



**AT CAMP KIEVE**  
The sailing dock on Lake Damariscotta. Clockwise from right: An oar listing the names of my son Jack's cabinmates; the archer and his target; Kieve boys in days of yore; the welcoming Kieve crest.



# VACATION DAYS

**A**T FIRST I DIDN'T HAVE QUITE the feeling I expected to have as we pulled into the chaotic rest area/gas station located along a hurtling sliver of I-95 North somewhere in the vicinity of Darien, Connecticut. The place was a bustling scrum of vacationers, headed, I imagined, to second homes and summer rentals and faraway beach hotels. There was an air, although it was already deep into summer, of offices emptying and bags being packed, of long-planned itineraries starting, of distant gatherings getting nearer with each mile, of the big, longed-for break from it all, with the promise of rejuvenation and tranquillity and perfection, arriving at last. We had driven here, 20 minutes from our house, to rendezvous with a white van on its way to Maine. I was in a jacket and tie, my only luggage a briefcase that I would soon be hauling the opposite way, to Manhattan, and my wife, a mother of three, was practically bawling. Our firstborn and only son—our 10-year-old Jackie, who sat

stoically in the back like a doughboy about to be deployed to the Marne—was catching the shuttle to camp. I think because I myself had been so prone to homesickness—way beyond the age of 10, I'm afraid—I tried to act nonchalant, the brake-pumping father worried about missing the next train to the city. I had never seen so many white vans in one place, and I almost bumped a pedestrian or two as we searched the crowded McDonald's parking lot. Finally, a license plate from Maine appeared, and we saw a small gathering of name-tagged kids in backpacks encircled by nervous parents saying their goodbyes. Jack hopped out and quickly joined the group, more ready than I expected to get this part over with. It gave me a flashback to when I was the boy leaving home for the first time, and the way the sadder my parents got, the sadder I got. In his black T-shirt and neon green shorts, his hair barbered to Marine Corps length as a result of his having tried to cut it himself—"It's cool,

**"It's cool, Dad," he had instructed me that morning. "You don't know!"**



Dad," he had instructed me that morning. "You don't know!"—Jack valiantly sucked in his cheeks to keep his face from crumpling. We hugged and kissed him, and then, in a taste of what the future surely holds, he broke away and took his seat in the van. We would not see or talk to him for the next 10 days. Life at home definitely felt different without Jack. The sound of his dirt bike destroying the lawn was gone. The trail of snack crumbs that led from the kitchen to the sofa in front of the TV wasn't there. At night there was no one to yell at to brush his teeth—and to do his summer reading!

No requests to deny, such as "Can I drink a Red Bull?" or "Can I buy *Saw IV* on demand tonight?" Without their brother in the mix, our girls—Eliza, 7, and Clara, 4—can dress their two kittens in dolls' clothes for hours before either of the kittens (or either of them) shows a claw. Brushing and braiding each other's hair is also a major time-consuming activity. I was able to get through the newspaper unaccosted. My wife once took a nap. But though we might not have missed getting a break from the mischief, we all missed Jack terribly.

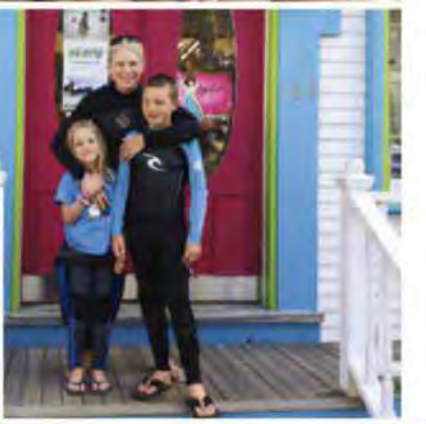
We wrote Jack each day, and received our share of telegram-like postcards from him.

"Dear Mom and Dad," one began. "Do you miss me? I miss you. Is my bearded dragon still alive? Please send me a new pillow. Love, Jack."

Camp Kieve, which was founded on the shores of Lake Damariscotta in 1926 and has a wonderful approach to instilling wilderness skills and good values in boys (and, at its sister camp, Wavus, in girls), posts daily photographs of the campers' latest exploits on its website. Each morning we scrolled through hundreds of new pictures, hoping for a sighting of Jack and his cabinmates. And there they were: swimming and sailing, setting out for an overnight camping trip, eating in a mess hall watched over by a giant moose head (no desserts), shooting bows and arrows and .22s, hauling up the catch on a lobster boat, singing along to the Kieve camp song. My wife and I studied each picture of Jack for forensic clues to his mood. Was he happy? Miserable? A little of both?

Kieve—a verb of Celtic origin pronounced *key-AVE* that means to persevere in pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement—is a six-hour drive (with summer traffic) from our house in Fairfield County, so we decided that when camp was over we'd spend a week in Maine, mostly at a secluded gem of a resort called Hidden Pond, in Kennebunkport, after picking up Jack. Until then we'd have to wait it out.

As we drove along the winding road from the camp entrance to a small hill clustered with cabins, we all started to get a bit nervous when Jack came into view, waiting with a bunch of other boys in the shade of a tree. He was decked out in Kieve gear—both his T-shirt and sweatpants were emblazoned with the camp's name in orange. It was clear he'd had a very good time. He almost couldn't stand being hugged with so much on his mind that he wanted us to



**DESTINATION: KENNEBUNKPORT**  
Clockwise from top right: At Hidden Pond everything is exceptional, including the transportation; my daughters, dressed for a Maine swim; my wife joins the crew for a day of surfing; the impossibly plentiful bar at Earth, Hidden Pond's highly acclaimed restaurant; a navigation post to help you keep your bearings.

see: the sailboats and climbing wall, the docks and the zipline, and the secret paths linking it all together that only a camper knew about. We spent the rest of the afternoon touring the stunning property, meeting the counselors, and attending an awards ceremony where Jack got the special commendation in archery.

Eventually, after lunch, when it was time to go, Jack realized he would have to leave a place he'd just come to love, and that brought on a different kind of sadness—a longing for something that wouldn't come again for a year. "A whole entire year!" he groaned. As we pulled out of Kieve, the car was unusually silent, as if our vacation were over too. It took perhaps 30 minutes, however, for the boredom of a road trip to set in. Hearing someone in the back scream the first "Stop touching me!," I knew we still had a full week of fun left.

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