

# Mel & Travis Share Why Escapees Goes Beyond Memberships, It's Family

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Travis and Melanie are a little different than your average RVers.



They travel in their Winnebago Horizon, the fourth RV they've owned over the years, along with their children, and do so part-time these days with the kids in school. Like many children in RVing families today, Travis grew up going to Escapades, the large summer gatherings of the famous [RV club Escapees](#). And like many modern RVing families, the couple works remotely from their rig, as well as back home in San Antonio.

What sets them apart is that Travis is the grandson of Joe and Kay Peterson, founders of Escapees, and he is now the president of the organization alongside Melanie, the company's Vice President.

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“During my childhood travels,” Travis recalls, “Escapade was certainly a common term and often the destination or reason for where our travels took us. At the time, it was hard to grasp what Escapade was truly about. I would get out of the RV and suddenly be bombarded with hugs from people who, at the time, seemed ancient. My parents always seemed to know who these people were so I played along, smiling too, even though I had not the slightest idea.”



*Travis pulling a blue boat at an Escapade.*

Like many a young child on an RV trip, he didn't always fully embrace these trips.

“The truth is,” he continues, “I would be lying if I didn't say that there were times that I would have rather of been back in Texas with familiar friends and things to do during my summer breaks from school.”

His tune did change over the years, as his eyes opened a bit more with every passing year.

“I gained an understanding that it wasn't really that my parents always knew everyone, as it who they were. Escapade is the embodiment of what Escapees is really all about. It's a community or memberships, it is a family.”

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*Travis and Melanie with Kay Peterson, Cathie Carr and Bud Carr at Escapade 2015, right after launching Xscapers.*

The club was founded in 1978, by Travis’s grandparents. His own parents, Cathie and Bud Carr were the second generation of the family to run Escapees. It seemed like a natural fit for Travis and Melanie to then do the same.

“Travis was always very reluctant to get involved with the family business,” Melanie reveals. “Because he wanted to pursue other passions and make his own path.” He joined the Army right out of high school, and the couple would marry soon after, on New Year’s Eve of 2008. After some time, though, life brought them back to Texas, and the company headquarters in Livingston.

“We both started working for the club while we were going to college, so we could test the waters and see what it would be like. Little did we know how quickly we would become passionate about it, especially when we started RVing as a family and seeing the possibilities. While this is a family business, it was quick to see the Escapees family extended far beyond blood. In 2015, we founded [the Xscapers community](#), which helped us both achieve a sense of creating our own legacy within the organization.”

They purchased the first RV of their own in 2011, just as their son was reaching his first birthday. They traveled for six months and returning home for six, until he began public school.

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*Travis & Melanie's oldest son Gabriel hanging out in front of their first RV.*

“While having him in a public school setting slowed us down a little,” Melanie continues, “We still plan as many trips as possible including summers, breaks and we’ve been known to pull him out for a week here and there to get some extra traveling in, much like Travis’ parents did over 20 years ago. It is like looking in a mirror and watching our childhood all over again.”

Immersed in RVing and the Escapees organization from birth, Travis was practically destined to find his life’s work with the company. Still, his duties there began with humble beginnings.

“When we both took more formal positions at the company,” Melanie explains, “Travis started off helping out with maintenance at the park and I began with some administrative work and helping with things to bring the company up to modern times.” She got their social media pages up and running. Soon, they were both on the Board of Directors, “which is where the passion really started to shine through as we explored ways to expand, grow and modernize the company. It wasn’t until 2016 that we took the reins and took over the President and Vice President positions from Bud and Cathie.”

Travis’s parents now serve the club via their seats on the Board of Directors, while Travis and

“We are constantly still learning and getting advice from them along the way.”

Social media and a new generation of RVers on the horizon, the Xscapers they mention, the club brought the organization into the modern era.

“Xscapers has played a large role in bringing Escapees back to its original roots and truly meeting the needs of a new network for all RVers.”,” Travis explains the relatively new branch of the club.

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“It was a gap we were clearly missing that became more and more evident as we started to travel and meet other working-age RVers like ourselves who felt we didn’t provide anything for them. We knew we needed to create a solution and were serious about making that change when we crossed paths with [Chris and Cherie from Technomadia](#).”



