

BE PREPARED

by

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I did not wish or expect to be a Scoutmaster. I intended to become the helpful father of a son in a Scout Troop. Thus began a 3-year saga of work, worry, physical torture, and success.

I recall vividly when David and I attended a meeting of Troop 60 at the Episcopal Church in Summit. I inquired of Dave Hill, the Assistant Scoutmaster, if David might join the Troop and, at the same time, volunteered myself to help with the Troop. He accepted David into the Troop as he glanced at me with a sly, knowing smile. This was Monday night. When Wednesday night came, so did a call from Dave Hill asking to meet with me after supper. He arrived at my home accompanied by 3 other fathers and, after a short exchange of pleasantries, got down to the purpose of the meeting. The Scoutmaster had just recently resigned, they echoed together, and I soon realized all four were pleading with me to be the new Scoutmaster. I had never been a Scout, knew nothing of Scouting, and wasn't about to agree to a responsibility of that magnitude. However, I consented to be a member of the Troop Committee and, with the others, to help keep the Troop going.

The following Sunday night, Dave called me and said he would be out of town and would I run the meeting. He felt "sure" another father would be along to help. He gave no specific name. Also he continued by asking if I would drive to Mystic, Conn., for the campout scheduled the coming weekend. Thus my first meeting and first campout came in the same week.

We left early Saturday morning for a campground outside Mystic, Conn. Seaport, and arrived 5 hours later. Traveling in a station wagon with 5 scouts and equipment from floor to roof, is not peaceful or without tension. However, I did enjoy the boys and listening to their uninhibited chatter was to become a rewarding part of my life over the next 3 years. The campout was a great success complete with beautiful weather, an interesting visit to Mystic Seaport, and a huge campfire with skits, marshmallows and songs to top off the day. I was smitten

with a desire to do more. The next week I purchased a uniform, scoutmaster's book, axe, knife, compass, aluminum cooking kit, and a few other things. The local Scout Supply Store was to become one of my favorite haunts.

Immediately three major problems will probably present themselves to those of you who end up as I did:

(1) Discipline—Troop 60 had none. Of the 43 boys registered in the Troop, I sized up 10 as trouble. Fortunately, most of these were eliminated through requirements for uniforms at meetings and during travel, and attendance required at 3 or 4 regular meetings for eligibility on campouts. This pretty well limited the number who wanted to raise hell and gave my good Scouts a chance to be Scouts.

(2) Equipment—The Troop had only one good tent. Luckily for me, this tent was recognized as the "Scoutmaster's tent." The rest of the equipment was in sad shape. Money is all that is needed to solve this problem. We passed the hat and ran various fundraising drives so that in two years we had one pup-tent for each of the boys. I discovered quickly that when boys sleep alone they, and the Scoutmaster, are more likely to get a good night's rest. Six boys horsing around under a tarp all night leave you with 6 zombies the next day, and impossible problems clearing the campsite and packing gear for the trip home.

(3) Drivers—Troops of our size travel in private cars. Fathers must drive cars in order for boys to enjoy the out-of-doors. Generally, fathers don't like to give up whole weekends and sleep on the hard, cold and sometimes wet ground. These were facts I learned quickly and each month getting the required cars was my most difficult task. However, once all the drivers showed up, and the cars were loaded, everyone seemed to have a good time.

We enjoyed so many interesting camping and travel experiences I hardly know which to recall in print. Here are a few that come to me:

The Sandy Hook Caper

Until recently, the Army owned the end of Sandy Hook, New Jersey. During the World Wars, immense concrete bunkers with deep

underground interconnecting tunnels were constructed. Huge guns protected the New York Harbor from these emplacements. The guns are gone now but the bunkers and tunnels are still there to explore. Scouts are allowed to camp in this area and, although security was tight getting in, the Army didn't bother you in the Scouting Area. About ten troops were present the September we camped. All the Scoutmasters got together and decided to have a joint campfire that night. For Scouts wanting to build the largest and most elaborate campfire of their careers, this place was Mecca. Driftwood by the ton was everywhere. Therefore, a magnificent tower, 25 feet high, utilizing all the combined skills of 150 Scouts, was constructed. That evening, when ignited, flames leapt 100 feet into the air and illuminated the beach for one-half mile in each direction. From the mainland, it must have appeared as though the entire Sandy Hook was on fire. Shortly, we began to hear sirens at a distance but coming closer by the minute. Then flashing lights and men running with hoses and pumps appeared over the dune. With all the Scouts and Scoutmasters booing their lungs out, the fire was extinguished. The maddest, nastiest fire chief I've ever seen rounded up those Scoutmasters who hadn't left on the run, and threatened us with all kinds of fines. Happily nothing came of the incident and, since we returned the following year, they apparently didn't learn which Troops were involved.

