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Thanks To: Kendall Dowsett, Eli Fyksen, Rachel Kornetsky, Alex Hushek, Hillary Lobenstein, Lloyd LaRoque, Andy Mendelson

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OCTOBER 2022

Sure, we call it our “Summer Homeland”, but most of us keep a special place in our heads for thoughts of Minikani year round. Likewise, we keep a special place in our hearts for camp. It’s who we are and what we love.

When I see pictures of kids at camp (on Facebook or Instagram) I can almost hear the laughter and know the fun they’re having. It doesn’t take much to take me back to the campfires, Amy Belle, the flagpole, skills, nature trails, cabins, corral, and hundreds of special days. I’m lucky that way.

But a photo of Mud Lake (like the one above) draws me in like nothing else. Sure, it’s a part of camp, but when you’re there, it’s like you have been transported to some Up North wilderness area. As George Costanza from Seinfeld would say “Serenity Now.”

Can you feel something else? The Minikani Spirit? Maybe you will after you read this Newsletter. Hopefully it will come to you whenever you want, like all the memories we share with our friends from our time at Minikani.



You Won't Want to Miss These:

Are you little bit curious about all the things that went on this summer at Minikani– See Alex Hushek's report on the next page! (Page 3)

Great things are about to happen on Explorer Hill. Isn't it about time? See page 5 for more information.

You won't get another chance for an opportunity like this until 2024. Learn all about the bi-annual MAC Alumni Weekend event on page 4.

He's the original "BUD" from the '90's. Find out what he's been up to lately in "Spotlight" on page 7.

From Summer Program Director Rachel Kornetsky:

Now don't get me wrong – camp is primarily great simply because it's FUN! It is built with a core intention of creating a space where kids' needs are centered so that they can have the time of their life. But through having all that fun, our kids do and learn some really significant things. They try something they've never done before. They develop and put into practice valuable skills, such as emotional regulation, creative problem solving, and conflict resolution. They get to connect with kids who are new and different from them. They learn about themselves while teaching us adults a thing or two too! If that's not magic, I don't know what is, and getting to be a part in creating that is the greatest joy and privilege in the world.

Happy Halloween! You can learn about Storytelling at Minikani – and we've even given you a Classic Story to share on pages 6 & 7.



From Kendall Dowsett, MAC Executive Co-Director:

The Minikani Alumni Community Winter Gala is back, and it's going to be better than ever!! Join your MAC Board and fellow Alumni (aka favorite people) at Third Space Brewing on December 23rd from 7:00 - 10:00 PM. Non-camp spouses/family/friends invited (they probably know what you're like around your camp friends by now anyway), but leave the kiddos at home -- this is an adults only, 21+ event!

Tickets and pricing will be available soon, but in the meantime we can promise an exciting line-up of unprecedented auction items. Intrigued?? YOU SHOULD BE! That's December 23rd, from 7:00 - 10:00 PM @ Third Space.

What has 50 teeth, a nearly naked prehensile tail, and loves your garbage? See Nature Notes p. 9

Questions or Comments about the MAC Quarterly Newsletter? Email us at minikanistafflodge@gmail.com



A very distinguished and special group of 90's counselors returned to camp with a special mission - to pick up their kids who had been having the "Minikani" camp experience of a lifetime the past 2 weeks.

SUMMER CAMP 2022

By Alex Hushek, Minikani Member Engagement Director

Int'l Counselors

Our International Counselors this summer came from England, Germany, Hungary, Scotland, Spain, and Poland! With 14 International Counselors, the large group brought new benefits and some interesting challenges as well. They easily were able to form a close bond with each other with their shared experience of joining this unique culture and learning the ropes together. This helped them each feel more comfortable showcasing their individuality more, instead of having a stronger social pressure to conform tighter to the “typical Minikani counselor.”

Coming from so many different places, they also brought such a wide range of perspective that helped expand the Minikani bubble to more than just the ideals and culture from our community that is centralized around Wisconsin and the Midwest.

There were also challenges that came with such a large group of international counselors, like a greater need to host them when they had their days off. Luckily, our staff was able to get a stipend to help them host, and many friends, especially Chris Malicky, stepped up to make sure they were all set to enjoy their days off.

Evening Activities

Here's a little explanation of some of the evening activities:

Pickle Party (Around camp) - Cabins are grouped into six teams each with a home base and a jar at each base. Campers try to get as many pickles as possible by stealing pickles from other teams’ jars or completing challenges from Pickle Witches which are staff up in trees!