*Cherie and Chris pictured on the left, Travis and Melanie on the right.*

After a few margaritas and an evening of discussion, the idea was born. “We worked diligently over the next year with Chris and Cherie to refine and create the details before launching at the annual Escapade in March of 2015. The heart of the community has really been the Convergences,” rallies centered around working-age travelers in particular, “and the community has grown to account for nearly 21% of the organization overall. As the founders and creators of Xscapers, we couldn’t be happier with where Xscapers stands today and how far it has come.”

The offshoot of the main club is so popular, some two dozen people have even tattooed the Xscapers logo on their bodies, including Melanie and Travis themselves.

The Carrs want to clarify that Xscapers and Escapees are not separate entities, though.

“We sometimes see there are some misconceptions,” Melanie says, “within the community it is actually a subgroup of the club and when you join, you’re an Escapees member first. When you join Xscaper, it identifies you as part of the group and gets you access to the unique resources and

Every member is an Escapee, where those Xscapers are simply folks who are still working while they travel.

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“With that said, you will find a completely different atmosphere at Convergences. For example, we understand most people are working during the day so activities will start in the late afternoon or evening and the events are usually a little longer to make up for the time we miss out on during work hours.” The Convergences sometimes even move locations during an event, much like modern working RVers tend to do with their everyday lives.

As to the tattoos, though to some they may seem a world away from the humble beginnings of a club built around like-minded people getting together to form a community whereby full-time traveling couples and families can share one another’s company, it all boils down to the same original concept.



*Xscapers members with tattoos at Annual Bash 2020.*

“I think this really goes back around to the sense of family that our organization as a whole creates. We are a completely inclusive organization and you should feel like you are welcome and ‘home’ when you attend one of our events. We have seen people make the tightest and lifelong connections through Xscapers and I truly think in a sense, that has changed their lives,” Travis admits.

“We’ve also heard more than a few times that if they hadn’t found our events and a social co would be off the road. While we are so often credited for the success of Xscapers that helped had a pretty awesome playbook to follow. Joe, Kay, Bud, Cathie, Escapees staff, and most in tremendous amount of experience [that] we have heavily relied on to help guide us towards r Xscapers have the strong community bond it is known for.”

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*Happy Hour at the 2016 Hill Country Convergence.*

So how has all of this change—transitioning into a world where many families, in general, are looking to experience life on the road, remain connected through digital means, and seeking a life of location independence—influenced the club at its core?

“I think one of the most important aspects regarding change from the past 5 years,” Travis impresses, “is that we have made it our number one goal to not have change, in regards to the values and philosophies created by my grandparents and Escapees Founders Joe and Kay Peterson. If we can’t maintain our caring and sharing attitude, inclusivity, and honesty then the rest doesn’t really matter.”

□□They want to correct what’s off-course while keeping the original concept as strong and simple as ever.

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*Opening ceremonies at Escapade.*

“For Melanie and I, our biggest focus was, and is, the continuous effort to work towards fixing issues that we feel are crucial to the club’s longevity and improving the existing member experience. This includes bringing existing member services into the modern digital era, that started with a complete redesign of our online user experience, and the improvement of diversity and inclusiveness of all generations through Xscapers.

□□”With that being said, it is also important to highlight it takes a tremendous amount of teamwork to make this organization move forward. I don’t think Melanie or myself could have ever really prepared for being leaders in a such a multifaceted organization. The sheer number of moving pieces and our obsession to be involved, is something we still are learning from to this day.”

Travis’s parents, and both members before them and those still in the community today, have proven invaluable resources to tap in their new roles.

In addition to those roles as President and Vice President, and the daily tasks of making the lives of their RVing members easier, Melanie sees a bigger picture as well.

“[We’re passionate about] collectively making the RV industry better as a whole. We have w  
companies such as Winnebago and Dometic who are willing to listen to the consumer and in  
on feedback. We intend to continue to seek partnerships with industry leaders who share the  
excited to see what the future holds!”

Working so closely, as a couple who also then shares their downtime together as well, may sound like a familiar story to those of us who live, work and play together in our RVs.

