

AND TO OBEY TH



The Scoutmaster's conjuring trick.

“Education is about more than reading, writing and creating good workers. At its heart, it’s about developing well-rounded citizens who will help build a strong, caring and compassionate society.”

– Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, 2006.

“The following scheme is offered as a possible aid towards putting on a positive footing the development, moral and physical, of boys of all creeds and classes, by a means which should appeal to them while offending as little as possible the susceptibilities of their elders.”

– Baden-Powell, 1906.

A while back, Susan Muehlherr, Editor of *The Leader*, gave me a challenge: pick some aspect of the Scouting program, and write a piece on how it is relevant to Canadian society today. My initial reaction was, “Why me...I’m the history guy!”

But once I thought about it a little bit, I started to realize that through reading all of the dusty old tomes in my Scouting library, I’ve learned more than just historical facts — I’ve gained some insight into what made Scouting a success in the first place.

Many people involved with Scouting today point at the “competition” as reason for our declining membership; hockey and soccer, homework and video games. Others claim that Scouting isn’t “cool enough” for the youth of today. But society wasn’t really so different a hundred years ago:

“There are thousands of boys being wasted daily through being left to become characterless, and therefore, useless wasters, a misery to themselves and an eyesore and a danger to the nation.”

– Baden-Powell, 1919.

Illustration: B.P.'s Varsity of Life book

THE SCOUT LAW

by Steve Bobrowicz

In A Handbasket

Canada prides itself as a nation for the social advances we have made over the past century. Beginning with the suffrage movement which gave women the vote in 1918, Canada has become a world leader in championing human rights. But despite these advances, in many ways our society, especially in our youth and young adults, is degenerating at an alarming rate. Consider some recent headlines:

Vancouver BC, March 2004:

“Bertuzzi Breaks Moore’s Neck With On-Ice Cheap Shot.”

Collingwood ON, April 2005:

“Cyclist Files Million-Dollar Lawsuit After Falling Off Mountain Bike in Wilderness Area.”

Ottawa ON, July 2006:

“Police Seeking Revellers Who Urinated On National War Memorial.”

Halifax NS, October 2006:

“Booze, Dirty Dancing Stop The Music At Halifax Schools.”

There have always been hoodlums and vandals and disenfranchised youth, just as there have always been self-righteous adults ready to berate them. However, looking over the past hundred years, there has never been a time when the importance of respect, integrity and morality seems lacking in an entire generation.

Character Counts!

Educators and politicians have recognized this alarming trend; many jurisdictions have introduced “character education” into school curriculum. Unfortunately, character isn’t something that can be readily taught on a blackboard, or assigned as homework. It is a way of thinking, of acting in the community. And it is learned, not by lesson, but by example. B.-P. recognized this, and identified it as the Aim of Scouting:

“The aim of the Scout training is to improve the standard of our future citizenship, especially in Character and Health; to replace Self with Service, to make the lads individually efficient, morally and physically, with the object of using that efficiency for service for their fellow-men.”

– Baden-Powell, *Aids to Scoutmastership*, 1919.

The Essence of Scouting

Ask any youth member today what Scouting is about, and you’ll probably get answers such as “camping”, “hiking”, “games” and “fun”. But none of those things really describe the essence of Scouting.

There are two components of the Scouting program which distinguish it from all other youth organizations: the Promise and Law, and the Patrol System.

The Patrol System (including Sixes), effectively run, is critical for achieving the Aims of Scouting as described by B.-P. It is in the patrol environment that the greatest lessons of character are achieved: leadership, responsibility, teamwork, cooperation and self-control. Simply put, a Scout troop that does not use the Patrol System is not



Photo: Ruffi Dubreau

▲ **In Beavers, we learn about Canada.**



Photo: Jason Kwok

As Rovers, we provide Service to the community and Scouting. ▶

◀ **As Cubs and Scouts, we practise the Scout Law every day.**



Photo: Leah Donald

Scouting. "Using" the Patrol System requires more effort than dividing the Scouts into small groups and asking them to pick an animal for their name; to get results from the system, real responsibility must be given to the Scouts. The more responsibility given to the Scouts themselves, the more they will respond, and the greater the strength of character they will achieve. The object is not constant and uniform success, but trial by experience. Running an effective Patrol System has become a challenge in this day and age, where success and efficiency are expected; allowing the Scouts to learn by their failures is often not considered by leaders or parents. The lure to "do it for them" is a difficult temptation to resist.