Sunfish Pond Caper

At the top of the mountain near the Delaware Water Gap, is a lovely glacial lake called Sunfish Pond. You park your car near the Gap and then climb up a steep trail for two and a half miles with your backpack laden with food, tent, soda etc. It was a mighty sweat getting there, but once at the top, you were rewarded with a wonderful swim and delightful place to camp. We set up camp as usual with a flagpole, areas for tents, and cooking. After my tent was secure, I promptly fell asleep. When I awoke, I heard no noise outside. Looking from my tent, I could see no Scouts. When you are a Scoutmaster, there are certain signs that spell trouble. Needless to say, this was one of them. I had always insisted that the boys notify me if they were taking a 5 mile hike (one of many requirements for Merit Badges) or other projects that would keep them away from the campsite for prolonged periods of

time. I started around the periphery of the Pond and shortly I could see the boys up on a rocky ledge staring across the Pond. Occasionally they shared a pair of binoculars. "Could it be a bear, ducks, deer or other wildlife?" I wondered to myself. However, as I came over the ridge, I realized their interest was not fixed on Scouting activities. Across the Pond (100 yards away) were a dozen uninhibited youths (mostly female) naked as could be, swimming and jumping off rocks. A strong smell of marijuana was drifting across the water. Nature with all her wonders has never commanded Scouts' interest as this scene did.

Summer Camp

When Scouts go to summer camp, either a Scoutmaster or paid advisor must go with them if the Troop attends as a unit. It is hard to close your office for a week and harder yet to get another father to do the same. But, when you decide to do something, it gets done and the chips fall where they may. We elected for Sabattis, a lovely Scout Reservation north of Lake George. We also decided upon a wilderness area in the Reservation since it appeared to us more of a challenge to make our own campsite, rather than using one previously made. Due to a series of car problems, we arrived at 3 p.m. instead of 1 p.m. as planned. It was pouring rain. I checked in immediately and found to my horror that all the boys would have to pass a swim test prior to heading for the campsite, since it could be reached only by canoe. By the time this was finished, it was after 5 p.m. The rain continued to fall and now it was getting colder. We got the canoes and our gear across the lake, but by then almost everything was soaking wet, including some of the dehydrated food we were to eat. We were all getting hungrier by the minute since we hadn't eaten since 11 a.m. that morning. Our campsite was an interesting challenge in dry weather. In wet weather, it looked impossible. Its location was on a steep, rocky slope with thorny bushes everywhere. There were almost no level spots on which to pitch a tent. It was becoming dark. We could not get a fire started and most of the dehydrated food, except breakfast cereal, must be cooked to be edible. As the Scoutmaster, I was feeling pangs of panic. This was a tough way to start the week—hungry, cold and wet. However, we survived the night and the next morning the sun rose bright, beautiful and warm. We dug in the campsite on a series of

ledges which was an interesting and lovely spot as we looked across the Lake. There was a cementing effect upon the Troop from this terrible start that lasted the week and continued for the years ahead. Sometimes life seems to work this way in the presence of adversity.

Competition

Scouts love to compete with each other and against other Troops in Scouting skills. Scoutmasters love to win competitions with their Troop against other Troops. As a result, twice a year Jamborees are held on a regional basis. Troop 60 with two years of experience under its belt was ready to pull out all the stops. We had become experienced in laying out an orderly campsite: Tents in neat rows, cooking area, latrine, work and display area, camp gateway and flagpole—to name but a few. For a month, we worked on a flag-raising and lowering ceremony, and then spent a Saturday cutting trees that would be lashed together for the gateway and flagpole. We were to be the biggest and best in size, quality and sound. The sound was provided by a trumpet player who did beautiful bugle calls as we went through the elaborate ceremony. His name is David Sanborn and the trumpet is now his chosen profession (his professional name “Chase Sanborn”). When we went to the Jamboree, my car looked like a Bell Telephone line truck with logs on top and out the back window. I prayed more than once, it would stay with the car. However, it did, and we won best campsite, best Scout display, and best overall Troop. Never before and never again, did we feel it was worth working this hard but that one day of success was a great excitement for us all. We came home with three wonderful prizes of cooking gear, including a Dutch Oven that we used on many campouts the next year. My dental drill was used to engrave the appropriate information on the pots. Perhaps if seen by future Scouts, it will encourage them in competitive efforts.

Dedication

A few dedicated people who are willing to give more than expected of them, make Scouting possible. I was lucky to have a few such fathers to help me. One incident will be with me always. Scouts don't like to dig. Latrines must be dug and then covered with dirt upon leaving.

Scouts usually dig a wider hole than the box seat placed upon them, since it is easier to dig a wide, shallow hole than a narrow, deep one. Therefore, the average latrine box has a space on either side and it is covered with a tarp for privacy. This is fine in daylight and O.K. with a flashlight in the middle of the night. Russ, who was acting as my Assistant Scoutmaster at this Fall Jamboree, discovered the latrine problem at 2 a.m. with no flashlight. I was not aware of his predicament until the next morning about 5:30 when I got up. He was outside our tent, newly shaven, and smelling like a fresh shower. "Russ, did you drive home?" I inquired. "Had to!" he replied. He had made the mistake most make only once. He fell, almost knee-deep, in a very full latrine. However, this father drove home and then returned immediately so he could help me organize the day's activities. I doubt if he had two hours of sleep since a Scout campsite is normally quite noisy until 2 a.m., and driving home and back must have taken him most of the rest of the night.

I notified all fathers of my desire to resign as Scoutmaster in January with the hope that one of them would come forward and take over by the end of summer camp in August. As I went to the homes of numerous fathers and others, I thought back to the night Dave Hill came to see me with the same problem. It is difficult for boys to understand why you are leaving. We had enjoyed good times together and I had been through with one group of boys, the Scout advancement from Tenderfoot to Eagle Scout. I had enjoyed much of my experience and had come to know fine boys. I feel certain many of them will leave their marks on this world as they come into responsible positions within it. I hope in some small way, I helped them develop a proper attitude for others, and confidence in themselves.