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Subj: Omaha Connection--One more time....
To: WarshauerP

From Omaha to Waupaca.....Year after Year after Year -and- Reflections from an Omaha Kid.

It was the winter of 1962 and my parents asked me how I felt about going to camp the next summer. I would be nine years old and they thought I was ready. Shortly thereafter, we ended up going to Willard and Thamalee Friedman's house (Howard and Tom's parents) on a Sunday afternoon for a presentation on a camp in Wisconsin called Camp Waupaca. When we arrived, I joined many of my Jewish friends from our neighborhood in welcoming and being introduced to Barry Shanoff. Barry was the delegate that winter representing the camp and giving the presentation. Since a number of the kids at the Friedman house that day were not new to the camp, it was more of a winter Omaha camp reunion than purely a recruiting mission. Barry gave a slide show from the previous summer and answered questions for prospective campers. It was the start of five of the best summers of my life.

But, how were Jewish boys from Omaha, NE, connected to a private, non-agency affiliated camp attended mainly by Jewish boys from the north shore suburbs of Chicago? Simple.... Irving "Skipper" Kuklin. Skip was a native Nebraskan who attended the University of Nebraska. My dad tells me that Skip was a ZBT member with him and some of the other campers' fathers. Years later, when Skip and Loretta were settled in Chicago and started Camp Waupaca, word traveled to Omaha and Lincoln and the bridge was built between Nebraska and Lake Stratton. (Skip's brother Floyd still lived in Lincoln and his son Gary attended camp).

During my summers of 1963 thru 1967, Omahans peaked at seventeen in 1964. There certainly was no shortage of camps for Omaha Jews to choose from in the upper Midwest, but the thing that made Waupaca special for us was that the connection was personal; our fathers were fraternity brothers with the owner.

When I talk to my contemporaries today about the camp experience and

sending our own kids to camp, I tell them (tongue in cheek) that my two favorite days of camp were departure and arrival day. You see, to most of the Omahans and a few Chicagoans who know me well, they would easily understand why my favorite days of the camp season were the travel days. That's because we aristocrats from Omaha FLEW to camp unlike the shleppers from Chicago who had to ride the train.

Even at nine years old, I was passionately consumed with aviation. When the big day arrived in June, I could hardly contain my excitement when we arrived at the airport to board our Braniff Convair 340 for our flight to Minneapolis with an intermediate stop in Sioux City. We then connected to the upper midwest's local service carrier, North Central Airlines, for our multi-stop DC-3 service to our terminus of Stevens Point, WI. (You could never have too many takeoffs and landings). After deplaning with gym bags and guitars in tow, Bob Krohn was waiting to greet us with the camp bus for our thirty mile ride to Camp Waupaca.

We Omahans always arrived a full day ahead of the Chicagoans. There was an advantage to this in that we always got first dibs on the best bunks. Whether one picked an upper or lower bunk depended on whether he wanted a good view and better ventilation or to harass unmercifully the guy above him by kicking his springs. One other thing about us Omahans; never could, not today, and won't tomorrow get used to 16 inch softball. It's got to be either baseball or 12 inch.

The camp season flew by and, before we knew it, we were celebrating the end of the blue/white war at the final banquet in the elaborately decorated mess hall. While many campers were promising to be pen pals over the winter and were exchanging addresses and phone numbers, I, on the other hand, was eagerly anticipating the next day's travel and was excitedly wondering whether we would be greeted in Stevens Point by a DC-3 or a Convair.

I find it ironic that only eleven years after my last summer at Camp Waupaca I found myself strapped in the co-pilot's seat of a North Central Airlines Convair 580 prop jet as a young new hire first officer. I was now flying the same planes to the same cities carrying the next generation of kids to the same camps in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The best coincidence of all happened in the winter of 1980. I was based in Chicago and had just completed a routine trip. I was walking through the

terminal at O'Hare and who do I see walking toward me but none other than Terry Rifkin. Imagine his shock when he was practically accosted by a young pilot who is screaming "TERRY RIFKIN!" After introducing myself and making the Waupaca connection, which included being one of the "Omaha kids", we had a nice visit. Terry invited me to join a Jewish men's softball league and hooked me up once again with Dick Garb whom I hadn't seen since we were campers. Dick and I met for lunch at Marshall Fields in the loop. I didn't join the softball league because shortly after Dick and I met, I left Chicago for a return to Omaha while commuting to my new crew base in Minneapolis. I made the move from Omaha to Minneapolis in 1985 where I reside to this day.

Another great coincidence occurred around the same time as the Rifkin connection. I was eating Chinese at a takeout joint on the near north side when a rather portly gentleman turned around to head for the door after paying his bill. I was now facing him and practically choked on my egg foo yong. All I could do was yell "CHUCK COOPER!" He stopped at my table and had a huge grin. Again, I made the Waupaca connection and Chuck was very friendly. He told me that encounters from former campers happened around Chicago every so often. He said he got a real kick out of that and he was thrilled that so many people still recognized him. I thought it was obvious because he hadn't changed at all.

The Camp Waupaca years were long ago but the memories are extremely vivid in my mind. The camp experience became a significant aspect of my life. Until 1998, I had no idea there was so much interest by so many former campers and counselors in reconnecting with each other. I learned all this when Dick Garb e-mailed me about the '98 reunion. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the '98 reunion at camp and the one day reunion last February in Chicago. I certainly plan to be at the 50th next summer. I hope all of you will too.

Kudos to Paul and Mike for setting up and maintaining the web site. I know it's a real labor of love for these two guys. For me, all this recent interest in Camp Waupaca has been nostalgic and a lot of fun. I'd love to hear from any of you guys from the 60's. My e-mail address is Frajes@AOL.com.

John Rosenberg

1963-1967 "Omaha" and damn happy about it.