

EAGLE SCOUT COURT OF HONOR

Joel K. Burford

January 6, 2013

“SCOUTMASTER MOMENT”

Prepared by

Dwight A. Burford

Lone Scout Counselor

It was Monday, July 27, 2009, in the northern Colorado Rockies. Joel was up first at around 5:30 a.m. Both he and Jacob coughed much of the night. Consequently, I didn't get much sleep either.

In addition to their coughing, I had a fitful night with leg pains. My legs seemed to hurt no matter how I tried to position myself on the cot, which happened to be missing a spring or two.

After breakfast in the dining hall with Brent, Jacob, and the other Scouts and Scouters at camp, Joel and I cleaned up around our table and headed off to his first merit badge class of the day, Fishing. The meeting place was over by the camp lake, which was down the hill and across the meadow stream, and then on down the road a ways further along the hillside. It was quite a walk, but we made it in time for roll call.

On the way over to the lake that morning a few memories from an earlier summer at the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch came to mind – one before Joel's time, when his older brothers, Garrick, Ian, and Brent had come to these mountains for a summer camp.

As Joel and I passed along the trail, we came to where, that earlier summer, Garrick had picked up a small snake for better viewing. Also, there was that place where we used to see deer feeding along the stream bank. And soon Joel and I came to where his older brothers had turned to go up to the shooting sports area, and where Joel would go later that day for his Rifle merit badge class.

As we walked along, talking and looking around, the newly-turned-11 Joel told me rather excitedly, “I want to come here next year!”

Well, I thought to myself, this is just the first full day of camp, and we happened to be walking downhill at the time he came to that decision.

So I thought I would see how Joel looked at things on the hike back, which was pretty much uphill most of the way. While we made the walk over to the lake from the dining hall that morning in about 15 minutes, I knew it would take a bit more time and effort to get back up the hill to his next class.

I was just glad Joel had a positive outlook the first day of camp after having such a rough time his first night at high altitude in the thin, cool mountain air.

After a taking a picture or two at the camp lake, I left Joel and his class, and started the 20 minute hike over to the C.O.P.E. area where Brent and Jacob had gone for their first activity of the day. I figured I would need to hurry to get there and back in time to walk Joel to his next class which was near the dining hall.

The C.O.P.E. course was located over by Camp Ruth Coffin, which was at one of the tips of a large triangle, with the camp lake and our campsite forming the other two corners of the triangle, each about a 20 minute walk from the other. What made it even a

bit more challenging was having a campsite located at the back end of Camp Jeffrey, which was further up the hill beyond the dining hall.

My hike over to the C.O.P.E. area that morning was a pleasant one. The pine-scented air, cool breeze, and warm sunlight were all very refreshing and relaxing. However, I was quite alert. For, you see, when we checked into camp the day before, we were told to be on the lookout for a moose which had come through camp a couple of weeks earlier. Apparently, a bunch of Scouts from Florida got an up-close and personal meeting with the moose. So the camp staff was warning everyone to be on the lookout for this marauding moose.

We were told that in case we happened to be approached by one of these large, majestic animals – which I must admit, I really hoped to see – the camp staff warned us to follow some rather simple instructions. In case you run across a moose, they said, find a tree and stay close to it, but be on the other side of the tree, opposite the moose, at all times.

The staff made it sound as if moose have a hard time seeing you with a tree in the way, and moose apparently are not very adept at pursuing you around a tree. Instead, they reportedly tire quickly of this circular game of tag and, after a short while, are expected to move on. This seemed like a simple and safe enough plan for both Scouts and Scouters ... at least as long as a tree could be located in time.

So that morning I was mainly on the lookout with the hope of getting a picture of one of these unique critters, which have eluded me so effectively over my many years of camping and hiking in the great outdoors.

While I walked to the C.O.P.E. course, I kept an eye out for other animals as well. We had been told that mountain lions and bears were in the area. Since Joel was small and new to the area, I felt it best that I make sure he had a buddy to walk back with him. So I kept my pace up while making my way along the trail.

After taking a few pictures of Brent and Jacob playing some C.O.P.E. games, I headed back to the lake. It was quite a hike, and I was a bit winded when I arrived.

Joel and I then headed up the hill to his next merit badge class, Photography. Not long after we started out, Joel noticed I was sweating and counseled me to stop and take a drink of water.

I reassured this first-year Scout that I was just fine and that we needed to keep moving or he would be late to class. Several more times Joel said he was convinced I needed to rest, and insisted I take a drink.

When I kept forging ahead, Joel finally said he thought I had heat exhaustion because I was resisting help and his assistance.

That really got me to thinking as we walked. On the first day of his fishing class they must have reviewed first aid, like they do in many merit badge classes, and I supposed the topic was fresh on his mind. In any case, Joel was apparently listening in class.

Still, Joel insisted that I rest for a minute. Since I didn't want to hold him up, I encouraged Joel to go on ahead of me while I rested. But he wouldn't hear of it, insisting he needed to stay with me to provide help if I needed it, as I apparently looked to him as if I did indeed need help.

Consequently, we started resting every so often along the trail, which made Joel late to his next class as I worried he would be. In the end, everything worked out okay. Once he received some basic instructions, he then only needed to do some photo labs.

That afternoon a couple of Scouts from Troop 123 out of Newton buddied up with Joel to walk to their Rifle merit badge class together. That let me stay close to camp where I reflected on the morning's events ... while keeping an eye out for any wandering moose that might happen to walk by.