Dodgeball Night (Norris Field) - Each cabin is paired with another cabin and participate in a single elimination tournament. When teams are eliminated, they can bet on the outcomes of other games, play in the “Less Successful Bracket”, or watch the rest of the games. By the time the last game is played, it gets a little dark out, so we bust out the spotlights and play the final game which always ends in a crazy celebration.

Hojo’s Circus (Council Bluff) - When Hojo’s Circus comes into town, Hojo (the Circus Master) brings out a wheel with each counselor’s name on it, and spins it to select a handful of random counselors to participate in different challenges. The campers and other counselors bet on who will win each challenge, and then after numerous challenges the winning cabin is announced!

Snipe Hunt (Around camp) - During Snipe Hunt, counselors are the “Snipes” and hide in trees. When campers find them, they call out to them and then have to complete a challenge or riddle for points. At the end of the game the cabin with the most points wins!

Skills

Let’s think back to all the times campers were taught both tangible and intangible skills. Sometimes learning how to sail is as important as learning how to share a pair of scissors, or pretend to pick up ghosts on a piece of cardboard covered in marker scribbles.

It's all part of the goofy and practical lessons in independence, confidence, stewardship, inclusion, and celebration we show each and every camper!



Counselor Esme with Campers.
“Esme was an incredible International Counselor this summer who really embodied the Minikani Spirit.”



Alumni Weekend

Editor's Note: Not since 2017 have alumni been able to head back to Minikani for a weekend of camp fun with their friends and families. This year was no exception. Swimming, games, hikes, great food, campfires and a little Sunday rain gave everyone there an experience to cherish and remember. Over 50 adults were there, but Hillary Lobenstein provides us with the following story about her experiences with the five 'campers' she 'counseled' for the weekend. Thanks Hillary!

Minikani alumni, family, and friends gathered at camp on the weekend of September 10-11. As I rolled into the upper parking lot, I saw my dear friend Myles Hayes and his son, Aiden, across the parking lot. Aiden told me all about his adventures at camp, and he was on his way to Adventure Challenge and then off to Lake Amy Belle. There was no stopping this young camper!

Our cabin group checked into Cabin 17 in the Pioneer Unit. Our cabin consisted of five Minikani campers: Grady, Audra, Anna, Chris, and Dom. All five kids have experienced the magic of Minikani



during the summer. Three of them went on their first Explorer trip this past summer.

We made a beeline for swimming in Lake Amy Belle. Our crew showed off our daring and technical jumps off of the tower. After I had encouraged multiple kids that jumping off the tower "wasn't that high," I decided to climb the tower myself. Yes, the tower is that high! What was I thinking? But I had five teens watching me, so I had to jump! Activity goal achieved!



After swimming, we went to the craft porch for conversation and crafting. We rediscovered copper enamel; Kevin Wright was able to remind us of the process. And we will fully support a revival of copper enamel for summer of 2023. We were able to choose between the classics: shrinky dinks, friendship bracelets, scratch art, and clay. Magical creations were made by adults and children.

Our afternoon slowly transitioned into evening. Alumni enjoyed dinner under the dining hall porch. Then, the children took over Council Bluff with their antics. I'm not sure if it was a song or skit. But there was definitely a performance involved. Then onto the classic

evening activity of Stratego. Dubious costumes were donned from the stash in Robertson Lodge. Heather Ullsvik's children, Haaken and Linden, were ring leaders of Stratego. The sun was setting fast, and fun was had by all.

Our evening ended with smaller campfires. Staff from the 1990s gathered in the Pioneer Unit behind Cabin 13. Children performed skits with unknown plots, varied animal noises, and a bit of singing. Old friends settled in for conversation that comes from the deepest of camp friendships; those friends in which time or place does not change the intensity of those relationships forged so long ago. We may be in our 40s, but we are still the closest of friends.

As we left the campfire with our s'mores-sticky hands and smiles on our faces, the peace of Minikani was present. We meandered through the Boys' Unit, and I was fortunate to follow the next generation of camp. Aiden Hayes (Myles's son) and Woody Hayes (Drew's son) held hands and howled like wolves at the cloud filled sky. Friendships, family, and semi-feral children forged new experiences together at our one true home: Minikani.



Woody & Aiden



Explorer Hill Expansion Project October 2022 - Update

After 20 years of our women and men sharing Explorer Hill and the women having access to the Explorer Kybo, we are getting ready to build a brand new facility to support all of our Explorers! Before 2002, female Explorers were located near the Girls' Unit in platform tents. In the summer of 2002, they moved to what is now known as the Trailblazer Rec Building. In 2005, all of our Explorers moved up to Explorer Hill and the transition from small cabins to yurts was in progress. At this time, all of our Explorer cabins are in yurts. We have been waiting YEARS to begin this project. We can hardly contain our excitement.

