

Scoutmaster Minute

There Goes “My Boy”

Every Scoutmaster has a special feeling for a Scout that successfully completes the journey from Tenderfoot to Eagle Scout. It is made even more special when you get to watch them grow from tentative, immature boys of ten to confident and respected young men. They are no longer afraid to try new things and they are constantly looking for new challenges. Over the past seven years, we have had the opportunity to work with a special group of young men who will be graduating from high school in a couple of months and moving on to college. I would like to share a story with you that was in a recent edition of Scouting magazine that pretty much describes why we are still volunteers in an organization like Scouting.

He stands before me, and I have to stifle a laugh. Arrayed in a Scout uniform, eyes full of hope, pride, anticipation, and trepidation; the khaki uniform is about to swallow him. Bought to last for the long haul, it bags about his neck and billows around his belt. This belt is so long it wraps almost twice around him. But, he would not have it any other way. There are no patches yet, but he has big plans for the future.

Eleven years old, this is his first Scoutmaster’s Conference, and he is both frightened and excited. I ask him to repeat the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. He starts with a rush, looks at me, and falters. This is the same pledge he repeats every day in school; however with me he cannot remember the words. With a look of panic, his eyes meet mine. They ask, can I still belong; can I still go camping; play the games; learn the tasks; can I be one of the boys? Reassurance is quick in coming; he is welcomed into the troop.

Knots tied again and again; twisting bits of rope around sticks and poles; tying equipment onto packs and into trucks; sticks lashed together to make a rickety tri-pod where a water jug is precariously suspended. It is a somewhat “useful camp gadget” to make the water more accessible. As he walks away, he looks back over his shoulder with pride, not at a teetering tripod that may or may not support the bucket of water, but at a monumental Eiffel Tower that could support the world.

“I do not know about these pancakes,” he says. “We put in too much water and did not have any more mix, so we added hot chocolate to thicken them up.” He looks on, waiting for my approval of the concoction. It is a good thing that we are going home tomorrow; it is not hard to last that long. Besides, if it is good enough for them, it is good enough for me.

With a splash, he is in the lake, skinny legs and arms flailing the water. Is he swimming or trying to empty the lake? Ah, there it is – the crawl, oh no wait, it’s the sidestroke; no, it really is the crawl! Arms and legs going like the slowly dying pistons of a warn-out engine; slower and slower, until he starts to sink. He does not have enough fat to keep him afloat. Will he make the 100 yards to get classified as a Scout swimmer? Oh, the coveted swimmer classification; the open doorway to water adventure, canoeing, rowing, sailing, motor boating, snorkeling, and untold experiences of fun. The strokes are very slow, but he has not given up. “Keep going. Just keep trying; that’s it. Keep it up.” Finally, he has done it! I am as excited as he is tired! We can always work on the technique, but we cannot make him have the courage or heart to keep trying and never give up.

As I lay in my tent, the cool alpine air invades the side of my sleeping bag. No matter how I turn, a little rock or stick is reminding me of where I am, and each turn lets in more of that cool breeze. There is a scratching on the outside of the tent door. It is so soft I can hardly hear it. But, there it is again. I open my eyes, look toward the door, and there silhouetted in the moonlight he stands. I wonder if he is shivering from the cold or from

having to wake up the Scoutmaster in the middle of the night. I rouse the Assistant Scoutmasters as I ask the young man what the problem is. "I do not feel well," he complains. Hot chocolate, praise, reassurance, reorganization of his bed, and he is finally tucked away for the night. I return to my cozy nest. It is much more comfortable now for some reason, and we all sleep the night away.

"Can we stop and rest?" he pleads as he wipes the sweat from his eyes. "We just stopped a hundred yards back. I thought you could hike forever with that new pack?" I counter. "Well, how much farther is five miles anyway?" he asks. On the tops of mountains is the dwelling place of stars, or so it seems when we finally reach our destination. As we lay on our backs studying the vast sky above us, we learn how the Big Dipper, Orion, the Little Dipper, the Northern Crown, and Cassiopeia can all help you find north at night. "It is so big and makes me seem so small," he says. "Hey," he exclaims, "we should have brought my Dad's telescope. It is real cool, and it brings the stars in really close." "How big is it?" I ask. "Oh, it's a big one. I think it is about a six-incher. You can see forever with it." "Would you have been willing to bring it all five miles up here in that new pack of yours?" I ask. "Well," he says after a short pause, "maybe this looks good enough for me after all!"

Camping, cooking, hiking, swimming, dodge ball, night games, backpacking, Scout meetings, day hikes, monthly campouts, Summer Camp, High Adventure, and Courts of Honor – in a blur the weeks turn into months, the months into years. Then, here he stands before me for another very important Scoutmaster's Conference; and again I have to stifle a laugh. His uniform is about to choke him this time. It's khaki material is taut over his broadening shoulders, the buttons strain the buttonholes. His trousers are held up by his now too short belt. Across his chest is his sash; rows of merit badges marching from his shoulder to his waist.

His eyes meet mine, much like they did those long years ago, and I see the familiarity that many shared experiences bring. I have been there to watch him succeed and I have been there to watch him learn how to fail. His face shines with pride, confidence, leadership, and accomplishment. "Think I am ready for my Eagle Board of Review?" he asks, giving me a firm left handshake. "Well, I don't think you are ready," I reply as I look him straight in the eye. "I know you are ready!" As I watch him go I think, "There goes my boy." Not my son; his parents will not give him to me; and besides, my wife says no more kids! But, he will still always be my boy and I will forever remember the experiences we have shared together.

That concludes this Eagle Court of Honor. I would like to thank you for attending and supporting our troop, its programs, and most importantly – your sons. I would like to thank our special guests for taking their time to attend this ceremony and help us recognize these young men and what they have accomplished. These boys truly are what this program is all about. For the parents in the audience, especially the ones here for the first time, I hope someday you will get the thrill of standing up here and crying in front of an auditorium full of people, when you get to put that Eagle Scout neckerchief around your son's neck. But remember, the crowning jewel in Scouting is becoming an Eagle Scout, but that alone does not define all that your son learns along the Scouting Trail.

To our newest Eagle Scouts, congratulations on your tremendous achievements! After we have retired the colors, you and your families are requested to remain in the foyer to meet those in attendance today as they leave. Once the troop has filed out, everyone is invited to a reception in the cafeteria to congratulate these outstanding young men on their accomplishments.

Thank you for coming! Senior Patrol Leader, you may retire the colors and dismiss the troop.