

My Life as a Boy Scout

My father, RGS, had been a Boy Scout in his youth. As an adult he was very interested in having his two sons be involved. I don't remember much about my being a Cub Scout – I definitely was one. In my essay on RGS I did mention the creation of the Owl Hoot newsletter that he (and I?) distributed at Cub Scout meetings. I also believe that my mother, RAPS, served a term as a Den Mother. I don't know if it was for me or for Jim. As you can and will see, they were both supportive of our Scouting.

However, as a Boy Scout, RGS was quite involved as an advisor for merit badges and, although not a Scoutmaster, he did a lot of things on the side to help. He even went along as one of the adults (and as a driver) on some of our overnight camping trips, somewhere in the nearby Michigan woods.

Anyway, he did encourage both Jim and me to rise through the ranks from Tenderfoot to Eagle Scout. I believe it was for Second Class that I had to complete a five-mile hike. As I recall that was mostly on dusty gravel roads with no substantial altitude gain. Oh well, I did end up hiking a lot in my life, which I will describe in an essay elsewhere. Along the way to Eagle one has to pass (i.e, accumulate) a batch of merit badges (on topics such as first aid, bird study, citizenship, canoeing, and lifesaving). These were commemorated with little cloth icons which RAPS dutifully sewed onto my merit badge sash. To be worn at the monthly Boy Scout Meetings to impress all the Tenderfeet in the assembly.

Well, in writing that I decided to go find my sash and see what all I once knew how to do. I *can't* find it! I can't believe that is something I would have thrown away. It must be in a box somewhere along with my Eagle Scout badge, which I *also* cannot find. What I *can* find is a hooked rug that RAPS made after my award displaying that badge and date. Considering how many hours she must have spent making that rug, I will say that was supportive, indeed.

There is a kind of Super-Eagle scouting award called The Order of the Arrow. I was invited to join this order, but today I have no good idea why this award even exists. Was it because I went camping with my troop more than 15 times? Anyway, to pass their initiation I had to fast and stay silent for a day while doing some kind of community service. I survived.

There was another "award" which I and my fellow Arrowers made up out of thin air. We called it the Order of the Silver Buffalo Chip. It only consisted of thin air.

Later, as an Eagle at age 16, I was asked to serve for a year as a Junior Assistant Scoutmaster (wow!) with two other Eagles – Bob Thomas and Dave Long. I'm not sure what we were actually supposed to do at the monthly Scout Meetings, other than to show up and order the young ones to stand tall at attention. I do recall one time bringing my camping knapsack to a meeting to show what all I considered as useful to have along on a hike. I remember that Dave spent some time that night teasing me for having a pair of tweezers in the ditty-bag, and I *still* don't know what his point was for that. Over time I lost track of Long but Bob Thomas and I stayed in touch until quite recently, even after our wives died.

Another perk of being an Eagle was that I could get a summer job as a camp counselor at one of the Detroit-Area Boy Scout Camps. There were two such gigs, the first being at Brighton Lake. I must have been 17 and this was my first time away from home for more than a week or so. I signed on as a kitchen helper. The camp served three meals a day to about 200 boys and staff in a big dining hall. My

job as commissary manager involved greeting the foodstuff delivery trucks that came almost every day, keeping records of what all came in, and storing it away until it was needed. Another of my tasks was to rise early each morning to start the big coffee urn. So that was the year I started drinking coffee. It was just plain awful stuff, but I persevered in drinking it, thinking it was the adult thing to do. About halfway through the summer somebody decided they had enough of that bad coffee and they took the urn apart. What they discovered was that somehow a piece of the metal cover over the heating coils had come off. The coffee was being brewed in direct contact with the burner coils.

Also that summer is when I also began drinking beer. I had a car for the season – RGS considered that I was Trustworthy enough (one of Scouting’s catchwords) to use the old family Chrysler to get there and back. I also developed a group of friends, fellow camp counselors from all over the Detroit area. There were four of us, all about 17, and, of course, all Eagle Scouts. (Don’t ask me to remember their names at this point.) Somehow we were able to talk one of the cooks, a feisty middle-aged lady, into buying us a six-pack of beer. I guess she figured that four of us and just six cans couldn’t get us into too much trouble. And, as it turned out, we didn’t, but I now consider it pretty damn foolish of me to *drive* us away to a secluded spot to commence drinking. Somehow at the end of the year I was able to turn over the Chrysler to the family unscathed.

Another adventure of that summer is when I was christened “Captain Silbar.” The camp had a few small sailboats that responsible counselors could take out alone on the lake. I turned out not to be very responsible as a fledgling sailor. After the second time I capsized my boat, the authorities decided I couldn’t take out a boat alone, anymore.

The other Scout Camp gig was the next summer at the D-Bar-A Dude Ranch, about an hour north of Detroit. This time, on the alleged strength of my being able to type 40-words-per-minute (I actually couldn’t), I was to be the secretary to the camp director. The program there consisted of horseback riding and various shooting sports, such as 22-caliber skeet. I was mostly stuck in the camp office, but there was a weekend (between the arrival of new campers) when a large group of us were to go on a horseback-camping trek. I was assigned to a horse named Mohawk, who should be easy enough for me to ride (being new to the game). As long as Mohawk could see the tail of the horse ahead of him, there was no problem. I guess we were at the end of the line. As we started out, I called out, “Oh!, should I go back and get my guitar for the evening song session?” “Yes, please do.” So I somehow got Mohawk turned around to – reluctantly – go back to the office to pick it up. On getting it and remounting, with my feet barely in the stirrups, Mohawk saw the tail of the horse he was following a long way up ahead. He started *galloping* to get back in line, as I was hanging on to the saddle for my life with the guitar on my back banging and making plenty of racket to inspire Mohawk to run even faster. Things calmed down once we got close to the tail of the horse ahead.