

### Mr Wilbur's Last Scoutmaster's Minute September 27<sup>th</sup> 2011

I had a great dilemma as to what to write about tonight. I have been filing away thoughts about my LAST Scoutmaster minute for several years. But somehow everything I had collected seemed irrelevant.

Hopefully, the new Scoutmaster will, from time to time, let me have an occasional Scoutmaster Minute but tonight this is my last \*official\* one.

So I guess I want to take SEVERAL minutes tonight to explain some of the "Vision" which has steered me as your Scoutmaster over the past 25 years. Please indulge me here... Baden Powell got to say goodbye to \*his\* Scouts many many times!

For reasons that I don't fully understand, I continue to be driven to be involved in Scouting since I joined as a Cub Scout in Pack 69 at Thomas Elementary School in 1963.

I've had my triumphs (and my tribulations) in my 56 years. My youth was pretty uneventful. I grew up with a single mom who re-married when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. As a Cub Scout, I got my Arrow of Light and crossed over into Scouting at age 11. Like so many other kids, I remember not getting elected into OA when everyone else felt I should have been elected and being so elated when I finally got in.

I remember the copperhead snake that climbed out of my gear in my tent that eventually ended up biting my Scoutmaster. I then had to take charge of the troop until another leader could get there the next day. Back then Eagle Scout were really rare. And like most other Scouts back then I earned my Eagle too late to complete any palms.

My original troop eventually folded and I found myself needing a new home.

Who would have known that fateful day about 30 years ago when I walked into this room and found a room full of energetic young kids playing "Kick the Eraser" for three hours and going home would change my life! The next week I returned and they played exactly the same game again and went home. No program, no instruction, just a 3 hour game!

After everyone had left, I asked George Gray (the Scoutmaster) why there was no program? And he replied with a huge sigh, "I know, but its' just me running the troop by myself and I don't have the time to conduct a proper program too".

I knew I was needed here and decided to stay and the two of us re-built the Troop. A few years later, the Scoutmaster's wife told George, "It's time for you to step down"! By then there was a young adult that wanted to be Scoutmaster. I was perfectly willing to let him do the job but the Troop youth went to the committee and said if \*HE\* becomes Scoutmaster they would all quit! The next week I reluctantly took over the job and the rest is history!

Well, the Troop recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I was playing with a little math and realized that I have been Scoutmaster for more than half as long as this Troop has been in existence! (Good grief I feel old)...

I'm actually old enough to remember the years of "B. C." that's "before computers". Life was all lot simpler when "boot up" and "log on" was something that you did when you were merely trying to warm up your feet up by holding them by the hot fire. Get it? (boot up) and (log on)???

Baden-Powell said a Scoutmaster should be an older brother leading his younger brothers in the game of Scouting. That spirit has always guided me. I have several hundred younger brothers now spread all across the country.

I have worked with boys dealing with suicide, abuse issues, dying parents, etc. I remember getting a call from one parent because she could not control her unstable son that was out of control and punching holes in the walls. She wondered if I could come over and try to calm him down. When I arrived he was still screaming and throwing things at his parents. And when I ordered him to stop... He DID! (Then we all had a long talk).

I've since experienced the deaths of Scouts and other Scouters. The hardest thing I had to ever do was to organize a Troop 374 Color Guard to carry a casket of a 14 year old Star Scout that was killed in a tragic 4 wheeler accident.

My friends have teased me for years asking if I planned to stay in Scouting until my death. I've always told them that I would stay in Scouting as long as it stayed fun.

I've been a Scout Leader for 38 years. I've served on staff for Camporees and was a Camporee Camp Advisor in the late 1970's. Wood Badge, staff for all sorts of Leader Training and Roundtable Staff too. I have 32 Eagle Scouts linked to my history.

Over the years, I have attended a Summer Camp for every year I have been in Boy Scouting. (That's 45 of them if you are trying to count in your head). I have not missed a single OA event since my election in 1969. I've earned too many awards to list. Some of them were simple training awards. Many of them were higher awards like my Silver Beaver.

More recently, I attended the National Jamboree. Over the years, I had dreamed of attending a Jamboree, never ever thinking that it might be a possibility for me!

I am telling you all of this; not to blow my horn, but to show that my Scouting years have been lengthy and rewarding. I have many wonderful memories that I will always cherish.

There are two favorite things I can remember while being Scoutmaster. First was the several page letter I got from Life Scout Josh Karnowski apologizing for not listening to me when he was 16 years old! And the 2<sup>nd</sup> thing I cherish is when an Eagle Scout chose to give his Dad's pin to \*me\* instead of his real dad who was still living.

If I ever decided to leave Scouting, I feel I could not do so without the need of a 12-step program. Fortunately I haven't reached that point yet.

But, I've known for a long time that it's time for someone else to take over as Scoutmaster. It's not that I am doing a bad job... But I'm not quite as passionate about it as I used to be. I see the spark I once had in that guy (over there) who is replacing me and I think he will do well by the troop. I don't intend to disappear. Too much of this program is still very special to me (even though the PLC DID vote to no not have a last Haunted House).

But I'd just like to not always be the first person here and be the guy who has to stay to lock. Someone else can now keep those well intentioned adults from helping too much, and also do all those other little things that come with the Scoutmaster's job.

Scouts, next week, I will no longer be wearing this patch on my shoulder.

