

Scout Essay, September 2016

To the parents of boys:

If you are like most people, you know that Boy Scouts go camping...and maybe fishing, hiking, or swimming, too. You know that Boy Scouts are supposed to be nice and do good deeds. That about sums up what most people know about Scouting.

That's a good start, but there is so much more. So, I asked some friends who are now between the ages of 30 and 80 to tell me some things that they are absolutely SURE they would *not* have done had they *not* been a Scout and have compiled their responses in the text box, below.

As you think about the things you might want for your son, think of this list of possibilities.

THINGS I DID BECAUSE I WAS A BOY SCOUT

*cooked my own meal on a fire*took a train across the country*canoeed through rough water*filled sandbags in a flood*carried a torch through the woods*mushed a dog sled*worked with someone of a different nationality*shucked oysters*jumped in a lake*watched a thunderstorm from above*ate freeze-dried food*planned an event for 300 people*belonged to something larger than myself*traveled outside my home state*learned tolerance*served on a crew for an 84 foot top rigged gaff schooner*camped in an ice cave*set and met goals*whittled*had a hog roast*used a real research telescope*collected firewood*baked a cobbler in a dutch oven*taught younger kids*gave a presentation*learned first aid*shot a rifle and shotgun*operated a ham radio*sharpened a knife*identified edible plants*waterskied*tied a necktie*folded an American flag*used a budget*rescued someone in trouble*persevered*rowed a boat*gave service to others*learned about poison ivy*milked a goat*climbed a mountain above the clouds*made useful things from rope and logs*saved a drowning child*prepared a survival kit*sat in an arena with 40 thousand other Scouts*made friends I have kept up with for forty years*learned orienteering*took my first airplane flight*rappelled down a cliff*was introduced to wilderness survival*used the CPR I learned*tried geocaching before it was cool*demonstrated how to fix a flat tire*flew through the air on a zip line*acted as a cowboy in Wyoming*canoeed the tranquil Boundary Waters*hiked the Rockies*caught salmon in Alaska*explored caves in Kentucky*built a trebuchet*developed great respect for our service men and women*experienced safe skateboarding*visited the Pro Football Hall of Fame*rowed a boat to a victim in distress*lost a troop leadership election*elected to a leadership position*earned Personal Fitness merit badge*learned to "leave no trace" outdoors*went white water river rafting*toured a prison*learned respect for the Native American cultures*help ranger tag hibernating bears*met people outside of my family socio/economic bubble*had other people counting on ME*worked with kids who didn't look like me*took long bicycle rides*developed a desire to take on challenges*learned the hard way to always "be prepared"*discovered that I could be in miserable weather and be happy*developed compassion for the less fortunate*slept under the stars*became who I am*made a small difference*was brave when I wanted to cry*discovered duct tape can do a lot*carved an arrow out of a stick I still have*found a place to be me*learned that I can disagree without being disagreeable*participated in a national service project*placed flags on graves for Memorial Day*built a ferris wheel out of logs and rope*met the King of Sweden*learned rudimentary firefighting*sailed around the tip of Florida*fried (and ate) fish we just caught*spoke in front of 1000 people*learned from adults I didn't know*got to go scuba diving*discovered spelunking*counted tree rings with a forester*did outdoorsy stuff with my Dad*climbed the highest mountain in the lower 48 states*built a 10 foot fire*went to British Columbia*learned obscure constellations*planted a tree*planned a meeting agenda*hoisted food in a tree to keep the bears away*read a topographic map*floated down a river for days and days*kayaked past moose on the bank*mountain biked in God's country*used my first computer program*edited a newsletter*spent the night alone in the