The Law

The Scout Law is not simply a mantra to be learned for investiture and then forgotten; it is the foundation on which the entire Scout training rests. B.-P. chose carefully when he decided to call it the "Law", as opposed to the "rules", or the "guidelines", or the "suggestions". The Scout Law was to be obeyed, no less than any provincial or national law; and early Scouts took their commitment to the Scout Law very seriously.

In Canada, the Scout Law was updated and simplified as part of the Scout program review in 1968. The current Scout Law presents a straightforward set of ideals to which all Scout members, both youth and adults, should subscribe to in all aspects of their daily life: helpful and trustworthy, kind and cheerful, considerate and clean, and wise in the use of their resources. If all Canadians were to make a sincere effort to uphold this Law, we would certainly see fewer disturbing headlines in the news.

In comparing Scouting's impact on the character of our nation from a historical perspective, however, it is useful to remember B.-P.'s original wording of the Scout Law:

- A Scout's honour is to be trusted.
- A Scout is loyal to the King, his country, his officers, his parents, his employers, and to those under him.
- A Scout's duty is to be useful and to help others.
- A Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout.
- A Scout is courteous.
- A Scout is a friend to animals.
- A Scout obeys orders of his parents, Patrol Leader, or Scoutmaster without question.
- A Scout smiles and whistles under all difficulties.
- A Scout is thrifty.
- A Scout is clean in thought, word and deed.

These high ideals framed *everything* that early Scouts undertook in their training. It set the stage for thousands of stories of good deeds, heroism and self-sacrifice on the part of individual Scouts, patrols and entire troops over the first sixty years of the Movement in Canada. It was the focus of the Scouter's Five Minutes at the end of every meeting, of the Scouts' Own at camp, and of sermons dur-

ing Church parades. And it worked; within months of the publication of *Scouting for Boys*, thousands of boys throughout the British Empire were subscribing to the Scout Law in place of the hooliganism which B.-P. felt was rampant a hundred years ago. Consider this letter from a grateful mother to the Ontario Provincial Council in 1922:

"He was getting to be 12 years old. He gave me respect and obedience, but for pure satisfaction and delight he turned — where — but to his own world.



He would go from me whistling, his hands in his pockets, down the street to join his 'crowd,' in a world of their own. It was a rough world, heaven knows, full of the average boys' voices and crudities. There were too, the usual 'Bully,' 'Braggart' and 'Rowdy' and plenty of lawlessness which among boys passes for manliness.

As the days went on these boys incensed him more and more; there was in the whole situation sufficient danger and promise of disaster. Just at this time there fell into my hands a pamphlet called 'What Scouting is and Does!' In it were the ten Scout Laws.

A Scout is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind to Animals, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty and Clean in Thought, Word and Deed.

These are Laws, mind you, not advice and admonitions, but Laws imposed by a solemn promise made by the boy when he joins the Scouts.

That settled it. If the Scout Movement stood for these things, I was with it, heart and soul.

I have not told you that the gang at this time joined. Well, of course they had. They were Boy Scouts now. From the start the whole thing was a great success. My boy, for one, benefited immensely. I tell you humbly that some of the very faults that I had worked with for years, began to disappear, and without fret or friction. He was trying to be a good Scout — that was all.

Now they have been Scouts for six months. I can see the organization affecting the changes I have longed to affect. The 'Bully' no longer deserves the name; the 'Braggart' has become a silent and use-

Photo: Greater Toronto Council

ful member of society and the 'Rowdy' is as fine a boy as you would care to see. And neither their mothers nor I am responsible for that, but only and solely the Scout Law and the Scout Handbook, compiled and written by men who were once boys themselves, and who understand, a boy's world. I say — 'Lord Bless You, Gentlemen!' ”

Letters such as these were once common, a testament to the power of the Scout Law in building the character of the youth of our nation. What modern Scouter wouldn't be proud to receive a letter like this today?

Means to an End

You may have noticed that nowhere in the Scout Promise does it say “I promise to go camping once a month.” The Scout Law doesn't mention that a “Scout can light a fire with one match.”