The Explorer experience is the cornerstone of residential camping at Minikani, and a key component to the health of the LT program. We have a big waitlist and a huge desire to partner with local programs to increase diversity. Our goal is to impact more kids! A new facility is phase 1 of a developing plan to increase residential camping experiences on the hill and under the stars up north. This project is the launching pad for impacting over a 100 more kids and 300+ campers a year through programming expansion while maintaining the environment, the magic and counselor/camper experience we all know and love.

YMCA of the USA and the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee have responded to priorities generated by the advisory board and Minikani leadership. We received a grant for \$487,550 from YUSA and this has been matched

through in-kind donations and other funds that the Y has committed to the project. Additionally, Andy Wiegman, new Board Member and Minikani parent is running the in-kind services & material and advising the team on bids. A special thank you to Minikani alumni Allison Pickard for the original drawings that we submitted for the grant! To date, RINKA+ has provided \$45,400 in pro-bono design work and has been hired to do the design work, has provided the design and over 300 pages of build and bidding documentation so we could get permits and bids!

Eli Fyksen, Executive Director

“In all of my time with Minikani I have not seen better coordination between YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee and our Minikani Branch. We now have Greg Valde on the Finance Committee and we are united to sustain the traditions and impact of our great camp.”
Kevin Casper, Advisory Board Member

“A KYBO on explorer hill is the first step in ensuring that we have the ability to grow our program. Like many things at camp the pieces fit in like a puzzle and each decision has an impact on programs. An expanded explorer program allows us a larger pool of LT applicants which in turn allow us a larger pool of staff. This is a project that simply stated, helps ensure more kids, teens and young adults are impacted by a Minikani experience.”
Eli Fyksen-Executive Director

How can you help?
Minikani leadership and Kevin Casper are managing the Explorer Hill Expansion Development. If you would like to get involved in this, please contact Kevin Casper (kcasper@gmail.com). Naming rights are available for the building; you can leave your family legacy at camp. If you have a business in a position to support with in-kind gifts to help the project, we would gladly discuss that possibility with you. Those gifts are tax deductible.



Camp Storytelling

Aesop, The Brothers Grim, Hans Christian Anderson, Walt Disney – they’re all great story tellers. For almost 30 years Minikani had its own famous story teller, Lloyd LaRoque. From 1963 to 1990 he told campfire stories, gave passwords, vespers, and his specialty, bedtime stories. Some of those stories continue to entertain campers even today. Recently I caught up with Lloyd and asked him about storytelling at Minikani.

What are some of your more popular stories? The Boy with the Red Eyes, Wendigo, Wailing Annie, Mud Lake Monster, The Devil and the Barn Roof, Thump-drag, Grand Pappy, and The Hand.



Where did you get the ideas for your stories? Some of them come from old folk tales (Wendigo, The Devil and the Barn Roof). Others I just made up - they’re completely original. As a storyteller it’s fun for me to see the kids engaged and really listening. Many of the Minikani stories have been around a long time and have proven they are worthy of being told.

Obviously you can’t tell very scary stories to young campers. How should a storyteller gage the appropriateness of the story?

Generally, younger kids (7-10) do best with a story that is fairy-tale based with giants, elves, and talking animals. I would always tell the story without including anything that would intimidate or scare the



campers. Stories for younger kids can be told in a very dramatic way with a lot of expression. For example, I would say something like “In the center of the field was a BIG rabbit, looking right at ME.”

With older campers (11+) I would start by reminding them that it was just a story and that it wasn’t true. I told stories about vampires, mummies and creatures like that. I always kept my voice normal, with no drama or effects. The idea is to let the story scare the camper, not the storyteller. This way the story is more believable and possible in the camper’s mind. A good way to start a story is to say “Let me tell you what happened.” I also try to ‘attach’ the story to something the kids already knew, like people and places. “Right behind the dining hall” or “Just ask your counselor”.

Many campers will ask “Is that really true?” What do you tell them? My answer is to put it back on them with “What do you think?” Most kids will say that it isn’t true. In general, kids like to be entertained, and – if they feel secure – they also like to be scared.



“The idea is to let the story scare the camper, not the storyteller.”

