

The following thoughts was delivered last weekend at the Pack 926 Blue & Gold Banquet dinner by Jim Greene, an Assistant Scoutmaster with Troop 1 Southborough.

Scouting is the greatest gift I have given my boys, and myself. *And, that is before I agreed to put on the brown shirt.*

I have two boys, one is finishing his last year at Algonquin, and the other. . . will be heading there in the fall.

I can remember sitting at these banquets a number of years ago. Life was hectic with activities like Sunday school, soccer, basketball, baseball and yes, cub scouts. Here is the thing that is hard for you parents to understand right now: *Almost all of it ends.* Few of these boys will be three season athletes at Algonquin. You parents will not be spending all that time driving or coaching them. They are not coming to you for help on their homework, *because it is quicker to Google the answer.* They are texting or chatting online with a ton of friends you never even meet *who all live in Northborough.* There are hormones, acne, jobs, and girls. And then they learn to drive and are always hustling somewhere else.

Ultimately, we are all working to make our kids independent so when it happens at this accelerated pace, I hear many parents who just shrug their shoulders and hope that they did the best they could to give their kids a good foundation. These are the same people who after talking with me for a while usually say *"I wish I had known more about scouting"* OR worse *"I wish my son had stayed with scouting."*

Why?

First, to be selfish, because it is an activity that we parents get to participate in with our boys all the way until they graduate. Our troop camps 11 months of the year. If you don't ski, maybe you bike, maybe you hike or could paddle a canoe. Come on every trip or come only once a year. Spend the whole trip sharing a tent with your son and talking, OR, just hang with the adults, be the driver and get a chance to watch and listen to your son interact with his peers and better yet, the other adults. It is all quality time that other parents outside of scouting don't get and eventually your son with thank you for it – *so I'm told.*

Second, because that motto is true - 'Be Prepared' – is what scouting is all about.

Imagine the difference on the first day of 6th grade between that anxious student and the boy scouts crossing over here today. The boy scout has about a dozen Helpful, Friendly, Cheerful, Kind and Loyal older scout friends in 7th and 8th grade. The boy scout spent a few months in the troop working with older scouts and adults, learning to quickly embrace new ways of doing things and make new friends. The boy scout went to scout camp and spent his day moving between Merit Badge classes with different instructors and fellow students each period, just like they will experience in middle school. What about in a couple short months when the entire 6th grade goes on the Stone trip and some kids are going away from home for the first time. The scout has probably been on 3-4 trips with a bunch of friends and built up their self-confidence by learning to interact with the adults in their troop.

I once had an older scout who went to a different school tell me about something they witnessed an adult doing that seemed odd at Mount Wachusett when my older son was there for ski RAP. It turned that the adults was not with the Trottier group. But think about that level of Loyalty and Bravery for a then 15 year old to have to come forward and say something to me. That's because scouting teaches Values. We don't just recite the 12 words of the Scout Law each week and tuck it away like knowing the presidents or the state capitals. We also recite the Scout Oath to do our best to live it. We discuss what that means and how it can help us stay out of trouble and be a positive influence on others.

Scouting through rank requirements and Merit Badges teaches tons of practical life skills from knots, and first aid to cooking, financial management, and personal fitness. Scouting has a consistent emphasis on the importance of Community and Citizenship which we experience through various service projects that we do all year round and by letting the boys lead the troop.

And oddly, I think the greatest way we help scouts to be successful is by giving them the opportunity to fail. A boy led troop can seem chaotic, and loud, and sometimes a little dis-organized. Where adults might cover a topic in a 10 minute presentation, the scouts might take 40 and require repeatedly getting everyone's attention.

But, you know what? In that time, the boys leading will have learned what works and what did not. Their next presentation will take less time, it will grab attention faster, and they will have asked older scouts or leaders for tips on how to speak to and control a room. And, the boys in the audience may be rowdier listening to a fellow scout, but are actually more likely to remember the subject when it came from one of their peers and not an adult.

Does a classroom where you are being graded or a sports team where you are trying to win the game have such forgiveness? In Scouting we create an environment where it is ok to fail, so that makes it ok to experiment and find what works for you.

And the studies show it works – scouts, on average more than their peers, grow up to appreciate what they have, be thrifty savers, take care of themselves and their environment, care about their communities, and respect and care for others.

And boys, if all this preparing, growing, maturing, and learning sounds boring, let me tell you. With the scouts, I have walked on glaciers, climbed mountains, ridden a bike down a mountain, skied, rafted, canoed, zip lined, swam in glacier water, kayaked with dolphins, walked right by a huge porcupine, a mountain goat, deer so close it could spit on me, a sleeping bear, and a very very awake moose. The other stuff is just what we talk about while having the greatest adventures the boys can think of. Because they decide what we do.

Parents, don't make the mistake of thinking your son is too busy for scouting. Scouting will wait for those other activities to quiet down and will be there to help prepare your son to be prepared for life.

Thank you.