



Eugene Mirman, Comedian
Ilya Mirman, Marketing Exec
Camp Tohkomeupog
(1982-1983), East Madison

First Pranks

For the Moscow-born Mirman brothers, Camp Tohkomeupog was a crash course in American culture.

Three decades before the Era of Fake News, new Russian immigrants Eugene and Ilya Mirman learned not to believe everything they heard — just like in their old country.

Eugene was only 8 years old, the prime age for gullibility, when Camp Tohkomeupog counselors came up with an elaborate hoax to convince the youngest campers there was a total solar eclipse. While their campers were sleeping, the counselors stealthily set all the kids' watches five hours ahead.

"It was pretty impressive," recalls Eugene. "They had reveille with the bugles to wake everybody up — and we all lined up like we usually did. It's really 2 a.m., but we all think it's 7 a.m. They tell us there's an eclipse and that's why it's dark (presumably the ruse worked because the moon wasn't visible). Then they said we could either continue our day or as a special treat, we could go back to sleep."

"Then in the morning, we saw the kids in the other age groups and our group was like, 'Oh my God, did you see the eclipse?' and we bragged that we got to sleep late. And they said, 'What are you talking about? It's 8 o'clock in the morning!'"

Older brother Ilya, then 13, faced counselor hoaxsters of his own. His bunk was told that it was a Tohkomeupog tradition for kids to walk barefoot on hot coals at the first campfire of the season. To allegedly protect themselves from burns, the campers were urged to rub a generous helping of toothpaste on their feet and put their socks back on. Needless to say, there was no firewalk



Ilya



Eugene

Ilya and Eugene Mirman at Camp Tohkomeupog in the early '80s. Born in Russia, the brothers fondly recall their NH campmates as being "less mean" than Massachusetts kids.

and Ilya wisely kept his toes Colgate-free.

"These were harmless pranks where everyone was borderline humiliated equally," he says, noting that back home in Lexington, Massachusetts, their classmates would inexplicably blame them ("the Commies") for every Cold War crisis.

"Kids in New Hampshire were definitely less mean," agrees Eugene. "Camp was like a slightly gentler America for us."

Eugene is now a standup comedian best known for voicing Gene Belcher on the animated FOX sitcom "Bob's Burgers." Ilya is vice president of marketing at Desktop Metal, a hot startup specializing in 3D metal printing.

Pranks aside, Ilya says he credits Tohkomeupog for helping him better acclimate to American culture.

"I went to my first dance and they played 'Stairway to Heaven' as the last song. There was an awesome capture-the-flag game spread across acres and acres. I loved sneaking around the woods and fields," he says. "I definitely gained a new level of comfort just interacting with people."

"Before I got to camp, the only music I really liked were these two Russian bards, Vladimir Vysotsky and Bulat Okudzhava," Ilya adds. "My bunk exposed me to rock music — Peter Gabriel, The Doors, The Who, the Grateful Dead — and I still remember which kids would play which cassettes. Some of the counselors would play these songs on guitar around the campfire. This had a huge influence on me."

No word if any of the American kids were smitten by the Russian bards.



Chris Sununu
New Hampshire Governor
Camp Fatima (1984-1989)
Gilmanton Iron Works

Hardcore Hiker

New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu says he first learned to carry his weight at Camp Fatima.

In 1998, future New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu buckled down for five months to hike from Maine to Georgia. But his first steps of conquering the Appalachian Trail actually happened more than a decade earlier, when he trekked up Mount Major and Blueberry Mountain with his friends at Camp Fatima.

"My love for hiking really started there," Sununu says. "Camp is all about exploring places you've never been able to explore. Those were the first times I could go out and not just hike for an hour or two, but for four, five or six hours and really spend a whole day out on the trail."

"Being on a mountain is an exhilarating feeling, but it makes you realize rather quickly that you have to be responsible for yourself. You have certain obligations, like carrying your own food and gear. But you also have to think of the safety of those around you," he says.

Sununu laughs when he looks at pictures of himself in the Camp Fatima yearbooks, which at the time showed the boys posing with random sports equipment. "That's a \$6 regular boy's haircut from downtown Salem right there," he says. "And this is when I went through my phase of spiking my hair a little bit."

Maybe to impress one of the girls at the Catholic camp's sister institution, Camp Bernadette, which would occasionally participate in dances and other joint activities. "It was always exciting to see them after you were with just guys for a couple



Gov. Chris Sununu in 1998 on his five-month Appalachian Trail hike and his Camp Fatima yearbook photo, which reveals his slightly spiked hair phase.

of weeks," he notes.

When the current governor was a camper, his father, John H. Sununu, was the state's governor. Did that distinction ever earn him any special treatment — positive or negative — from the other kids? "It would come up from time to time, but I don't think they treated me any differently. I didn't act any differently, so they didn't treat me any differently. I was just Chris from Cabin 10," he says.

But like most other kids, Sununu cherished the freedom of not answering to his

parents 24/7. It's a gift he plans to give to his own children, two of which will be attending New Hampshire camps this summer.

"You learn very quickly to rely on your counselors and rely on your peers. You go from being a bunch of strangers to being a team. Camp helps you develop great communication and leadership skills," Sununu says. "You also learn to work out your differences and problems with other kids, and at the end of the day, you're still friends. You make bonds that last a lifetime."