A popular modern catch-phrase is that “three fifths of ‘SCOUT’ is ‘OUT’”, and certainly Scouting has always been primarily an out-of-doors Movement. But there is a danger, especially in our leisure-oriented modern society, to treat the camping, hiking and other outdoors activities as an end unto themselves, rather than as a means to the true goal of Scouting, which is the development of character.

B.-P. used the outdoors activities as a “hook” to catch boys into the Movement. He never downplayed the practical value of Scouting skills, but he made it clear to Scouters that the purpose of Scouting was to build good citizens. The challenge, of course, is to deliver the message of the Scout Law without losing the interest of the Scouts:

“...if you try to preach to them what you consider elevating matter, you won't catch them. Any obvious 'goody-goody' will scare away the more spirited among them, and those are the ones you want to get hold of. The only way is to hold out something that really attracts and interests them.”

– Baden-Powell, 1919.

The Value of Scouting in My Life

Every month, the *Leader Magazine* carries a short testimonial from a Scouting youth who has been awarded the Scouts Canada Foundation academic scholarship. I was never fortunate enough to win a scholarship, but I thought it appropriate to share what I see as the value of Scouting in my life.

The 2006-07 Scouting year was a sort of personal milestone, as this was the year where my years of service as a leader have surpassed my time as a youth member. It's made me reflective.

I grew up in Scouting in the late seventies through the mid eighties. Like most other youth members, first and foremost I thought it was *fun* — the camps and hikes, games and crafts, and especially the camaraderie. But there was more to it than that, things I wasn't able to put my finger on until many years later. First, Scouting gave me a love for the outdoors and a respect for the environment which eventually put me on the path to my career as a wildlife biologist. That's a tangible and obvious connection. But what of “character”?

I quit Venturers after one year for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was peer pressure...it wasn't “cool”.

Still, eight years of the Scout Law, of being a Sixer and Patrol leader, had made their mark on me. The strength of character that Scouting built kept me out of drugs, out of crime, and just generally out of trouble through my teen years, while many of my friends fell to these temptations. I can't say that I've never done anything that I'm not proud of, but I was certainly better equipped to handle the challenges of adolescence with the Scout Law to guide me, even if I wasn't consciously thinking about it at the time.

Does Scouting succeed in building character in all its members? No, of course not. I recently was disappointed to learn that one of my former Scouts had been arrested for drug dealing. It made me feel that I had personally failed him, that I hadn't gotten through to him with the message of Scouting. It took a chat with my mother to help me realize that Scouting can't solve *all* the problems for *all* the youth of the country. She also pointed out to me that although there has been one “failure” in the hundred-odd youth who have passed through my care, there have been important successes as well. I'm fortunate enough to know of at least two of my youth who have had their lives turned onto the right path due to their involvement in Scouting. Often the great irony of being a Scouter is that, in most cases, you'll never know the extent of the good you did, since it often isn't manifest until years later.

Scouter Rick, if you're still out there, I turned out all right.

Believe What You Teach

So, is Scouting relevant? I say it is as relevant today as it was in 1907, if not more so; not only relevant, but necessary. Has there ever been a time in Canadian history when the youth of our nation have been in greater need of a positive force in their lives? No other organization has such a capacity for good as the Scout Movement.

But as B.-P. said, character is about more than *being* good. It's about *doing* good. And that has to start with the leaders.

Youth have a knack for sniffing out a sham. Leaders cannot hope to be successful in teaching character to our young people unless they have strength of character themselves. Character is not something that is taught on a blackboard. It is learned by experience and example.

Believe in the Scout Law. Hold it close to your heart and live it every day. It's not always easy, but it's worth it. – *Steve Bobrowicz is a Scouting history enthusiast with a flair for writing about Scouting's history. You can see Steve's articles sprinkled throughout previous 2007 Leader Magazines. A previous troop Scouter and group commissioner in Manitowadge in Northern Ontario, Steve and his family have recently moved to Thunder Bay where he hopes to become involved with Scouting once again.*

For Further Reading

There are undoubtedly hundreds of books about character development in youth and in education, but from a specifically Scouting point of view, in my opinion the best one is *Aids to Scoutmastership* by Baden-Powell. *Scouting for Boys* is another good one, of course.

There is also *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* by Michael Rosenthal (Pantheon Books, 1984). This book is one of many Scouting histories available, but it is written particularly from the point of view of the value of Scouting in the development of character in youth, and focuses largely on the “good” done by Scouting over the first several decades.