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My last night at Camp Waupaca was one of those clear, moonless nights that you can only appreciate when you're in the middle of nowhere. I remember looking up and seeing what appeared to be a faint, wide trail of haze in the middle of the sky. Then I realized that I was looking at the Milky Way.

The best way to stargaze at camp was to lie face up on the trampoline, which was installed outside, flush with the ground, next to the equipment shed. It was even better if you had a couple of friends with you to chat and pass the time. And if it was one of the last nights of camp, in early August, with the Leonid meteor shower giving you a shooting star every few seconds, well, it made you a little less eager to go home.

Now the story I'm about to tell happened almost 23 years ago, with some of it based on recollections from the Waupaca reunion in 1996. Which is to say that some of the facts are wrong. But I think I've got the basic gist of things.

1980 was the last of my four summers as a camper at Camp Waupaca. Technically, I wasn't a camper; I was a Junior Counselor, helping the counselors with the 10-year-olds in Cabin 6. But I had not yet turned 15 that August and still felt a little more camper than counselor, a little more kid than adult.

Still, adulthood started to creep up on me that summer. I discovered beer (not that Pabst Blue Ribbon in a can was such a great discovery). I don't clearly remember all the details about getting drunk – Jeff Rissman, Steve Prebish, Mike Hollobow, and a couple of kitchen girls may have been there, we may have been hanging out near the mini-bike trail, I may have had to help Hollobow stagger back to his cabin. I do remember that the idea of drinking beer was a lot more fun and exciting than actually drinking it.

Beer, or at least the anticipation of it, was what brought me to the trampoline on that last night of camp, stargazing with two or three friends. Who were the friends? Maybe Prebish, Hollobow, Rick Goldman, Steve Reitmeister, Scott Diamond, my brother Aaron. Like I said, it was a long time ago.

Rissman had gone off with his girlfriend, a kitchen girl named Sandy (who was 16 and could therefore legally buy beer in Wisconsin in that more innocent time) to buy some beer for all of us to toast the end of another summer. I fully believe that he intended to come back and share some beers with the rest of us. He was always a man of good intentions.

Rissman is my cousin and a year younger than me, and had just turned 14. He was the uber-camper, the Golden Boy. He started going to Waupaca as soon as he was old enough and went to both sessions, all eight weeks, every summer. He was one of the best

athletes, could barefoot water ski, was funny, mischievous, and loved by just about everyone. Chicks dug him.

The young lady that summer, Sandy, was probably one of the most attractive kitchen girls to ever grace Waupaca's dining hall. On that fateful night, Sandy wanted to bring a friend along (maybe another kitchen girl? Maybe one of the Wantee sisters?), and she wanted Rissman to bring along a friend of his to be her friend's date. Rissman brought Greg Burke.

Burke was a man who followed the path of least resistance. His shoelaces were always untied because he couldn't muster the energy to tie them. There was a tree in the CIT Village that was known as Burke's tree because each morning when he (barely) woke up, he would piss on it, the bathrooms being another 50 yards away and, therefore, too far to walk to. His hair was never combed. Chicks dug him too.

Burke also had a girlfriend that summer. Not just any girlfriend – Beth Desnet, Manny's youngest daughter. A confession – I had a huge crush on Beth. I wrote poetry about her (which I had the good sense never to show *anyone*). The fact that Burke went off on a beer run on the last night of camp with another woman *kills* me. But, I'm sure Rissman was very insistent and, like I said, Burke followed the path of least resistance.

So, there the rest of us were, lying on the trampoline, looking at the sky, talking about who knows what, oohing at the shooting stars, and every now and then saying "Where the hell is Rissman?" As it got later we started to get more frustrated, which in retrospect is kind of comical. I mean, it's not like we had other plans. And we had a pretty good idea what the delay was.

Meanwhile, in another part of camp, the pizza guy showed up. Rissman had ordered out for pizza and had expected to be back in time to take delivery before anyone noticed. But since he wasn't there someone did notice. Manny.

If Manny was initially peeved that Rissman had ordered out for pizza, he was furious when he couldn't find him. And with each cabin he checked he got even madder. He saw Paul Warshauer and Mike Lurie in the dining hall working on the *Trail's End* and asked them where Rissman was. Warshauer tried to calm him down and said that he was sure Rissman was just saying his goodbyes to a certain young lady, in a perfectly gentlemanly way of course, and that Manny shouldn't worry.

As Manny started to search the athletic fields he saw us hanging out on the trampoline. "Do any of you know where Rissman is?!" he shouted. "No." "Haven't seen him." "Don't know where he is." We were sort of being honest, just not completely honest. I'd like to say we covered for Rissman because of The Code: you never rat on another camper. But, at least in my case, the motivation wasn't so noble. I figured that there was no chance at that point that Rissman was going to sneak into camp and have a beer fest with us, so I decided to save my own ass.

Eventually we left the trampoline and went back to our cabins. Later that night, Rissman and Burke returned and, wisely, stopped off in the dining hall first. Warshauer warned them that Manny was on the warpath (and it wasn't Tribes time) and that they had better chew some gum or something to get the smell of beer off their breaths. I think Manny may have even been unaware that Burke was gone, out cheating on his daughter.

There were rumors the next day that Manny had called out the police, sheriff, fire department, and National Guard and that they had been planning to drag the lake. I think all Manny did was yell at Rissman. For a long time. Loudly. They were outside the CIT Village and people heard Manny all the way to Cabin 1. That night Manny forbade Rissman, Golden Boy, from ever returning to Waupaca.

As it turned out, Rissman returned the next year as a Junior Counselor. He and I talked that fall and winter about going on a canoe trip in Canada the next summer, but Warshauer talked Rissman into apologizing to Manny and asking for another chance (to keep the door open in case he ever wanted to be a counselor), and then talked Manny into saying yes.

So what did I learn from the experience? That waiting for beer can be better than beer itself. That girls and alcohol can decrease a friend's reliability. That there are few experiences in life as peaceful and gratifying as lying on a trampoline on a warm summer's night watching the shooting stars against the Milky Way.

I also learned that there's a moral balance in the universe, a kind of cosmic justice. A couple of weeks after the end of camp, Rissman became very ill and had to miss his first month of high school. On that last night of camp, Sandy gave him a terrible case of mono.