As I have already said... I'm not going anywhere... Troop 374 is in very good hands. It is just the right time to give another man a chance to see what he can do with our troop.

Mr. Kobel is more than ready to apply his ideas and his vision to this job!

So to Nick and the Troop Committee:

What have I learned in the last 56 years? Sadly, I've learned that no matter how much you care, some people just don't care back. I've learned that no matter how many friends you have, if you are their pillar, you will feel lonely and lost at the times you need them most.

But there will be the great times too! Witnessing the mental, emotional and spiritual growth of your Scouts. It doesn't get any better than that. Those moments when a scout makes a small but important good choice, and becomes in a small but important way a different person. Like when that new Scout at his first summer camp comes to you with a huge smile on his face and says, "Gee Thanks Mr. Kobel, I'm having a great time at Camp"

Another thing I know is that 90% of the work is done by only 10% of the people. Doesn't make it right but it is a fact of life! Just look around... The parents that really need to get more involved are not even here tonight.

To run a successful troop, dedication is a requirement! The troop must take priority over your desire to attend social activities. I missed countless "fun" things over the years because it conflicted with a Troop meeting or other activity or even the Wednesday Swim night.

Your continual goal needs to be to create a troop of boys, where they feel it's their troop, their program. They pursue their dreams each year as outlined in their annual plan. Boys working together sharing experiences, with a couple of adults tagging along to quietly and gently provide some direction and guidance.

Of course, there IS one thing that I learned over all these years is plagiarism. Don't try to do everything yourself!

And remember that many times your scouts are experiencing things for their FIRST TIME!

As we grow older... as we gain life experiences... it is normal that our passion and our sense of wonder diminish. But there can only ever be one "First".

Every time there is a "First" it must be their BEST "First" experience! You only get that one chance for it to be their best "First". Whether it is their first campout or the first time they step to the edge of a cliff and looking down before a rappel... There is only ONE "First time"!

Never lose that feeling of giddiness inside when you watch a young Scout who has just re-entered the room after going before a Board of Review; watching him standing there, scratching the sides of his pockets or wringing his hands as he awaits the results.

And to the Parents:

**DON'T MAKE EXCUSES** for your kids! Don't do anything for your son that he can do himself!

Let him pack his own gear. Make him call the Scoutmaster when he has decided to not attend something we were expecting him to be at! You can hand him the phone, but make him do everything else! They will never learn to be responsible if they are always given an excuse by mom or dad. And they will never become independent if they never have to do anything for themselves!

Continuing with the Parents:

Troop 374 is very fortunate to have a very large committee of leaders. But, unlike your school teachers, remember that they are only volunteers. They are not experts. They don't get a salary. They're your next door neighbors. They're not perfect. They are just ordinary people just like you. They don't have any more spare time or energy than you do, they all work full time and juggle their schedules and try to keep it all together as best they can.

The only difference is that they believe in what Boy Scouting has to offer. So much so, that they contribute their time, their miles, and their talents to help your sons grow in Scouting.

Scout leaders have to buy more than one uniform. They complete mountains of camping forms, budgets, and registration forms, and fill their homes with boxes of paperwork that you will never see. We are ALL required to take WAY too many training courses that seem to expire before you have had a chance to use them. And there are countless meetings outside our weekly meeting such as Roundtable, OA and special staff meetings.

Leaders must struggle to get parents involved who try to convince us; "That they don't have the time to drive on outings or help at meetings". But, we rejoice at the generosity of those that do manage to help.

And what do I have to say to the Scouts?

How many of you think that we adults expect too much out of you?

How many of you HATE it when we criticize something you have done? (Or haven't done)?

Well, whether it is your parents, your teachers, your soccer coach, or maybe even your good old scoutmaster...

And they get on your case to the point where you think is too much... Remember... That is a good thing!

When you are screwing up and no one is telling you about it anymore, then THAT is the time to worry about it!

When you see yourself screwing up and no one is saying anything... That is a very bad place to be.

If we no longer criticize you then that means we have given up on you and they no longer care.

Your critics are the ones that know you and love you and care about you!!!

And lastly to every single person that is involved with this Troop:

Please pay attention to your calendar! There is nothing worse than spending hours planning an event to only learn that there are only a handful of participants! Or worse having an event sneak up on you and you are not prepared for it. I have watched members of this troop (some of which are in this room right now) seemingly schedule family events that appear to intentionally conflict with our calendar! Why would they do that? Instead you need to PLAN and arrange your calendar to attend our events. Not just only attend the activities when it is convenient for you. And when there IS an unavoidable conflict, don't hide that information from everyone! Speak up! Let everyone know early in our planning process you will not be able to attend.

Yes, I acknowledge we are sometimes slow in getting the word out and sometimes the information on the Website is screwed up too! But maximum participation by EVERYONE is the only way to having a successful program! And yeah... I know sometimes we have changed dates at the last second too! Proper planning is sooooo important and we need to be doing a better job of not switching a date at the last minute! Doing so is not fair to anyone!

And in closing... Remember... as I said earlier... The committee is made of only volunteer leaders. Please be patient if they appear distracted or frustrated or overwhelmed at times. Forgive them if they are not the kind of Boy Scout Leader you would be if you had the time to be doing their job. Instead, provide them with encouragement or offer your help.

They are, after all, only mentors... Volunteers who have taken an oath to give these boys, your boys, the most precious gift they have to offer -- the gift of time.