

MINIKANI ALUMNI COMMUNITY

NEWSLETTER

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Special Summer 2010 Issue

By Bruce Rasmussen

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It's been almost 20 years since I was the Program Director at camp (1991), and it was 20 years earlier that I first came to Minikani (1970). So I figure that gives me a special historical perspective for what's going on at camp right now, the Summer of 2010. Encouraged by the present Program Director's invitation extended to all Alumni to come and visit camp, I decided that I would, indeed, spend a full day at camp and get a feeling for what changes have occurred during all those years at "My Summer Homeland".

I chose July 14th to visit camp-for-a-day, the same day that Minikani and other camps around the world were celebrating the 125th anniversary of YMCA camping. The Explorers were on their trip in Northern Wisconsin at the Birchrock site, and the LT's were on their Service Trip, also up North. What follows in this Newsletter is my personal observations, reactions, musings, and memories of what camp was like before, and how it has changed for the present.

◆First Impressions: As the editor of this Newsletter, I realize that many of you will only glance at this issue, skim its contents, and go on with your busy lives. So I want you to know that, without a doubt, Minikani is not only doing the same great job with kids that it did back when you were there, but it has continued to get better and better.

◆There are some things at camp what will probably never change. Amy Belle and Mud lakes are still there, as are Norris Field and the Units. The grass is worn in paths leading to the Dining Hall and the assembly area, and there are still Totem Poles at Council Bluff. (But more on that in an upcoming issue...) The Woodlands and Rolling Hillsides of Minikani have changed little in 40 years.

◆Minikani was always a unique place, and it still is. As Alumni, we can be proud that we were part of an institution that was special in the lives of so many kids and counselors. For a lot of us, it has helped make us who we are today. It is comforting to know that the Spirit of Minikani continues in the Summer of 2010, as strong as ever.

My Full Day

I pulled into the Upper Parking Lot just in time to hear the 7:15 am Reveille bugle. Camp slowly came to life. The American flag was raised and the Pledge of Allegiance recited before going into the Dining Hall for breakfast.

Next came Password and cabin clean-up. I walked around camp and tried to visit all the skill areas. During rest period, I joined a Day Camp group at the Rock Wall. Later there were new skill sign-ups, followed by cabin activities. I joined Cabin 16 for a craft activity (shrinky-dinks), and an exploratory trip to “Gator Lake”, a small pond just past the corral. We rinsed off in Turtle Bay, and just made it to the Dining Hall in time for dinner.

After dinner we sang a few camp songs and celebrated a counselor’s birthday. A shortened Free Time was followed flag lowering, and then the special Evening Activity, the 125th Anniversary Campfire. My long camp day came to an end with 9:15 pm Taps and a Vesper.

As you can see, it was really just a typical day at camp. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. But it was a memorable day, both for me and the 200+ campers and staff. It was a day at Camp Minikani.



Check Out These Websites

www.minikanistafflodge.com

This is the main site for the Minikani Alumni Community Website. Once here, you can click to join the official mailing list. You can also keep up-to-date on all the current happenings of the Community. Other headings include Calendar, Alumni Board, Photos, Alumni Weekend, and Apparel.

www.minikani.org

This is the official web site of YMCA Camp Minikani, which has recently been updated. You can get information on dates for summer camp, check out Minikani’s blog, and enjoy a collection of Alumni Photos.



Big Changes At Camp

If you haven’t been to camp for a few years, the first big change you’ll notice is the new entry way off of Amy Belle Road. Drive in and you’ll see a new, outstanding looking building just inside camp, the Halquist Lodge. The business office is located here, and large meeting rooms are used for off-season conference groups. This is also where the Leadership stay when they’re at camp.

In the summer, the Halquist Lodge is used for the Day Camp, which is also a big change. Minikani runs the traditional residence camp, but also offers Day camp for kids ages 7-12 from the Milwaukee area. Two busses bring Day Campers to camp each day.

Actually, there is another entrance to camp from Bark Lake Road. This brings you to the Equestrian Center. If you remember any of the old corrals at camp, just multiply that by about 50 times, and you have the EC. They run their own Residence and Day Camp, and have a busy schedule throughout the year providing children and adults with the opportunity to follow their passion for horses by being educated in all aspects of horsemanship. Watch for a future issue of The Newsletter to learn more about the Equestrian Center at camp.

Still another big change at Minikani is the growth of the Leadership Program. Now there are both LT’s and OLT’s (Outdoor LT’s), selected from former Explorer campers to come for two weeks and develop their leadership skills. They are everywhere, doing, helping, assisting, learning, and much more. Both camp and campers benefit from them.



Some Things Never Change

Minikani is all about the kids. It always has been. The Waterfront, with its many aquatic activities, is as popular as ever. Kids still wear colored ‘bands’ on their wrists to indicate their level of achievement in the skills there.

The dinning hall is still loud and noisy at meals. With everyone sitting at rectangular tables crowded together, it is sometimes difficult to hear yourself think, let alone carry on a conversation with your cabin mates. Hold up an empty plate of food, and an LT server quickly replaces it with more. And when the bell rings to bring back good food, unit cheers and songs greatly add to the decibel level.