woods**dug a latrine pit***hiked 20 miles in one day***ate a prickly pear***performed a skit in front of 7000 people***helped an old lady across the street***hunted for arrowheads***built a handicap ramp***sang at a senior living center***slept in a snow hut our troop made***purified water***portaged a 75 pound canoe on ancient trails***learned to identify dozens of trees***slept on a frozen lake with a dog-sled full of supplies***led my friends to plan an event***flew on an airplane copilot seat***backpacked rim to rim at the Grand Canyon***built and balanced a budget for a \$12,000 event***was honored by my troop mates***learned to face my fears***rode a horse***packed a burro for a long trail ride***shot a bow and arrow***made fire by friction***learned about sustainability***began a lifelong path in my duty to God***found patriotism inside myself***had the joys of servant leadership revealed to me***had a ball with kids I didn't know before at summer camp***got my first business job because I was an Eagle Scout***met the President in the Oval Office***set up my own tent when I was way too tired***learned that the troop Moms could out hike us***fought through the cold to cook other people breakfast***learned things I didn't know I was learning until years later***swam one mile straight on a lake***visited the Arctic Circle***laughed with my friends and old guys around a fire***learned to inventory equipment***attended the World Jamboree in Japan***toured national battleground sites***learned from lots of mistakes because of my Scoutmaster***developed a habit of cheerfully serving others***learned how to solder plumbing together***rode on a Blackhawk helicopter***recognized that helping others helps ME even more***helped build a model railroad town***got to run red lights with the governor's police escort***held an American bald eagle***built a boat with my Scoutmaster**
I became a man

(NOTE: this list can be printed out as a poster)

This list of amazing experiences reported by my Scout friends is just a sample of the fun adventures and character-building trials anyone who has been a Boy Scout for a few years could easily duplicate.

On top of that, Scoutmasters are expert talent scouts and cheerleaders. I was a Scoutmaster for a long time and I know that the one-two punch of collaboration between a Scoutmaster and a parent is more than most kids can resist! It is a powerful combination of influences that nurture, develop, and expose the boy to exactly what he needs most, exactly when he needs it.

If you want your son to gain greater perspective on the world, notice above how many adults mentioned that *they had met the first people unlike themselves through the Scouts*. Scouting can help your sons meet and get to know their first doctors, electricians, lawyers, plumbers, business executives, musicians, and welders. Through Scouting, your son will surely befriend people of different religions, different ages, races, and mindsets.

If your son struggles with teamwork, consider what it will mean for him to be a part of a patrol of six to eight who must work together to plan a menu on the weekend campout, buy the food, carry it into the site, store and shield it away from the critters, collect firewood, cook the food, and then clean up the pans! Do this when it is 37 degrees and raining cats and dogs, and you get a real sense of what teamwork can be!

Imagine that your son might need to learn to persist with things he starts. Scouting is the way to go for him. When a boy first meets his first Eagle Scout he may be eight years old. His oldest conscious memories span from the time he is three...that is five years. Because many boys don't complete their Eagle requirements until approaching their eighteenth birthday, most will have persisted for ten years...fully twice the time elapsed from their oldest conscious memory. Fully half their lives will have involved fulfilling their resolve to become like the older boys they so long ago sought to emulate.

For boys who seem aimless and without a passion, Scouting exposes and guides them safely and enjoyably to over 100 merit badge topics and numerous ranks. They'll experience myriad activities and experts in those fields they would not encounter in their school or religious programs.

What about the young boy who isn't too sure who he is? Scouts can help him discover what he's made of when he tested by cold weather, or being challenged to hike five more miles. A boy who is acclimated to creature comforts will encounter the mailman's nemesis: snow, rain, heat, and gloom of night. A boy who's a loner will actually feel at home in a troop of boys - and over time begin to see it as his safe harbor - his springboard to the world. When that Troop travels or participates in the activities of the larger Scouting world, he'll feel part of something bigger, much bigger than himself. A Scout comes to see his place in the world beyond the oyster from which he sprung.

A boy tempted by his sticky fingers or loose tongue will raise his right hand every time the Scouts get together and promise to do his best....to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful. Over time, he'll also become courteous, brave, and reverent. Boys neither enter nor exit Scouts as saints. But the cathedral of the forest, persistently encouraging words from his leaders, and a sense of belonging among peers will certainly drive him to develop respect, empathy, and love for others. *All* others.

A squeamish boy in Scouting will dig and be taught to use a latrine, catch a frog, handle a snake, clean a fish, and dip his hands in mud. He'll scrape garbage into a smelly can, pull the innards out of a chicken to prepare it to be roasted on a homemade rotisserie, and will get a face full of spider webs while running merrily through the woods.

