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Gentle Scouters: The attached is an essay I read in a Scout Chat room I peruse. I have the permission of Scouter Dave to reprint it and pass on. He is NOT a local-to-us Scouter, but I think you will find much to agree with here.

See you on the trail, James L.

**All Scouting is Local**

Sun, Jun 24, 2018 8:18 am

**David J. Shipley** (david.shipley@verizon.net)

I’ve missed a lot of the drama with all of the BSA changes.  Yeah, I read the articles but I never realized that there were some Scouters (or former Scouters) that think THE SKY IS FALLING, SCOUTING IS DOOMED and that everyone is RUNNING, not walking, FOR THE EXITS.  Just WOW.  I guess I’ve been too busy to notice our Troop, our Crew, raising a son and working a paying job in between all of that.

Former House Speaker Tip O'Neal would say that all politics are local, I would say all Scouting is local.  I prefer not to get involved with the national culture wars that the BSA finds itself involved in.  Why?  Because Scouting is thriving where I am.

The Troop had six Eagles this year - many of which started Cub Scouts together in the pack (and unfortunately, all of whom are graduating).  We had eight Webelos crossover into the Troop from two different Packs.  Net of incoming and outgoing, we are at 46 Scouts.  That seems to be just about the right size.  The three other Troops in the area reported an increase in the number of crossovers.

In the Troop, we continue to be extremely boy-led and the patrol method has taken hold after making patrols permanent last year.  Ask any Scout who is the most important leader in the troop... four years ago it would be the SM, two years ago the SPL and now it is the PL.  Our annual Troop leadership training campout is listed among the older Scout’s favorite campouts… who would have thought.  After its second year, the older Scouts are teaching what it means to be boy-led and patrol-based as well as what it means to be servant leaders.  It is gratifying to see concepts you’ve introduced taking hold and both amusing and humbling to see your sayings about leadership be taught by one group of Scout leaders to the next.

We picked up 4 ASMs this year, all of whom really get and are excited about boy-led.  Part of the reason is that their sons joined the Troop is that my NYLT trained son functioned as ad hoc Den Chief for the last couple of months of their time as Webelos.  Part of the reason the adults we willing to step up was that they saw, in my son and the other youth leaders, how the program really works to turn boys into men.  When Webelos visit the Troop, we have our SPL and ASPLs talk to the parents about the program.  It emphasizes the boy-led nature of the Troop but also gives the parents the sense that one day, it could be their son up there talking to the adults.

The new crossover Scouts accompanied the Troop on a Wilderness Survival campout in the Pine Barrens in May.  It dropped down to 20 degrees that night and everyone’s water bottles froze.  The next campout featured a bear wandering into our campsite as the Scouts cooked pizzas in Dutch Ovens and a ten-mile hike that was advertised as being "just over five miles" (my bad... I went from memory rather than checking the map).  The new Scouts keep coming back and seem more excited as a result of their adventures.  As one Scout said, "this is what it means to be a Boy Scout."  As I did their Scoutmaster Conferences for the Scout rank, one Scout told me he loves Scouts and that it the only reason he looks forward to Tuesdays (and confessed that he had piano lessons in the afternoon).  Two of the new Scouts have already who have challenged me to chess matches during Summer Camp continuing a longstanding tradition.

We have a Scout with Downs Syndrome and a Scout confined to a wheel chair.  It really warms your heart to see that every Tuesday they are among true friends.  It is amazing to see the Scout Oath and Scout Law at work among the boys.  Our Scouts are a bunch of goofballs, but the Troop provides a safe place for them to experience adventure and a safe place to fail.  There aren’t enough places in life where kids are allowed to fail without an adult swooping in.

My son finished up his position of responsibility as ASPL and is looking forward to finishing his Eagle next year as an 11th grader.  I've told him once he gets his Eagle, he will be a JASM and I’m looking forward to having him to help out in that role.  Much of his Scouting year was outside the Troop.  He was the President of the Crew, the Chapter Chief for his OA Chapter, on NYLT Staff at a neighboring Council (he took NYLT there and was invited back) and is on summer camp staff at a different neighboring council (at the camp our troop goes to every year).  I just dropped him off at summer camp yesterday… it was great to see that camp has really become his second home.  His last quip was, “two week and two days till you’re back with the Troop.”  I have to admit, I would have loved to stayed and spend my summer at camp too.