Morning skills are just about the same as always. Sure, the actual skills change through the summer as they have throughout the years. My first year at camp we offered both Wrestling and Photography. Water Ballet seems to have come and gone. Now they group the Landsports with the Range, renaming it “Gun n’Run”. Nature is grouped with Campcrafts as the “Wilderness Survival Area”. But the philosophy hasn’t changed a bit: Offer kids a chance to do something they might not be able to do at home, and help them become better at it. It’s not about the competition, just doing your best.



Some Things Must Change

The old Mini-Kamp Tree (Also called the Craft Tree) is gone, the victim of a summer storm. Small trees planted in the 70’s are now full size. The Upper Parking Lot has been completely blacktopped, and the ‘green’ island in the middle is only a memory. Ethel’s Cabin, once the camp store, is now storage for camping gear. The Staff Lodge, which was located in Fireside Lodge when I started in 1970, was moved to a long-gone building next to the Lower Parking Lot, then to Robertson Lodge, then to The Bunker, and is now back in Fireside in the Log Roller’s Den. (It still attracts lost clothing, misc. equipment, and other assorted paraphernalia like it always has.)

Adventure Challenge skill has taken over what used to be the Campcraft Woods. The Range has been moved for safety reasons. Some of Stew Brown’s handmade wooden signs have been replaced with professional metal ones. Parents can email their campers

daily now, and see pictures of their sons and daughters posted in real time on the Minikani website. There is always an adult in each cabin for the whole night, not just an O.D. in a tent in the middle of the unit. Again for safety reasons, there is a fence around the Tot Time Playground. The Ad staff carry a walkie-talkie with them at all times, ready to respond to a call for help or information. Pine Forest is showing its age.

Day Campers attend morning skills with Residence Campers. Careful attendance is taken at all skills. Groups of campers are escorted from one skill area to another. The ‘Store Box’ treat that used to be available at the start of Rest Period has been replaced with an all-camp snack for everyone at about 3:00. A portable bathroom stands next to Fireside for any emergencies. Horses are lead through camp on trail rides.

It is clear to me that these changes are inevitable, and all of them are eventually for the best. Although steeped in tradition, Minikani is a dynamic camp that is more than capable of growth and change. We expect it of the campers and staff, why wouldn’t we want it for the camp itself?

Future Minikani Events

Alumni Weekend

August 21-22, 2010

Come and see how camp has changed for yourself. Register at the Alumni website, www.minikanistafflodge.com



More Changes

Here is a partial list of Good Changes I found at Camp, in no particular order:

- ◆ There is a new boardwalk that starts behind Halquist Lodge, goes through the swamp, and ends up near Pine Forest.
- ◆ Password is given at Council Bluff each morning, not in the Chapel Area at the lake.
- ◆ The Camp Store has moved to Coffman Lodge, which used to be the Maintenance Building in the Pioneer Unit.
- ◆ Wilderness Survival skill also includes spear fishing, with a possible Fish Fry at the end.
- ◆ Counselors rotate from the Resident Camp to the Explorer Unit, Day Camp, and Mini-Kamp. This keeps everyone fresh and gives staff a chance to learn new skills.
- ◆ A “Weather Kid” at Password reminds kids how they should dress for the day, including sunscreen and insect repellent.
- ◆ The pool is open for Free Swim during Free Time. Girls one day, boys the next.

Dining Hall Changes

If it’s possible that a camp runs on ‘its stomach’, then Minikani has just completed a marathon! The kitchen provides meals that are more kid-friendly, tastier, and with a wide selection of options. There are more vegetables and fruits served that I can ever remember, and there’s a salad bar option for everyone.



Love at Camp

I asked campers to tell me what they “Love at Camp”. They gave me plenty of answers: Friendships, Staff, Campouts, Rags, Options for Skills, Being outside, Swimming, Counselors, Capture the Flag, Amy Belle Lake, Corral, Pine Forest, The Energetic Atmosphere, Campfires, Fun, Songs at Dinner, Mud Lake, Ice Cream, Fishing, etc. Pretty much the same things that you loved when you were at camp!

The Challenge Program, with Bear Claws and Rags, is still an important part of camp. All staff continue to work with their campers to help them set reasonable personal goals. Counselors also benefit from the program.

What Would I Change?

There is one thing I would like to see changed at camp. I would not change the three Meal Graces, which have been sung forever. But I would like to hear them sung with an up-beat tempo to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” – instead of sounding like a funeral dirge.

My Final Thoughts...

Thank you, dear reader, for your attention throughout these 4 pages. It is because of you that I went back to camp for a day. It’s not the same as it was - it is better. The smiles are there, the fun is everywhere, and kids have some of the best experiences of their lives. There is enthusiasm everywhere, from kid to counselor to staff. For eight short weeks a summer, there is a place on the shores of Amy Belle where people care about each other, where energy seems to never run out, enthusiasm rules the day, and love is so strong you can almost touch it. But then you know what I’m talking about, you were there. You were a part of it. You’ll never forget your Summer Homeland.

