

What Makes a Scout

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When they asked me to give a speech about Scouting, I thought, “This is going to be easy.” But as I tried to think of all the things that I wanted to say about Scouting I realized this meeting could go on all night.

Simply put, Scouting teaches young boys to be good citizens and trains them to become leaders. But how? Since the earliest recorded times, people have looked to the wisdom of lawgivers to guide them along their paths of duty and honor. From the Code of Hammurabi to the modern court system, most laws that people have written have begun with a “Do” or a “Don’t”, with a “You must” or a “You must not”. They either command or prohibit. But the Scout Law does neither. It’s simply a statement of fact, of what’s natural for a Scout, and of what a Scout **is**. **A Scout is: Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent.** Teaching Scouts to live by these words, in every part of their daily lives, is how Scouting makes good citizens and leaders.

Lord Baden Powell, the founder of Scouting said, “Scouting is a game with a purpose.” You’ve all seen pictures of a Boy Scout helping an old lady across the street. A Scout is helpful. But there is so much more to it than that. I’ve picked up bags and bags of litter on road clean-ups, squeezed thousands of cups of lemonade for our Troop’s sponsor’s annual summer festival, painted walls, cleaned, dug holes, cut wood, collected boxes and boxes of canned goods for food banks, retired American flags at a military ceremony ... the list goes on and on. Yes, it was all considered work, but we worked together and made it fun.

Scouting provides opportunities for boys that they would probably never get to try otherwise. On a scout outing I got to fly in a prop plane around the Point in Pittsburgh and out to Kittanning. I’ve canoed (and unexpectedly gone swimming); whitewater rafted, rappelled inside a cave, and hiked the battlefields of Gettysburg. I’ve camped in the pouring rain, the freezing cold, and the sweltering heat (OK, those may not be enticing examples). I’ve looked through a telescope, shot a model rocket, toured a paper mill, and researched my family tree. Where else would you get to try all those things?

Some say that playing sports make a man by teaching boys good sportsmanship and making boys strong. However, each time a Boy Scout says the Scout Oath he promises, in part, to keep himself “... physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.” So, contrary to sports, Scouting is for everyone. It’s not the most capable part of the group on an outing while others wait on the bench hoping for a turn. Everyone goes; everyone works together. Older scouts teach while younger scouts learn, until they are the older scouts and then they become the teachers. Everyone has something to contribute.

Scouting also provides opportunities to explore areas of personal interest through Cub Scout arrow points and activity pins and Boy Scout merit badges. As you can see by my sash I’ve taken advantage of checking out a few. Cubs begin with simple skills like cooking meals or

making kites. As Webelos they can study geology, build toolboxes from wood, perform plays and explore the law of gravity. Boy Scout merit badges are meant to prepare boys for adulthood. Last year over 96,000 American Boy Scouts earned the First Aid merit badge. I would definitely want one of them with me in an emergency. Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, and Citizenship in the World merit badges teach boys that what we do affects others and what is happening on the other side of the world affects us all. When I earned Personal Management merit badge I had to prepare a budget. My counselor told me a budget is **NOT** just writing down that I spent the entire contents of my wallet and it is **NOT** hoarding all my money in a box. It's planning what I am going to save and what I can afford to spend. Swimming, Hiking, and Cycling merit badges encourage fitness for life. But beyond that there are badges to explore hobbies: Gardening, Theater, Model Building, Radio, and Coin Collecting, (I looked through over \$500 worth of half dollars until I found a 1999 one. The bank tellers were my best friends that summer). There are badges to explore public service: Fire Safety, Emergency Preparedness, and Crime Prevention. Other badges explore careers: Engineering (I really enjoyed that one), Architecture, Journalism, Auto Mechanics, Medicine, and Law (I did that one and found it is not a career for me!). And of course what would Scouting be without outdoor skills? Wilderness Survival, Camping, Pioneering (We built a three story tower with only logs and twine. There is nothing more satisfying than everyone climbing to the top and getting their picture taken), and Hiking (I don't remember how I got talked into the 20 mile hike for that one, maybe because my dad was the counselor).

All along the way the work, the learning, and the fun are put together into two main awards that scouts earn. The Arrow of Light is the highest award in Cub Scouting and the Eagle Scout rank is the highest award in Boy Scouts. Boys that have taken the time and had the perseverance to have the privilege of wearing these patches show everyone they are ready to become a useful part of society. Not only have Eagle Scouts learned about the skills needed as adult, they have also served as leaders to others. They have performed an Eagle Project – a service project of their choice. That project isn't that boy being helpful to others, it's that boy serving as the crew boss while his friends and scouts perform the service. The Eagle candidate has to arrange the work schedule, make sure supplies will be ready, make sure workers will be there on time, and deal with any last-minute problems that always arise. And when it is all through he has to provide a report detailing the project and the work completed. Sounds an awful lot like many of your careers, doesn't it?

But when they turn 18 years old, when these boys are ready to be good citizens, what will they do? How will they put their Scouting to use?

- 26 of the first 29 astronauts were former scouts
- Of the 12 men to walk on the moon's surface, 11 were involved in Scouting.
- The 108th Congress contains 216 former scouts and 22 Eagles.
- Gerald Ford, an Eagle Scout, became President of the United States
- Steven Spielberg, the famous movie producer, is also an Eagle Scout
- Hank Aaron, Walter Cronkite, Harrison Ford, Bill Gates, Bruce Jenner, John F. Kennedy, and John Ritter were all Scouts in their youth.

Of any one hundred boys who become Scouts, it must be confessed that thirty will drop out in their first year. Perhaps this may be regarded as a failure, but in later life all of these will remember that they had been Scouts and will speak well of the program.

Of the one hundred, only rarely will one ever appear before a juvenile court judge. Twelve of the one hundred will be from families that belong to no church. Through Scouting, these twelve and many of their families will be brought into contact with a church and will continue to be active all their lives. Six of the one hundred will become pastors.

Each of the one hundred will learn something from Scouting. Almost all will develop hobbies that will add interest throughout the rest of their lives. Approximately one-half will serve in the military, and in varying degrees, profit from their Scout training. At least one will use it to save another person's life and many will credit it with saving their own.

Four of the one hundred will reach Eagle rank, and at least one will later say that he valued his Eagle above his college degree. Many will find their future vocation through merit badge work and Scouting contacts. Seventeen of the one hundred boys will later become Scout leaders and will give leadership to thousands of additional boys.

Only one in four boys in America will become a Scout, but it is interesting to note that of the leaders in this nation; in business, religion and politics; three out of four were Scouts.

This story will never end. Like the "Golden Pebble" of service dropped into the human sea it will continue to ripple in ever-widening circles, influencing the characters of men down through unending time.

But you mustn't take Scouting for granted. You can do nothing more important for young people today than to continue your support of Scouting. Thank you for helping to make Boy Scouting available in the Pittsburgh area. Your time and support are appreciated and will make this world a better place.