The Venturing Crew is doing great.  We are around twelve members with another two or three folks interested in joining.  The Crew takes youth-led to a new level.  If nothing else, they have learned how to send and respond to e-mails.  After the adults letting a couple of events not happen due to lack of communication among the youth, they realized that they are truly responsible.  Every time I see the Crew together, I'm just astonished at the bonds of friendship.  It really has become a place where a bunch of goofballs can relax and be themselves and feel truly accepted. The Crew had an end-of-the-school year barbeque and kayaking outing last week. It was great to see a flotilla of kayaks on the lake with the kids just being kids and having fun.  They have a multi-day bike trek and a multi-day canoeing and kayaking trek planned for the summer.  The adventure junkie in me can’t wait.

It seems that fixating on what National comes out with and then looking at the worst possible implications doesn't help the Scouts.  One of my favorite sayings (stolen from Richard Bach) is "says can't when means won't."  That is what my reaction is to a lot of the gloom and doom I sometimes hear.  Whatever the decision, rule or guidance, we decide how to implement it so that we deliver the program we know the Scouts deserve.

Allowing girls to form Troops by National is neutral.  How it works is dependent on how many of the folks here who know the right way to run a program step up.  It is only a nightmare if implemented poorly.  We need to convince people that the only way to do this is to do it right.  It is up to us as Scouters to build the groundwork necessary to have youth-led, patrol-based Scouting that focuses on being a game with a purpose played by youth in the outdoors.  We are the coaches and it is up to us to help the Youth learn to play the game correctly.  Our CO is implementing it right -- separate girl Troop, separate meeting night and letting the youth lead by deciding how much interaction they want to have between the two Troops and the Crew.  To the adults worrying about how it will work, the simple answer is that in a youth-led Troop it isn’t their problem. We have had an amazing response of youth and adults to the idea.  We are up to at least 7 interested girls.  If we build a Troop, they will come.  Whether we agree or disagree with the decision to allow girls, we should do everything in our power to make it succeed - not for the sake of National, but for the good of the Scouts we have promised to serve.

The new G2SS youth protection guidelines are only an issue if you make it one.  Our CO's youth protection policy for many years required two-deep adult leadership in patrol meetings.  Venturing’s youth protection required co-ed adult leadership on outings.  We have put in the hard work so that we have adults that are trained in what boy-led actually means (you observe and then talk to the leader after the meeting like a coach) and what the patrol method is (they are the cornerstone of the Troop).  We have Patrol Leaders who are trained (by the older youth leaders in the Troop) in the leadership concepts of boy-led, patrol method and servant leadership.  That prevents a leadership vacuum that adults instinctively find the need to fill.  We let parents know that Scouting is a safe place to fail - and we let Scouts know it is better to try and fail then not to try at all.  The adults and youth practice the Scout Oath and Scout Law -- it is all there and it works.  On outings, we have enough adults to accompany the Scouts.  We train the adults to be observers.  The adults are last in line on the trail.  The youth are in front, with a newer Scout leading and an older Scout guiding him.  That is the way it is supposed to be.

The last question I ask at Scoutmaster conferences is "are you having fun?"  My answer is a resounding yes.  I'm excited to see the boys take responsibility and lead the Troop.  I'm excited to see the Crew grow into proactive leadership and form amazing bonds.  I loved going to SeaBase with the Troop, I've loved sleeping in Adirondack shelters in 15 degrees as it snowed; I loved doing the Wilderness Survival campout; I've loved having guys over my house to starts fires using magnifying glasses, fire pistons, potassium permanganate and glycerin, batteries and steel wool and a bow drill; I loved going whitewater rafting with the Crew and I'm looking forward to a week at summer camp and a long weekend kayaking trip in Upstate New York.  Best of all, I love the responses I get from Scouts when I ask them if they are having fun.

Every time I become frustrated with adults – be them in our Troop, District, Council or National – I remember why I’m doing what I'm doing.  It is for the Scouts... my Scouts.

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