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“While we both work on our own projects,” Melanie continues, “we are usually both involved in some way or another with what the other is working on and we are both working the same hectic schedule. It’s often hard for us to turn work off and we find ourselves spending dinners talking about projects or ideas.”

With their kids no longer in school due to the current situation in the world, this also means the couple will find themselves in meetings at the same time, which leaves the children responsible for their own time while also spending all of it with mom and dad.

“They have had to adapt big time,” she says, while adding, “This can be a big challenge for us when it comes to distractions, which is why on a normal basis, we have them in some sort of school setting (in addition to our oldest being extremely social) because there wouldn’t be enough hours in the day for us to properly homeschool them and have room for family time. This all contributes to the reason we haven’t adopted a full-time lifestyle yet. We like taking things one step at a time and we never quite know even what the next year will hold for us as we grow and adapt to the constantly changing phases of our life.”



*Enjoying Bloody Mary’s at Annual Bash 2019.*

Still, they make it a point to attend as many events as they can. “We love the opportunity to i  
Travis. “You can always find us at the annual Escapade and Xscapers Annual Bash. Whenever  
with our travels, we make sure to attend those too. Outside of in-person events, we are always  
with the community on social media as well.”

Thus is the life of the new normal modern parents in an anything but normal time, both work  
duties of their careers, alone time for parents with the needs of their children.

Travis draws on his experience as an Army Ranger.

“My military experience not only had a huge impact on appreciating the RV lifestyle but also my understanding and passion for Escapees.

“As a kid, I remember that our RV trips sometimes felt like I was getting dragged across the country on another so-called ‘adventure.’ I recall the feeling of being bored sitting in the back of our motorhome playing video games or watching a movie, wondering if we would ever reach our destination. When I was a teenager and decided I wanted to join the military, it was because I wanted to be a part of a team, a brotherhood, a place where anyone would do anything for one another. Another reason was because I had a strong desire to prove myself and by creating my own path, something at the time I naively didn’t understand could be done through Escapees and the legacy my grandparents and parents created.”

Many of us would share such a revelation as we transition into adulthood.



*Travis & Melanie at 2009 Ranger Ball.*

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“There was a very specific moment,” he continues, “during my very last overseas mission w  
helicopter while I gazed down at a place that I would have otherwise not have seen. At that i  
opportunities I had wasted. When I was that young bored boy who was dragged across the U  
longer this trip would be, I did not realize I was missing a beautiful world right outside my w  
was to have visited every state in the U.S. by the time I was sixteen.

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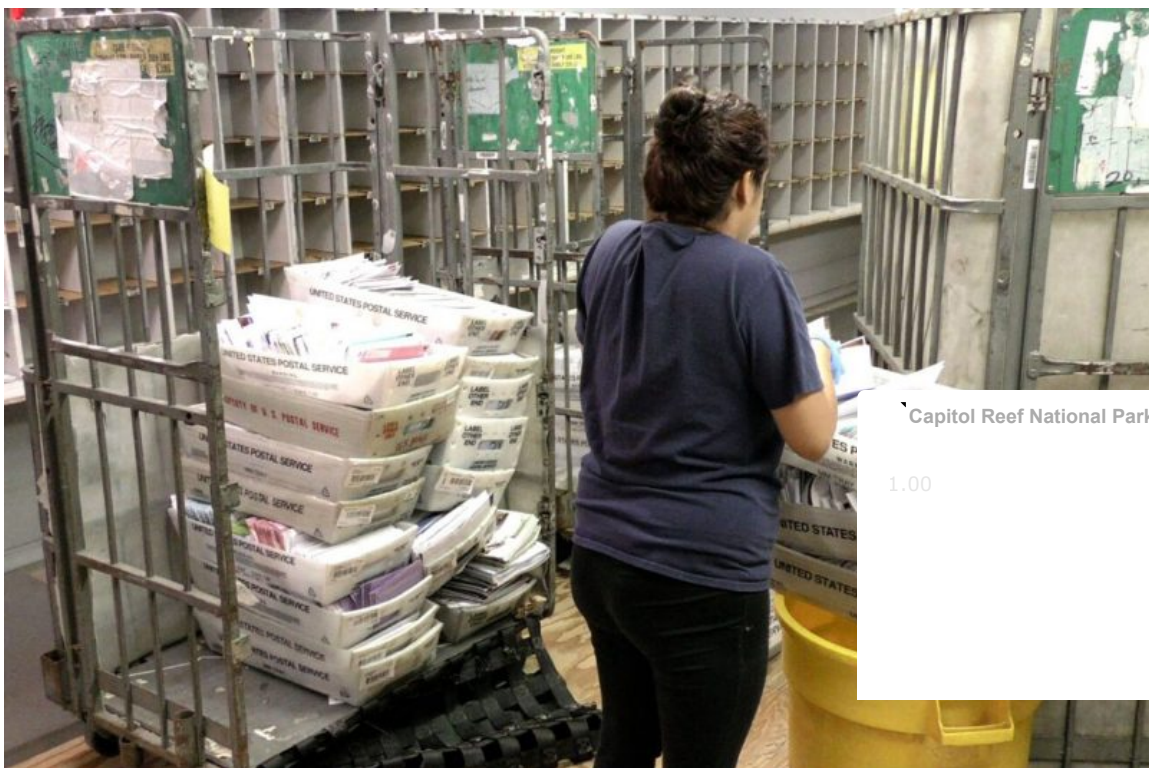
“Now, as I looked across rugged Afghan mountains below me, I felt a deep sense of regret. I could only vaguely remember flashes of snowcapped mountains or towering pine trees that rushed by my window as a boy. It also opened my eyes to something I was too blind and unwilling to see at a younger age.

