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## Inside this Issue

- 1 May 2020
- 2 Welcome Rachel Tough Decisions
- 3 Virtual Campfires
- 4 The Rest of the Story GoFundMe
- 5 Spotlight on Alumni Jenny Risch
- 6 Nature Notes Nature Lodge Pits
- 7 MAC Website Quick Guide

Thanks To: Rachel Kornetsky,  
and Jenny Risch

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# NEWSLETTER



Coming off of Minikani's 100<sup>th</sup> celebration last year, loyal readers of the Newsletter will remember that in the last edition we asked you to look ahead to the future and see what it holds for Minikani.

Not surprisingly, not a single person suggested that the very next year (2020) there would be a world-wide pandemic, a quick and deep economic downturn, food shortages around the world, and the possibility of no regular summer camp at Minikani for the first time in 101 years. No one predicted that for the future, yet here we are and this is what we got.

Because of the corona virus all of us were very suddenly forced to stay at home and wonder where our next roll of toilet paper would come from. Our schools closed, jobs were lost, sporting events were cancelled and we learned about Zoom. People got sick and some died. Of course you know all about it – it's happening right now. It's a tough time for us and our families, and it certainly isn't over yet.

Experts say we're going to come out of this "different". After a period of adjustment, let's hope that we can move into a better future for everyone.



## Rachel Kornetsky

### Summer Program Director

(Editor's Note: Please help me welcome Rachel to the year-round Minikani. I caught up with her recently and asked her to tell us about herself and her camp experiences.)

I first came to camp when I was 11 years old after Greg Valde, Minikani alum and board member, told my mom that camp was going to change my life. Now, going into my 15<sup>th</sup> summer at camp, I can safely say he was right! After 4 years as a camper, I moved through the LT program and was incredibly grateful to be offered a position as a counselor.



I was a faithful waterfront staff member – my favorite spot on camp is sitting out in a boat on Amy Belle, looking back at Minikani. I was the Waterfront Director in 2016, Day Camp Director in 2017 and Assistant Summer Camp Director in 2018. Last summer I worked as the Wellness Coordinator, which was by far my favorite summer I've had at camp as I got to build some amazing relationships with campers and staff.

Camp has shaped me countless ways – my values, my way of living, and my passion for working with children. To have the opportunity to have a job where I can make a real impact on kids, build community, play every day AND do it all at my favorite place in the world makes me feel pretty lucky.

We all know that this summer is going to be a different one – the whole world has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. So while I can't right now speak to the specifics of what we'll see at camp this summer as things around us are ever changing, I'm confident that we will be able to spread some Minikani magic to our community who will need it more than ever



## Tough Decisions

### by Bruce

I hate the thought that there might be no regular camp this summer. But I understand it. And at the same time I hate the thought that campers and staff might have their health put in jeopardy. Would a mid-July start help? What about smaller cabin groups? Only day campers? Will there be a Leadership Program? How about a virtual camp? What will Minikani be like? These are all good questions.



When I was a kid I learned that it was pretty easy to choose between 'right' and 'wrong', but it was sometimes tough to decide between 'right' and 'right'. Having a regular camp this summer is the 'right' thing to do for kids and staff, but following health and safety rules for everyone is also the 'right' thing to do. It's a tough decision for anyone to make, and it's a decision that the YMCA and Minikani are working on making right now.

Mark Twain said "*Good decisions come from experience. Experience comes from making bad decisions.*" Unfortunately, there's no room for making a bad decision here. I only hope the decision makers will have the courage to do the 'right' thing – whatever that is – and know that they'll have our support.



## Gold Rag

From the Gold Rag Study Material:

"Listen to the voice of God!  
Around you! Within You!  
Listen!

He calls you to grow!

To stretch your mind with new knowledge;

To stretch your muscles with clean play and hard work;

To stretch your heart to include new friends;

To stretch your soul and fill it with beauty and hope and great purposes!

Listen to the voice of God!"





