

Balancing Individualism and Teamwork: The Impact of Scouting on My Character 160806

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One of the great things about Scouting is that it promotes a strong “Spirit of Adventure”, where we get off the couch, put down our electrical entertainment devices, and go out where we don’t have all of the niceties of modern living. This doesn’t mean that we don’t thrive, for many times on our trips we were able to cook really great meals (great fried chicken and shrimp) that showed we did far better than just survive. Sometimes, though, even when we had only cheese and crackers, we still had a great time. And sleeping under a canopy of stars and moon was fantastic!

When I look back on my life, I believe that my Scouting experience actually shaped my character much more than church or family, at least at that time. That doesn’t mean that church and family weren’t great influences on me, but somehow Scouting changed me more. When I first became a Scout, I was the perfect definition of the 90-lb weakling. But I grew in strength, and ended up hiking and bicycling many miles and camping out many “moons”. When I started, I couldn’t really swim, but later swam a mile and achieved the swimming and lifesaving merit badges!

My growth was due to the fact that I participated in stressful situations under good, supervised leadership; I knew that I had to get the job done if I wanted to get back home from a hiking or camping trip. It made me physically stronger and more appreciative of all the blessings that I had. It allowed me to get away from the ordinary structures of life and see them from a distance. It filled me with the joy of doing and being, of putting my whole heart into something as I carried my pack along the trail. It gave me the most memorable experiences, with mountaintop views of this amazing country. And this growth experience enabled me to put that same enthusiasm into my spiritual life as well, which I hold to be very important.

Scouting teaches individual performance in a team setting – this is like any actual sports or other type of team. But Scouting taught me that these two things must be properly balanced: you must take care of yourself (on your own), but you must take care of the patrol and troop as well. This is a lesson that has been very beneficial through 40 years of working with other people. “Do your best,” but work hard to make everyone win!

We are here to honor those who have advanced in rank and have achieved other distinctions. I’m sure there have been many adventures along that path. As Helen Keller once said, “Life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing.” We must remember that we are not in the adventure alone! I would like to encourage you to take advantage of your opportunities to lead and make others stronger in your next adventure!