“I always thought that nowhere else than in the military would people gather from across the nation to see their comrades in the hospital, or go such great distances to pay respects at a memorial. Nowhere else than here would I make friendships that would last a lifetime. Nowhere else would I feel this same sense of brotherhood. It wasn’t till a couple years before becoming President that I realized that the Escapees organization I have been a part of my whole life had all the things that I tried so hard to obtain. Escapees is a community we can call our own, that goes wherever we go, no matter if it’s a small chapter rally or a full-blown Escapade. Whenever we see that SKP decal we know our brotherhood, our community, our family is here and we are home.”

Melanie agrees. “The core benefit of Escapees is without a doubt the community you will find through our organization and events. We often say ‘many people join for our benefits such as mail-forwarding, education or parking, but they stay because they become part of a family.’”

She touts the intangible benefits of membership as well, such as the aforementioned advocacy efforts with the RV manufacturing industry. But it goes beyond that. Melanie provides a monumental example.

As part of your membership, you can sign up to get your mail delivered to one of a few locations across the United States. While this is incredibly convenient—you can then have your mail forwarded all at once to somewhere you’ll be staying long enough to receive it safely, not to mention the amount of junk mail they can filter for you—it provides an even more crucial resource for full-timers with no other permanent, physical address.



*Sorting mail at the Escapees headquarters in Livingston, TX.*

“It’s the ability to use our address to establish domicile. This is a big piece of the puzzle for full-time RVers who don’t have a physical address. This also allows us to heavily advocate on behalf of RVers to protect their rights. In the year 2000, Travis’ mom, Cathie Carr, spearheaded an advocacy effort to protect the right for full-time RVers to vote. The issue landed on the steps of the Supreme Court, but in the end, RVers retained their right to vote.”

Specifically, Cathie Carr was heavily involved in retaining Escapees—who choose to claim domicile in Livingston, Texas—members’ rights to vote in that county. There are many benefits that come with being a Texan, including the state’s lack of income taxes and ease of vehicle registration renewal, but arguably being able to vote and avoiding any legal concerns about having no physical address to call home are the most beneficial.

Still, on a day-to-day basis, their mailing service is incredibly useful and valuable.

“The mail service is one of the biggest services we offer and we pride ourselves in providing an excellent, friendly and customized experience for our members.” This isn’t just talk, many Escapees members—including the author of this article—can testify that it is one of the easiest and most enjoyable experiences available when it comes to getting mail in general. The company, at certain levels of membership, basically acts as a junk mail filter to rival what Gmail does for SPAM.