## Virtual Campfire

Lights, Camera, Action. A lighted torch moves to Council Bluff - stage right - next to a giant tower of wood. The torch is quickly thrust into the wood pile with a yell ... and we have a campfire. So began the first of 6 Minikani Virtual Campfires. As it turns out, it was just what I needed to brighten my spirits. A little bit of Minikani in the midst of a pandemic – it was a little slice of hope in an otherwise scary time.

Sure, the 1<sup>st</sup> one had a little rough start – but then what campfire *ever* went off without a hitch? At these fires we've had family skits – “Walking Dead”, “Nona Super Hero”, “Get off that Roof” and a story from a 9 year old who loved Minikani. There were a couple jokes and sing-a-long songs about a blue jay with a cough, a momma without socks, a skunk, and an Austrian who went yodeling.

We had real musicians perform live (virtually) just for us. Songs we've heard and loved before (Paradise, Hallelujah, Sandman and You Belong) and some we enjoyed for the first time. (Remember the Way, Old Friends, We're all in this Together) Some are pictured →

I figure I've easily been to over 800 Minikani campfires in my 22 years at camp. Openings and Closings, Unit campfires, Cabin campfires, and miscellaneous campfires – on trips, Winter Camp, LT Weekends, and the spontaneous rainy-day all-camp campfires in Fireside. Besides Rags, nature, and the friends I've made there, nothing means more to me than a Minikani Campfire.



A big THANKS goes out to all those who participated and especially to Perry LaRoque for bringing it all together and Jenny Risch for handling the controls.

There's still time to join a Friday virtual campfire. There's one on May 15<sup>th</sup> with the “Closing Campfire” on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The best way to enjoy a Virtual Campfire is to go to the Minikani Alumni Community group on Facebook. Right at 7:00 PM CDT the live campfire will start.



Musicians from the top left: Grace Weber, Myles & Amanda Hayes, Angie Krysiak, Kendall Dowsett, Greg Valde, Jason Horowitz, Nick & Elizabeth Hayes. Musicians not pictured: John Bolger, Travis King.

## Minikani – the Rest of the Story

Did you know that John Prine's song "Paradise" has a link to Minikani? It was written in 1971 by Prine who died April 7<sup>th</sup> from complications related to COVID-19. The song is about the devastating impact of strip mining for coal, whereby the top layers of soil are blasted off with dynamite to reach the coal seam below.

The song came out one year after the first Earth Day and tells what happened to the area around the Green River in Kentucky because of strip mining. The song references the Peabody Coal Company and a town called Paradise in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

"Paradise" has been a favorite song around Minikani campfires for years. But that's not the whole story. In the late 1800's the Peabody Coal Company bought coal from established mines and sold it to homes and businesses in the Chicago area.

About the same time, the company purchased thousands of acres of Wisconsin land, including Lake Amy Belle and Bark Lake to the West. There were no homes (or camps!) on the lakes at that time. But there were forests with lumber and lakes that would freeze in winter and provide clean blocks of ice.

At a time just before trains were just coming into Wisconsin, wagons and waterways were the 2 ways to



Due to the Safer-At-Home extension, Minikani's Pancake Breakfast originally scheduled for May 3<sup>rd</sup> will be rescheduled for later this fall.

transport heavy materials. Wagons pulled by teams of horses were used, and barges using existing rivers and lakes were also popular. It was easy to move materials to Bark Lake, which drained into the Bark River whose watershed leads to the Rock River and eventually the Mississippi River. Most of the harvested lumber went by barges to Illinois.

After a number of years the 'easy' lumber had been harvested and trains were becoming available to transport materials around the state. The Peabody Coal Company then divided up the land and sold it, piece by piece, to interested farmers. That's how the original 40 acres of farmland was created on the shores of Amy Belle. Then in 1919 a 40 acre farm was sold to the Milwaukee YMCA and became Camp Minikani. Now you know the rest of the story.



