole camp was waiting at the beach for reveille to be blown." Sounds like it could have happened in 1989, let alone 1939. As the old saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

He was the Assistant Arts & Crafts Director, and yes, he made many a lanyard out of gimp. He remembers a raid on the camp nurse that involved hoisting a pair of undergarments to the top of the flagpole. The counselors were paid \$50 that summer. (JC's know that hasn't changed much!) If a parent did give him an end of summer tip, it usually wasn't more than \$5 for the summer.

He knew then, that Avoda wasn't about making a lot of money for the summer. It was about the experience and the closeness of the atmosphere. "I always remembered my time at camp very fondly. It helped shape me into the person I am."

Returning from a mission in the south of France, his airplane picked up some starving survivors from

Continued on the next page —>

## Greatest Generation...

some sort of Nazi labor camp. Irving had some idea that the Germans were detaining Jews in these labor camps, but he did not know the harsh realities. After finding out that these laborers were actually starving French soldiers, Irving asked the emaciated and foul smelling prisoners, "Where are all the Jews?"

They replied, "Ils sont tout mort."

The Jews, they are all dead.

"Churchill and Roosevelt knew that the Germans were killing the Jews. But they didn't make that information public. I still think that was a mistake. We had no idea that they were killing Jews."

One month after finding out that the Germans were doing unspeakable things to the Jews, the Germans surrendered in Europe. The surrender led the way to the Army finding the concentration camp in Dachau. Army cinematographers and reporters documented the hellish demise of the thousands and thousands that perished in Dachau. Other camps were liberated, including Auschwitz, where more atrocities were discovered. General Eisenhower made everyone in the armed forces watch the movies that came back from the liberated camps. Remembering watching that film, Irving still gets very emotional thinking back to that time, and knowing that those who perished were his own brethren.

After the War, Kessler dedicated his life's work to the Jewish Community. He met his wife in Newport, RI, where he and his wife live now. Fifteen years after the war, while visiting his father-in-law, a wounded World War I veteran, Kessler decided to make the trip from the VA Hospital in Brockton down to the shores of Tispaquin. "Avoda was still there, in its winter isolation, but obviously still used," Irving recalled.

The one characteristic that defines him as a person is his sense of service to Judaism. He served in the United Jewish Appeal, spearheading such efforts as the Ethiopian exodus, the Russian-Jewish Immigration to the US in the 1980-90's, and was in charge of sending \$500 million dollars to Israel in funding. Although he could not help the millions of Jews that perished,

throughout his great life Kessler has helped more than anyone could have imagined. More than even he likes to admit.

He can't help but think Avoda had something to do with that.



# Alumni Weekend

## June 23-25

sign up on the web at

[www.campavoda.org](http://www.campavoda.org)

## See you there!

# You're In the Army Now...Continued

We hadn't seen (or really spoken) to each other in more than 3 years. As luck would have it, J.D. was able to take a leave for 2 days (but only because he told his commander that he had a family wedding to attend) and meet me at the kibbutz I was staying on for a weekend.

When we first met up, I noticed two things about him instantly: the M-16 gun he was carrying and a timeless Avoda memory; the blue and white Camp Avoda beanie on his head. This is the beanie he wears to Shabbat services every week as a reminder of the great memories he has from his time at Avoda.

Like any Avoda reunion, we sat around for hours, reminisced about Color War, former bunkmates, and old counselors – we didn't even hit on the fact that we were in Israel and that he was in the Israeli Army. To me, it was as if we were hanging out in the grove outside Mr. Davis' cabin.

Of all the things that came up, J.D. had this to say: "I still get very emotional every Friday night on base during the services. I have many Camp Avoda memories and sometimes I have to bight my lip not to cry. Just doing the Bir-chat makes me teary eyed because it reminds me of PGD at the meals and all my Avoda brothers. Also, sometimes when we do cleaning, I have memories of morning detail at camp."

J.D. is optimistic that he'll return home to the US this June for a week or so, and would plan to make it to Alumni Weekend if that were the case. If you want to contact J.D., you can email him at [jdravit@hotmail.com](mailto:jdravit@hotmail.com).

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