The shy boy will grow accustomed to the rough-and-tumble of older boys. But he'll find kindness and an open hand from those same older boys, in a way he would not experience with upper classmen at school. I once invited our school principal to a Scout family picnic; he was amazed to watch the dozen or so juniors and seniors in *his* high school, playing soccer against the 30 middle school kids massed against them. Not one older kid (many of whom were already shaving) harmed a single hair on the heads of those younger boys. No one cried, no one got hurt -- and no one failed to have a crazy-good time in a game they made up on the spot. The principal could not believe his eyes: after forty years in education, he'd not seen such a harmonious and collegial mix of ages. He remarked that it seemed more like a family reunion game.

A boy who's never had a reason to develop compassion will find himself in a troop with a boy who's disabled, who may have impaired hearing or sight, or a type of mental challenge. He will get to know and love that boy he once avoided due to fear, discomfort, or general lack of knowledge.

A boy from a one-parent household especially benefits from being exposed to quality adults of various ages, each there to promote his health, safety, and personal development. Detailed and awakening conversations will occur while sitting on a log with men who are very different than he, but whom he will grow to respect and admire. Men will call him by name and care about him in so many growth-prompting ways that he will surprise his mother back home when he picks up his room or washes a dish without being asked.

If your little boy is afraid of things...of water, heights, being away from home, or creepy crawly things... Scouting will have a way of making him into a swimmer, rock climber, traveler, or naturalist. That's what we do. Scouting has the power to develop a boy into the man HE aspires to be.

If you would like your son to learn to better manage his time, Scouting will not *detract* from his accomplishments at school or on the gridiron. It will enhance them. In the last year before retiring as Scoutmaster, five boys from my troop were accepted to an Ivy League School. Every one of them was an Eagle Scout and each had distinguished himself in at least one or two other fields of endeavor. Over the years, my own little troop down the street from my house had the state champion debater, a lacrosse All-American, our state's fastest track star, the lead actor in our high school play (for three years in a row), a young man elected to the Boy Scouts' highest youth office (who thus met two Presidents, and traveled the world as a cultural ambassador for Scouting).

If you want your son to be exposed to "the thing" that will drive his life, note this: Steven Spielberg, the much-awarded film maker, sparked his interest in film behind the lens of his dad's 8mm movie camera as an eleven-year-old Scout, earning the Photography merit badge.

A very dear friend, now a Three Star Admiral, committed himself to leadership when he saw it in action among older boys in his troop.

Jay Leno, dyslexic and somewhat awkward, was identified in an early campout for his special skill of making people smile. He was encouraged when adult leadership in his troop made him the troop "Cheerleader", a perfect start to his life of showmanship.

A young Eagle Scout I once advised attended the National Boy Scout Jamboree, where he and his older buddies chose to enroll in classes to pursue the somewhat more obscure merit badges available there—Metallurgy, Archeology, Traffic Safety, Fingerprinting, Plumbing, Welding, Nuclear Science, Sculpture. Guess what? After taking Dog Care, he came home and told his Mom he wanted to pursue pre-med in college. Today he's training to be a veterinarian.

John Lithgow, renowned actor of stage and screen, first discovered that he could mesmerize a crowd when asked to perform a skit at his Boy Scout camp.

Another outstanding friend and businessman, who once ran the largest publishing company in the English language, told me that as a kid, he was small of stature and weak in the water. In fact, he avoided water at all costs. But his Scoutmaster knew better. He made sure the boy got into the water, learned to swim with the best of them, and became involved in row boating. That man has now endowed Scouting harbors and waterfront projects in multiple Scout camps, lavishing several millions of dollars on his commitment to safety and joy in water sports.

I can go on and on. Nearly every Scout friend identified how the man he is today was influenced by some caring adult who inched him in one direction or another to find his passion. I know *hundreds* of people who could write a most powerful list of *Things I Did Because I Was A Boy Scout*.

So whatever it is that you want to develop or encourage in your son, being an active Boy Scout will help you achieve your goals for him.

A boy who joins Scouting will see things, do things, and BE things that he never imagined. He will emerge as a man of character with a passion and a mission.

And isn't that really what you want most for your son?