Some camps have a ‘No Scary Story rule’. How do you feel about that? ‘Scary’ is a hard word to define. (Just walking into the Trailblazer Unit from Norris field at night in the pitch dark can be a scary thing for many adults.) You probably can agree that kids are exposed to scary stories all the time. (Not even including the nightly news!!!) Popular categories on Netflix include ‘Thriller’, ‘Horror’, and ‘Monster’ for a reason. But story telling has always been a part of camping. Many of the stories have been woven into the camp culture. It’s hard to generalize about the different kinds of stories. If the counselor telling the story keeps the appropriate age guidelines in mind then the campers will enjoy hearing the story.



At MAC’s 2013 Holiday Gala people had an opportunity to take a unique gift home. “Mud Lake Monster Beer” was an adult beverage that was all about camp and its traditions. It was brewed by Kevin Wright, had a bottle designed by Andy Reiland, and included a story written by Carl Fuldner, all three Minikani alumni.

Want to try out your storytelling skills with your own family? You can read the story of the Mud Lake Monster on the next page and then make your story appropriate for your audience. You can also see a photo of the 2013 beer bottle. Happy Storytelling!

**“Mud Lake Monster”
by Carl Fuldner**

Captain John Morgan’s aircraft mysteriously went off radar in 1919, leaving no trace. The plane, which had been carrying radioactive cargo, lost contact somewhere near the rural township of Hubertus, WI.

Since the Morgan incident, accounts of small engine aircraft disappearance near Hubertus have proliferated. Most of the testimonials center on Mud Lake, a unique pond located among the woodlands and rolling hillsides of YMCA Camp Minikani. For decades, local scientists have struggled to explain the strange ecology of the pond, which seems to survive paradoxically in a constant state of dying and smells faintly of vanilla beans, cocoa nib, and coffee.

Over the years, Minikani staff members have reported hearing propeller noises while patrolling the lake at night. Recently, a group of campers on a bog walk discovered what is believed to be the remnant of a parachute. A widely accepted theory connecting these strange facts involves a large amphibious biped lurking in the dying pond, which locals call the “Mud Lake Monster.”



Andy Mendelson

◆ What is your history at Camp?

I first attended camp in 1978, when I was 11 years old. Brad Seibel was my counselor; cabin 17. I signed up with a friend, who had attended the prior year. My brother had gone a few years before. I had been at JCC’s day camp and Wowitan before Minikani. It was in cabin 17 that I met Sean LaRoque, who remains one of my closest friends. I attended Minikani from that year until 1995: camper 1978-1981; LT 1982-1984; counselor 1985-1989; LT director 1990; Boy’s Unit Director 1991-1995; Program Director 2000. 19 years. For skills, I taught Camp Crafts (later called Wilderness Survival Skills), and then was the first counselor to teach Adventure Challenge.



**Unit Directors light campfire 1995
Jon Fleming McLaren, Amy (Dowd) Maxwell, and Andy**

◆ Did you have a favorite “job”?

Hands down, serving as the boy’s unit director was the most amazing experience. I was fortunate to have eight first year counselors in my first year, so I was able to grow into the job with them. I loved coming up with crazy unit activity themes: Hobbit Day, Tailgate Day, William Wallace Day, Junta Day, among others. More significantly was working with the counselors to create a supportive community, which I hope the campers also felt a part of. Every session I challenged myself to learn every campers’ names.

◆ Were there any special skills you learned or developed while at camp that you are able to use today?

I still have my skills in lighting campfires: one match - tinder, kindling and fuel. I also really learned to be loud (though some might say I didn’t need to learn this). This skill served me well when I taught 300-person classes. Lastly, I would say I learned how to find ways to incorporate camp into my day job: e.g., incorporating scavenger hunts into new student orientation, or having students do crafts in classes to better understand some academic concept.

◆ How did you make the transition from camp to the “real” world?

Well, after 19 years at camp, I would say that my transition to the real world was very, very slow. Going into the summer of 1995, I knew I was going to have to spend future summers working on research, writing my dissertation and attending academic conferences. At that point I was a year and half into my Ph.D. work. I definitely

Continued next page



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missed camp, but all my closest friends were from camp, so there was a lot of support.



Sean and Susan (Anderson) LaRoque leaving Pine Forest after LT chapel.

I am currently a professor and associate dean at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York (CUNY), where I have been for nearly eight years. Prior to that I spent nearly 15 years at Temple University as a professor in and chair of the Journalism Department. I started my career as a professor at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. I teach and write about photography and journalism.



Additionally, another Minikani friend, Jim Flint, got me involved with the Fiver Children's Foundation (www.fiver.org), a NY-based nonprofit that supports youth from under-resourced communities through after school programs and a summer camp. I have been on the board there for 24 years.