It was now 10 years since Joel's oldest brother, Garrick, had first started his trek to Eagle by becoming a Boy Scout in 1999 – about a year after Joel was born. Ian soon followed Garrick, then Brent, and in turn, Jacob. Each had begun their own trek to Scouting's highest rank over the past 10 years. Now, after a decade of Scouting with my sons, Joel was starting his trek.

Was I up to it? What would the next several years be like as Joel worked his way along that great journey, with his own stories yet to experience? What adventures would he live through? What unique skills and knowledge would he gain? What stories might he end up having to tell those who come after him some day? And how many more camps would I get to attend with him?

Was I ready to keep pace with Joel after already traveling so far along the trail with his four older brothers? Ten years is a lot of Scouting for one dad. And how many more would be ahead for the two of us as Joel continued down his course? Again, I wondered, was I up to it? Was I up to giving Joel plenty of good opportunities to experience Scouting at its best as he worked his way to Eagle?

I had to admit, I was tired. Dreaming about some lazy trout stream somewhere had kept me going at times over the past several summers. Now, my age and these Colorado rocks were speaking much more loudly to my legs and back than they had in the past. But I knew I had to keep going for Joel's sake, so that Joel would be able to come back another year as he said he hoped he would just that morning on the way to the fishing lake.

Then I realized it. Joel already answered my concerns. He was ready. At his young age, this new Scout was prepared to assist *me* in *his* journey to Eagle. He was willing to walk alongside me and encourage me to rest and refresh myself with a drink, even if it meant he might be late to his next station along the way.

And while I might try to send him on ahead, like I did that first day of camp, Joel's answer would be, "I'll wait for you, Dad." His was a heart of service, one to stay with me to make sure I made it, too.

That is when I knew I had to make sure I was there for him, that I did my part in seeing to it that Joel was given ample opportunity to make his way to Eagle.

And Joel, you've made it. While I am walking slower and a little more labored than I did when we hiked back from your first day of attending the Fishing merit badge class, we have indeed climbed more hills together than just that one. Thanks to you sticking with me, I have been able to accompany you on your trek to Eagle these past several years.

I have to admit, however, that I was quite sad we were not able to make it back to the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch the following summer as you said you hoped you could that first day of summer camp in 2009. With the building of an addition onto our home

beginning later in 2009 and extending on through June of 2010, you experienced some delays in your Scouting program. Nevertheless, you were able to keep going, and now here you are.

This fall you finally arrived. You have become an Eagle Scout, joining your four older brothers in achieving this most notable of all of Boy Scout ranks.

While we had planned to return to the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch again this past summer for Scout Camp, other factors detoured us once again. This time, forest fires in the northern Colorado Mountains closed the camp, and we were moved south to the San Isabel Scout Ranch.

I hope our adapting to changes like these will hold valuable lessons for you in the future. I hope you have learned from all your experiences in Scouting that while things don't always go as planned, you can still prepare yourself for whatever comes through faith in God and the skills and knowledge you have developed growing up.

Thank you, Joel, for being concerned about me back there on the trail. Although I was feeling rather weary, I was truly hoping you wouldn't be late, not just to your merit badge class, but ultimately for arriving at the rank of Eagle as well. And though you may have been delayed at times, and perhaps have even been discouraged from time to time, you have persevered.

I'm honored to see you arrive, and here, today, to be honored for meeting the challenge.

Each of you boys has had a different journey. Though you have had common experiences in some ways, you have been creative in coming up with making your own way.

Joel, I hope as you have gone through the many pictures from your Scouting journey, you have taken the time to reflect on the many things you have experienced and learned. And, now, I hope that you take the time to enjoy the past times as well as the opportunities which are before you. Begin planning some new adventures, perhaps with your brothers and friends. In many ways, you've only begun the adventure to which Scouting has introduced you.

My ultimate hope and trust is that you will reach the greatest goal of all, that of experiencing eternal life with your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Like Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, my hope is that you will be able to tell others:

*I have fought a good fight,
I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith;
Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,
which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day;
and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*
II Timothy 4:7,8

You demonstrated back there on the trail how you have a heart for others, for helping them even when it causes you a delay. That kind of heart comes from Jesus. As you continue on in life, remember how Jesus befriended us when He saw we were

without strength and, having compassion, He stooped down to help and save us so we might live with Him in His kingdom. As it is written in the fifth chapter of Romans:

*For when we were yet without strength,
in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
For scarcely for a righteous man will one die;
yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
But God commendeth his love toward us,
in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
Much more then, being now justified by his blood,
we shall be saved from wrath through him.
For if, when we were enemies,
we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son;
much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

Romans 5:6-10

As you press toward new goals in life, remember the trail back at BDSR. Remember how you helped an old, weary Scouter up the trail, and even how he first resisted your assistance. Remember how you paid attention to the needs of the other person traveling with you, and how you served him. It's great to accomplish things in this life, but it is so much more rewarding, eternally rewarding, to serve others as you did that day.

The church steps, which were built to your design and under your guidance and instructions in your Eagle Leadership Service Project, have and will continue to make a difference in the lives of those with whom you have fellowship in church. These steps now help you and others climb with greater ease, and they will continue to provide an easier way for others in the coming years, but in more ways than the practical way they do today. By completing this very meaningful project to help others, you have not only gained experience and skills, you have gained the confidence and insight to take on new and greater ways to serve others. By making these new steps a reality, you will be able to make further steps toward servicing others over your entire lifetime. Just to name one, your musical compositions have already lifted the spirits of others.

Congratulations, Joel, on a job well done! And may God bless you all the days of your life through your faith in Jesus Christ.