

Adventure travel shapes lives

Kids find themselves in the wilderness, abroad

By **JOHN BUCHEL**
Daily News Staff

In the summer of 1979, Phil Gould had been deep in the Canadian wilderness for weeks with a group canoeing down rivers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and they had not seen another living soul in more than 20 days.

The group was parked on a river shore facing a multiple-mile portage, but there were rumors of a shortcut — an uncharted creek which could lift hours of hauling gear from their shoulders.

They decided to send their trip leader, Jon Helminiak, into a nearby Indian reservation to confirm the rumors.

Helminiak was welcomed by people who still lived off the land. Their tribal leader drew out a map and described important landmarks leading to the creek through rough translation from one of the few English-speakers.

"Sure enough it was there, plain as day. It was something that we would have just gone right by if he hadn't explained it to us," said Gould, now a Cedarburg sales executive from Grafton. "We were putting our trust in complete, absolute strangers. That was quite a leap of faith."

Gould kept in touch with some of the kids from that summer, but others he did not. He hadn't seen Helminiak until this summer, when they were able to reconnect and talk about how their wilderness experiences and relying on each other on those rivers had shaped their lives.

"It's a very influential time in my life. You're talking about your later teen years right as you're trying to establish your independence," Gould said. "It was an exercise in dependency on other people maybe at a time when you think you can do everything by yourself."

Simply taking a kayak down an area river might be a stepping stone to greater travels, because some kids might never have been outside a 10-city block area, Gould said. Helminiak has become a life-long advocate of adventure travel, and recounts his many trips in his book, *Nothing Routine*.

As a former chancellor of development and alumni rela-

Getting started...

■ Wilderness Inquiry

A non-profit dedicated to bringing all ages, abilities to the wilderness. 808 S.E. 14th Ave. Minneapolis, Minn. 612.676.9400 or 800.728.0719
www.wildernessinquiry.com

■ Camp Manito-wish YMCA

Wisconsin wilderness summer camp for adolescents since 1919. P.O. Box 246, Boulder Junction, Wis. 54512, 715.385.2312, www.manito-wish.org

■ NOLS

The National Outdoor Leadership School has been training wilderness leaders for more than 40 years. 284 Lincoln Street, Lander, Wyo. 82520, 1-800-710-NOLS, www.nols.edu

tions at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Helminiak said few things compare to adventure experiences' ability to mold young adults' characters.

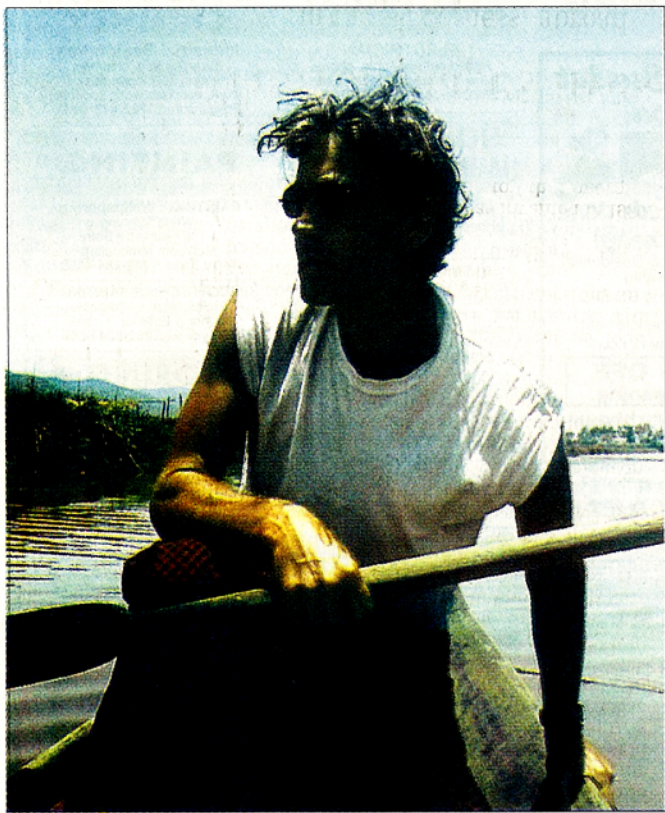
"To me they're just as important in a young persons' development as receiving a college education. I'd like parents to recognize that a week in the Boundary Waters or three weeks in a developing country are just as important as preparing them as college," Helminiak said.

Some parents might view such a trip as a luxury or worry about their child's safety.

But for Helminiak the payoffs are worth any investment or risk. He'll never forget the powerfully emotional experience of standing at the Berlin Wall and seeing firsthand the division of nation.

"Young men and women in this country are often very insulated from lifestyles outside of the United States," Helminiak said. "For me as a young person to leave this country and go to other nations and absorb the lifestyles, particularly the third-world countries, really gave me appreciation for the opportunities I have and what this country has to offer."

One obstacle to this goal is getting children and parents to know how to access these programs. Gould said scholarships and non-profit camps are a few of many ways to access these experiences.



Submitted photograph

Jon Helminiak paddles down a river in Burma. In his book *Nothing Routine*, he recalls adventure travel experiences from around the world which he says shaped him into a complete adult.