Most importantly, I recently got married. My wife, Martha, and I got married in a small ceremony in Door County in the fall of 2020, due to COVID, and then had a larger ceremony last summer in Greece.



Andy & Martha's wedding in Greece

◆ **If you could go back in time and re-live just one Special Day, what would that be?**

Just one? Yikes. There are so many, so I will go with two. Even though I am not a baseball fan, the first time we did Tailgate Day was so amazing, with the entire boys unit grilling out dinner in the parking lot, each cabin had their own little charcoal grill. The other would be Robin Hood Day. I had the idea that to recreate the robbing from the rich, the counselors would tape play money to their bodies and then go hide. The campers then had to track them down to get the money. It was way more frenzied than I had imagined it would be. Good times.

◆ **Is there a song that makes you think of camp?**

The song that always takes me back to camp is John Prine's *Paradise*. I first heard the song at camp, maybe sung by Bill Obermayer or Greg Valde. But it was one song that was a constant through my years at Minikani.

◆ **From your perspective, what does Minikani need to do to continue its success as a camp?**

Central for me is to provide kids the opportunity to figure out who they are in a supportive, fun, wacky environment. The setting should be a significant remove from "the real world," where people can try out new activities and new ideas, and build new friendships.

◆ **Anything else?**

I'll leave you with a password Amy (Dowd) Maxwell and I presented: "The spirit of Minikani will hit you like a wall of campers, and change you forever."

Editor's Note: At camp Andy was always taking photos. The two below were taken at the 100th anniversary celebration.



Nature Notes

By Bruce

The Opossum

Over 70 million years ago dinosaurs roamed the Earth. While they are now extinct, one animal who possibly shared the same land with dinosaurs still exists today ... *the opossum*.



The opossum is kinda like the 'quirky' kid you knew in high school. Mostly nocturnal, he prefers to live a solitary life as he goes about his business. His hair is thin and looks rather unkempt. Instead of braces, he has a mouth full of teeth, and likes to eat just about anything he can find. He can do things with one of his body parts that could make him a 'star' in certain circles. Let's take a closer look at the opossum, *Didelphis virginiana*.

During the daytime, opossums like to hide in hollow logs, trees, brush piles, road culverts, rock and stump crevices and under buildings and decks. Their habitat range is from 20-40 acres. They will eat almost anything including small mammals, birds, worms, crayfish, snails, frogs, insects, fruits, grains, and carrion. Carrion is dead animals. Because so much carrion is

roadkill, opossums are often killed by vehicles while looking for food on roadways. They have little fear of cars, yet will always come up short when they try to compete with a car.

Opossums are marsupials, which means they have a pouch where their young develop just like a kangaroo. They are the only North American marsupial, and also the northernmost marsupial in the world. Actually, they are not very well adapted to the colder climates like Wisconsin and often suffer from frostbite on their ears and tail.

A female opossum may give birth to as many as 25 babies just 11 days after conception. The babies, only the size of a navy bean, must climb up the mother's fur and into her pouch where they find a teat. Some babies will not find their way to the pouch and will die. Even if they make it to the pouch, only the babies who find one of the thirteen teats will survive.



An adult opossum, about the size of a house cat, is usually seen waddling slowly and awkwardly and is actually quite shy and inoffensive. They are dependent on others for their homes and protective cover.

One extraordinary display they have is "playing possum", which is a defensive strategy against a threat or predator (it plays dead). This act is achieved by rolling over, shutting its eyes, opening its mouth, going limp, and possibly defecating. It may even hang out its tongue and drool.



Opossum Facts

◆ The opossum has 50 teeth, which is more than any other mammal in North America, including humans, who average 32 adult teeth.

◆ Opossums fatten up on food before winter arrives, but they do not hibernate.

◆ The name 'opossum' was first used in western culture by Captain John Smith in 1608. It comes from the Algonquin name '**apasum**', which means 'white animal.'

◆ The opossum has an opposable hallux or big toe so they work like thumbs. The hallux helps the opossum grab branches when it climbs trees.

◆ Its tail is prehensile, and is adapted for grasping and wrapping around things like tree limbs. The opossum can hang from its tail for a short time, but they aren't strong enough to hold them for very long. Certainly not long enough to fall sleep.

◆ When threatened or angry the opossum can make a hissing sound or a low growl and bare its teeth. A mother may make a clicking sound to attract the attention of her young.

◆ Surprisingly, they are one of the few mammals that seem to enjoy eating ticks.

◆ Got more questions about opossums? Check out the *Opossum Society of the US* [HERE](#)