## GoFundMe

As many of you know, most of the year round staff at Camp were furloughed for an extended period of time. A GoFundMe directed at Minikani alumni was organized by Perry LaRoque. A total of \$5,000 was collected to help support them financially for the hardships they are enduring. We thank them for their continued service and sacrifice, and we especially thank all the donors for their generosity.



## A Prayer

O God, I thank you for my friends and all the joys they have brought. I thank you for the happiness of sharing work and problems and laughter, and for the joy of adventuring and learning together. I thank you for the chance to love and be loved, not because of cleverness or goodness, but in spite of faults and differences.

Avery Brooke

(Reprinted from "White Ragger Newsletter" VOL. 5 NO. 1 Fall, 1989.)



"And daddy won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County,  
Down by the Green River where Paradise lay.  
Well, I'm sorry my son, but you're too late in asking  
Mister Peabody's coal train has hauled it away."



# SpotLight

On Alumni

By Jenny Risch

Jenny Risch loves Camp Minikani. There' I've said it, and it's true. Throughout the years she has worked to maintain that love as a hard-working, supportive member of the Alumni Community. She contributed the following answers to my questions:

## ◆ What is your history at camp?

I was lucky enough to have parents who sent me to camp. I have no idea how they heard about Minikani and I don't even remember discussing if I wanted to go, but I clearly remember walking nervously down the GU Tunnel with parents as an 8 year old, heading to Cabin 5 for my first week as a camper!

I became an LT in 1996, was a Girls Unit Counselor, WSA Director and for my last summer in 2004, I was the LT Director.

## ◆ Did you have a 'favorite' job at Minikani?

Being LT Director was the most rewarding experience of my life. I loved being able to develop the actual leadership training curriculum and programming but obviously the direct work with LTs is a tremendous privilege, one that I learned so much from and carry with me. I'm also very fortunate to have long standing relationships with many of the amazing men & women who I first met as 14 and 15 year old LTs.

## ◆ Favorite camp food?

I loved grilled cheese any day of the week!!

## ◆ If you could go back and re-live just one day at camp, which would it be?

I can't pick just one, I loved every day. I miss the fresh smell of mornings at camp, the really hot afternoons spent in the lake and the sound of taps at sunset – I wish I could transport to those moments on a regular basis ☺ .□



## ◆ Favorite rainy-day activity?

Storytelling in the Nature Lodge if afternoon skills got rained out. I also remember a WSA staff member starting a no match fire in the middle of a rainstorm, which was my favorite rainy day activity ever!

## ◆ What are you doing now?

I lead business development, partnerships and technical integrations at a software company.

## ◆ Any skills you learned at camp that you use at work today?

So many! The way I lead initiatives and manage my team is really driven by the skills I learned at camp. I've led many team building and leadership development exercises drawing on my learnings & experience at camp. When resolving customer issues, I've trained customer facing teams to use the "firm, fair & friendly" approach ... and it works! ☺

## ◆ Any advice for our younger alumni who are just starting their careers?

Yes! Take every opportunity you can to learn new skill sets to build your resume. Set time aside to build and nurture your professional network, including the Minikani alumni as part of that network! If you want help from an alumni in any way related to your career, don't be afraid to reach out ... just be sure you provide specific ways you'd like them to help.

Last, have confidence in the really unique skills your years at Minikani have helped you bring into the workplace – if you use those skills well and continue to refine them, you'll naturally be a leader with a really dynamic skill set on any team you join.

## ◆ What song always makes you think of camp?

"Tighten Up" by Archie Bell & The Drells.

## ◆ Anything else to share?

I'm so proud and grateful to have this community in my life and am so excited for all of us to be together at Camp again soon!



Jenny & husband Matt



## Nature Notes

By Bruce

When I was hired in 1970 to be in charge of the Nature Program, one of my first jobs was to clean out the 4 large cement 'pits' in front of the Lodge that were full of mud, sticks, and leaves that had accumulated over the years. Two of the pits were connected by a large hole in their common wall and would hold water. Any painted turtles and bullfrogs we caught went



in there. Toads went into the third pit, and the fourth one was reserved for snakes we found. Garter snakes.

