

EAGLE SCOUT COURT OF HONOR

Ian Burford
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“SCOUTMASTER MOMENT”

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“There is no braver man in the world that would stand in front of this crowd and blow a bugle.” These words of compliment were spoken following the opening ceremony of the June 1, 2001, keynote lecture of the Teaching Parents’ Association by the association’s president, Jim Farthing. He was referring to a relatively new 10 year old scout and the service he had just performed.

Scouts from Troop 281, the troop sponsored by the association, had just posted the flags of the United States of America and the state of Kansas in front of a crowd of well over a thousand people. As Troop bugler, Ian Burford had played “To the Colors” on his bugle as part of the ceremony.

During practices, Ian had quietly asked me if he could play from behind the curtain or from offstage somewhere. As the time approached, I had to turn down his request more often with a bit more firmness each time, reminding him that we would be practicing the presentation only one way. Though he complied, I could still see the anxious question expressed on his face, “Isn't there some other way we can do this?”

As the audience gathered for the event, I began to question my decision. Was I putting too much pressure on my son? After all, he was only 10. He had played before our Troop and the Pack on several occasions. This, however, was a much larger audience and in a much more imposing setting.

On the other hand, Ian had worked hard to earn the money to pay for a regulation bugle and to complete the bulging merit badge so he could become the Troop bugler. But was this too much too soon? Soon the answer to this question would be evident to all those assembled.

The moment finally came, and our Color Guard was called forward by its commander, Russ Rains. And Ian began to play.

Later Ian would volunteer that he knew he had not played his best. In reply, I simply noted that though he had missed a few notes, it was impressive to see how budding courage had sounded out with each note he played.

Following their presentation of the Colors, the Scouts received a rousing applause from the audience, and along with Jim Farthing, the keynote speaker, William Bennett, publicly commended Ian for his bravery. Later that evening, as we left the convention hall, many individuals warmly praised Ian for a job well done. Even when we stopped for gas on the north end of the city on our way home, we met several couples who had been at the conference. They, too, greeted him with words of appreciation and encouragement.

As we neared home, Ian spoke up. He said he was now very glad he had played in front of everyone as we had practiced. It was then that I realized something very profound. If I had simply let my son live by his feelings of apprehension, instead of

consistently guiding him toward his goal, I would have stolen this victory, and its precious memory, from him.

William Bennett stressed in his talk that we often aim too low when it comes to our children. Like Ian, all our children are capable of accomplishing great things, the memories of which they will cherish for a lifetime if they are but given the appropriate guidance and encouragement to finish their course. It is through such determination born of conviction that bravery is offered the opportunity to shine forth.

What a joy it is that we can be a part of seeing our children succeed in overcoming the challenges they face now and as they grow. Allowing them to simply follow the path of least resistance will only end in them becoming like a lazy, wandering river that eventually gets filled with silt and rubbish. Teaching them, on the other hand, to pursue high ideals and persevering until they achieve them will yield a much greater reward for both them and those of us who care about them.

Ian, as you know by experience, the phrase in the Scout Law, “A Scout is ... brave,” is much easier to recite than to actually live out. But we recite it to remind us of our duty. Just as you were given the special privilege of playing your bugle at the 2001 TPA Conference, throughout your life you will be presented with many such opportunities in which you can exemplify this important characteristic of a Scout, and a Christian, through more than words.

As you face these challenges, look to those who have gone on before you, those who have been faithful to their calling in life, in particular the greatest calling of all, the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ (e.g. Hebrews 12:1 & Matthew 28:17-19).

Consider the Apostle Paul. Though imprisoned by Rome, he wrote to the Ephesian church that he was the prisoner of Christ, meaning he was bound to serve his Lord in whatever circumstance he found himself in – such conviction requires bravery (Ephesians 3:1 & 4:1).

To the church in Philippi, though yet in Rome’s prison, Paul wrote:

Philippians 3:13-14 – *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Why press forward so single-mindedly, even while a prisoner? Paul’s goal was to know Christ. It was to know the power of Christ’s resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, so that Paul might attain to the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:10,11).

Such determination and confidence served as the foundation for his courage, by which courage Paul wrote Timothy just prior to his execution:

II Timothy 4:6-8 – *... I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 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.*

These are true words of victory, the greatest victory of all, the victory born of faith in Jesus Christ (I John 5:4).

Paul ran a race the world could not understand. But it is the most important race of all. The prize is to know Jesus Christ and the immensity of His glory and grace. And you and I are called to run this same race, and we can do so only by looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-3).

As you seek to run this race and complete your course, Ian, please recall the Scout Promise, and how it starts out: "On my honor!" Remember that scouting is about honor, not the honor we as Scouts may receive from others for our service or accomplishments, but the honor we bestow upon others through skillful, gracious, and reverent service inspired by faith in God.

Ian, this is the first flag that was flown on our new flag pole and subsequently retired from service. Instead of retiring it in the usual manner, I am giving it to you as a tangible reminder of those you have served and those with whom you served in installing it, and especially those who have served, are serving, and will serve this great nation of ours, the United States of America.