



# Winnebago: The Sum of Its Parts

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Parent 2010–current

**In the early days of motherhood, I recall being vaguely astonished that we had created three very different sons. Even more surprising, it quickly became clear they each craved customized rules and experiences to reach their full potential.**

From ice cream cone flavors to sports preferences, from potty training behaviors to their first bike lessons, from having a small group of friends to having a cast of thousands . . . each son made different choices. So, we learned to anticipate and embrace their individual styles.

**LEFT:** Campers and staff sing “Goodnight Winnebago” after an Evening Assembly in the Lodge.

Put another way, I discovered that being a good mom meant understanding how to respect, nurture, and guide those differences.

Our oldest son, Ben, has a sweet, generous, and empathetic nature that thrives in community settings. Our middle son, Nick, is adventurous, competitive, and has a social ease that allows him to connect with lots of different kinds of kids. Our youngest child, Luke, is shy, curious, and a focused athlete.

### There's really only been one time that we've made a significant parenting choice that's benefited all three children equally: Camp Winnebago.

Like every extraordinary experience, there are many layers of Winnebago. Let me share a few of our favorites.

- **Arriving:** During the first day of Camp, the new boys are quickly scooped up by their camp Big Brothers, who immediately begin weaving them into the community.
- **Befriending:** Each of my sons has made friendships that will last a lifetime. I see it in the letters, texts, emails, and visits that happen during the school year. Plus, these friendships deepen with time. Many boys meet each other at age 9 and spend every summer together through age 15. They grow up together, and that's a precious gift to take with them.
- **Playing:** Swimming, baseball, tennis, soccer, kickball, sailing, archery, and riflery are all a constant and productive part of Camp. But while sports activities are a firm backbone to a camper's day, at no time is being an athlete prized above being a stellar community member.
- **Living:** Each boy lives in a bunk with a small group of other boys, as well as several counselors. In the early years, the counselors give tremendous support (and hugs) as the boys learn how to live away from home. As the kids get older, the counselors become your favorite older cousins, offering a playful game of hoops or gentle firmness, whatever is required in that moment. And no matter what kind of son you have, no child is left behind. That's just not the Winnebago way.
- **Hearing:** When technology is removed, and there are no screens or even electricity in the bunks, your son can suddenly hear the hum of nature in his ear . . . and in his heart.
- **Leading:** Twice a summer, in the younger divisions, two boys per age group are voted Captains for their Brown or Green team. It's worth noting that, almost every time, the boys who win this title are not the best athletes in the division. Instead, they are regarded as the best leaders.
- **Eating:** Being in Maine has its privileges, so there is a Lobster Night halfway through the summer. My boys also love Birthday Night, with a cake for every month of the year!
- **Traveling:** Older boys hike Mount Katahdin and canoe the Allagash River, while younger boys start with trips to Mount Blue and Parker Pond. Every trip encourages self-reliance, teamwork, and adventure.
- **Savoring:** My sons love the annual traditions, from Carnival Night to Mr. Winnebago to the Patrol Game to B&G to the Circus to Casino Night.

- **Visiting:** We love Visiting Day, when parents get to join in the fun, which always includes consuming delicious brownies and cooling off with a jump in the beautiful and pristine Echo Lake.
- **Receiving:** Over the years, all three of my children won a Winnebago Award for contributing to Camp by demonstrating good character. I cherish how Winnebago gets them to recognize their “best self.”
- **Giving:** As each of my sons grew older, the early lessons of Camp were fulfilled, and each actively made time for the youngest kids in Camp. It’s absolutely normal to see a 15-year-old cheering on a 10-year-old in a race or game.



**ABOVE:** Luke, Ben, and Nick Sosnow

- **Leading:** During Senior Year, the oldest campers lead the entire camp, not just in B&G color war, but in role modeling what being a good human looks like.
- **Reflecting:** Camp's extraordinary Director, Andy Lilienthal, takes enormous care over every aspect of Camp. That includes sending us a highly thoughtful evaluation of how the summer progressed for each boy at the end of the season, with comments woven in from key counselors and coaches. As you read it, you swiftly understand how well they see who your son is . . . and how he has the potential to grow.
- **Returning:** As I write this, my oldest is coming closer to the time when he can become a counselor. There's nothing he wants more than to pass on the joy of Winnebago to someone else.

Camp Winnebago is all of these experiences, blended into an extraordinary whole. It truly is the sum of its parts. For my very different sons, Camp achieved the impossible—seeing and giving each of them what they needed, at the right times, and in the right ways. Ben became stronger, more self-confident, and realized that he could be a leader. Nick learned that he could marry his athletic competitiveness with his sociability to achieve even greater success. Luke saw that he was his own bright light. He realized how to proudly stand alone, without always being in the background of two older brothers.

In the end, as parents, we have a similar opportunity. Our job is to provide a childhood that is the sum of its parts. Over time, we find that knee scrapes and holiday meals, school plays and homework, camp and college applications all unite into a precious whole. Your child becomes the adult he was meant to be.