For the next 22 years those pits became a popular place for campers to spend their free time after dinner. As I look back on it, it was probably the first chance for many kids (and staff) to get close up and personal with a snake. For some reason, the snakes became pretty tame after a few days. Maybe it was all the handling they got. But for a camper to hold a snake in front of their peers was seen as a true act of bravery. Occasionally a small toad (we called them 'penny toads' back then) would get put in with the



snakes. What a perfect opportunity to learn about food chains. ☺

Actually, a lot of learning went on around those pits. Animals need to be handled with care. Not everyone wants to have a snake shoved in front of their face. 'Crabby' snakes should be released back into the wild. Garters, like all snakes, can swim in water. We even had a surprise visit from the stork. One morning we were surprised to find 8 worm-like baby garter snakes. (Most snakes lay eggs, but the mother garter holds her eggs inside her body until the babies hatch.)

Experts say the human brain is hard-wired to react fearfully to snakes. Something about animals with either too many legs (spiders) or no legs at all causes a response from a certain part of the brain.



Actually Ophidiophobia (fear of snakes) is one of the most common phobias in the world. Right now I figure I've lost about one-third of my reading audience - those who are turned off by the mere suggestion of snakes or their pictures.

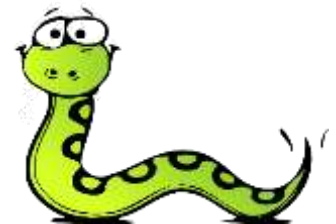
All snakes have teeth on their upper jaws and may bite you when they are cornered or threatened. The teeth are all sharp and hooked backward to help hold their prey. But only venomous snakes can inject venom when they bite. It is probably a good idea to know if any venomous snakes live in your area.

## Snake Myths

6 of the 7 myths listed here are just that – a wildly held but false belief about snakes. But one of them is actually true. Check below for the correct answer.

1. A milk snake will suck milk from a cow's udder.
2. A hoop snake can hold its tail in its mouth so it can roll downhill.
3. In Wisconsin, any snake with solid coloring or length-wise stripes is nonvenomous.
4. You can tell a rattlesnake's age by counting its rattles.
5. The only safe way to remove a snake's fangs is by using a silk cloth.
6. If a snake's head is cut off it will still stay alive until sundown.
7. A mother snake will swallow her young when threatened.

Just so you know, the chances of dying from a venomous snakebite in the United States is nearly zero, because we have readily available, high-quality medical care. Every medical center where a rattlesnake bite is possible will have the anti-venom to treat the unfortunate person. Also, more than half of snake bites reported in Wisconsin have involved either the careless handling of captive venomous snakes or are alcohol related. 🏠



Number three is absolutely true.





## Have you visited our website lately? Here's a quick guide to its use



**A. “Home”** page. [www.minikanistafflodge.com](http://www.minikanistafflodge.com)

**B. “Join”.** This is where you go to sign up to be a member of MAC. Anyone who ever worked at Minikani can be a member. There has never been a membership fee. This is also where to go to up-date your contact information. Don't remember if you gave us your new email address? Click here anyway – we'll up-date it if necessary. F.Y.I. We never sell your information.

**C. “Events”.** Always the most current info of what's happening.

**G. “Contact Us”.** Our email address [minikanistafflodge@gmail.com](mailto:minikanistafflodge@gmail.com).

**1. “Camp Store”.** Shop for MAC shirts, hats, drinkware and more.

**2. “Staff Lists”.** You can find a partial list of everyone who has ever worked at Minikani here. Please note: This is a link to our classcreator.com website, and anyone on the internet can see the names but you have to register with Class Creator if you want to click on a name and see their information. Have you added your name?

**3. “Get Our Newsletter”.** A .pdf copy of the latest quarterly MAC Newsletter downloads when you click here.

**4. & 5. MAC Links** to Twitter and Facebook.

**6. “Newsletter Archive”.** Our Newsletters go all the way back to 2009. Access every one of them here.