“We know that mail is such an important piece of our lives, both physical and digital,” Melanie continues, “so it is a high priority to ensure we are doing it right. There are a few different options you can choose from to personalize your experience and we also provide an optional mail scanning service for those who really want to cut back on what they receive. We can’t speak too much about this yet, but we have invested and are working on making the service better and more efficient this year and we can’t wait to share the news in the coming months.”

The couple states that this mail service is in fact what leads most people to Escapees in the first place.

“For most RVers, they join Escapees RV Club because of the mail forwarding service, bi-monthly magazine, campgrounds, educational programs and so on. But they stay because of community. We believe that the ideal network is not hierarchical, but rather, all the pieces are interdependent. Everyone must play a part. It’s a collaborative effort built on earnest relationships with members who support each other.”

“The majority of the club is made up of full-time RVers,” Travis notes, “but we do also have quite a bit of seasonal and part-time RVers as well. We like to say that we are a club for serious RV enthusiasts.”

“A member said it best,” Melanie summarizes, “when they wrote ‘We belong to many clubs,

Escapees are a community, a family, “the most amazing members who are always willing to beer around the campfire with them.” Some become lifetime members.

Community, advocacy...and education. Escapees members have access to information that c lifestyle easier, such as their RV Boot Club, and new RVers Online University. These courses cover everything from operating an RV safely to maintenance.

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*Marshall and Kelly from Camp Addict present at the 2020 Annual Bash.*

For an organization focused on in-person gatherings and building real, lifelong relationships, the past year has been hard.

“While we did have to cancel almost all of our in-person events over the past year,” Travis details, “we did have a few ‘Winter Home Base’ events over the winter with strict health protocols in place. All attendees were required to wear a mask, activities took place outdoors and everyone was required to stay a minimum of one month to minimize exposure coming in and out.”

This year’s Escapade is back on track, though. “We are currently moving forward with the [Escapade in Rock Springs, Wyoming in July](#). Our team has gotten the event approved with the local county and we will of course be implementing as many health and safety procedures as possible, along with limiting attendance. The health and safety of our staff, volunteers and members are first priority.” Additional events will be held later this year.

Melanie recalls how the year has changed not just Escapees as a club and community but RVing as a whole.

“When things first started to shut down and the reality hit that Covid wasn’t going away quickly like we may have naively thought at first, we were forced to make some really difficult decisions that heavily impacted our business community and the way we foster that is through our events. On average, through our nation anywhere between 40-50 events a year. Having to completely pull the plug on those left us

“Our awesome event directors and marketing team quickly pulled together though to put together offerings,” Travis adds, “which was a light during those times.” The company had already been using Facebook live meetings where members could stay in touch between rallies.

“To speak to RVing in general, we are still watching the impacts [the pandemic] has made on the community.”

“We were spending weeks and months on end formulating club policies, advice and resources for RVers surrounding COVID when things first started to shut down. We saw people were sitting still to try and avoid contracting or spreading the virus. We even saw a lot of people buying land and finding somewhere safe to lay low until they felt comfortable traveling again. As time went on, people started to realize RVing would be one of the safest ways to travel. The industry picked up quickly and rig sales are booming. We are curious to see the lasting effects of this as we move forward—things are starting to look up with the vaccine which means more people will resume air travel and other methods. We are excited to see what’s in store for the future and look forward to meeting some new and friendly faces around the campfire at our events.”

Looking even further toward the future, for a fourth-generation-run business, do they see their own children following in their footsteps?



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“Our hope is that yes, they will both continue the family tradition,” Melanie reveals. “It’s had through a period where he didn’t want to be involved. Our oldest shows a lot of interest in th think he has thoroughly enjoyed the RV lifestyle.” The family once traveled in an Airstream, getting their “metal home” back.

“Watching us work together,” she continues, “he has seen firsthand the ups and downs of running the business. He’s only 9, so it could just be our imagination, but he seems particularly interested in working and what the club entails for his age.”

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Engaged in an entire community of migrating, like-minded people from birth—as his parents and grandparents before him—will no doubt leave a lasting impression.



**About the Author:** Nathan has been living and traveling around North America in RVs and vans since 2008. He interviews fellow travelers and writes articles on the full-time lifestyle at [Wand'rly Magazine](#).

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