



# On My Honor...

*Boy Scouts are Still Making a Difference*

Norman  
Rockwell

**The aroma of Thin Mints and Peanut Butter cookies are forever imprinted on my mind. Every year a small room in our basement became a storehouse filled to the brim with Boy Scout cookies. Yes, I know I'm revealing a bit about my age, but back then it was the Boy Scouts who sold cookies each year, not the Girl Scouts.**

The late fall and early winter months were the traditional time for Boy Scout cookie sales. Each Scout strove to sell at least \$35.00 worth of cookies in order to earn his way to camp the following summer. That doesn't sound like a lot these days, but at that time it was quite the task since the cookies were just 50 cents a box!

Each night after school I would faithfully fill a cardboard case to overflowing with a variety of the aromatic packages. I remember cutting holes in each side of the cardboard box and fastening a length of rope between the two holes to form a strap that would hang around my neck and shoulders. Of course in proper Boy Scout fashion, I doubled the traditional "overhand knot" at each end to hold the rope firmly in place. Then off I would go into the cold and snow, knocking on doors throughout the neighborhood.

My father was a Scoutmaster for my two older brothers and it was only natural I should follow the tradition. Like millions of other youngsters, I became a Cub Scout and eventually achieved the much-coveted position of a full-fledged Boy Scout. Some of the best memories I have as a child and youth are of those times and the values instilled in me through the Boy Scouts have been a powerful force in my life as an adult.

Recently I met with Christian Long, the Executive Director of the Lincoln Trails Council of the Boy Scouts of America to see how this iconic organization is faring in the midst of these challenging times.

Chris opened our conversation. "Our mission statement is to prepare young people to make ethical choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law, Do you remember the Scout Oath?"

I have to admit I wasn't prepared for the interview to start with my being quizzed about the Scout Oath and the Scout Laws. While I couldn't quite quote the Scout Oath completely from memory, I was able to recite it with a bit of prompting. Not bad for not having recited it for, well let's just say a very long time.

Next we recited the Scout Law, "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent."

"Just think if everyone lived by the Scout Oath. What a world we would have," mused Chris. "Obviously, reverent is very important. It's the twelfth point of the Scout Law and it's the one that really needs to stick.



*A Scout from Decatur stops to reflect on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.*

Faith in something, in some God is important in our lives. We have all kinds of statistics but they show that 12 out of 100 Scouts get their first contact with the church through the Boy Scouts. I find that amazing in one respect, but in another respect I'm not so surprised. We've seen changes in our society that so many of our families don't grow up as a faith based family. Many (kids) don't have a real family. (If they do have one) There probably is both a father and a mother working and there just doesn't seem to be time for the children. And that's one of the areas where scouting really does make a difference."

Chris continues, "I know growing up, I didn't start Scouts until I was almost sixteen. If it wasn't for my Scoutmaster, I don't know where I'd be today. It certainly wouldn't be

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wearing a tie sitting behind a desk, helping do good things for kids. I had a point in my life where I had to make a decision and I had some good friends, I had a good

A Scout learns valuable skills for all areas of life.

Scoutmaster, and I developed my faith at that point in my life. Scouts is so important to so many kids.”

The Lincoln Trails Council actually covers twelve counties. In 2010 there were 3,757 youth registered in their program. This includes 27.7% of ALL elementary school boys, grades 1-5 in their Cub Scout program. During the entire year of 2010, they served more than 4,749 youth. While scouting nationwide has seen a decrease of about 2%, the Lincoln Trails Council actually experienced a 5% growth during that same time period.

“An overwhelming majority of our Scouting units are chartered (or sponsored) by churches; all kinds of churches (and denominations). Pretty much every kind of church that is out there. And we do good things through them,” says Chris. “Sometimes when there is a lack of

family, Scouting is a very good alternative because it helps bring people closer to God and closer to other good people who can be a positive influence. Scouting does so many great things for kids and that’s just a start.

Living by the Scout Oath and Law, if you can do that, you’ll see in both of those there is a degree of reverence. In the Scout Oath, duty to God is first, country is second, and self is third. Helping others is also in there, so what more can you ask for?”

Currently there are about 150 scouting groups in the Lincoln Trails Council. In 2010, 1,174 registered adult volunteers gave their time and talents to bring Scouting to the youth in our area. These Scouters gave over 100,000 hours of volunteer service to youth. They are supported by four career Scouters, three office staff, and one Camp Ranger.

“We truly believe in our mission, very deeply. Scouting is going very well here,” shares Chris. “We also have a very strong inner city program called Scoutreach. We do our best to reach the kids of the inner city of Decatur. We’re pretty proud of that program and we’re also very glad United Way partners with us to fund that program. We’ll serve over 600 kids through Scoutreach in the inner city.

Scoutreach is the regular Scouting program, but we pay leaders to come in and do the program with the kids and we go to wherever they are. It may be in a school, a daycare, in a church, wherever they are, we take the Scouting program to them. We feel strongly about that. It’s an expensive program because we have to pay people to do it, we have to buy their materials and such, but it’s so important because that’s another group of kids that can really benefit from the Boy Scouts.”

Another organization closely connected to the Boy Scouts is known as the P.R.A.Y. organization. Programs with Religious Activities with Youth is a not-for-profit organization whose national board of directors includes representatives from Protestant and Independent Christian Churches and the national youth agencies.

P.R.A.Y. is best known for their religious awards programs. The P.R.A.Y. program helps young people to develop a deeper relationship with God and to understand how God is active in their lives and in the world around them. It is a Christian Education resource that uses Bible lessons, paired with service projects, to help young people not only to grow in Christian faith but to also express their faith by reaching out in love and in service to others.

Chris reminded me, “Scouting isn’t necessarily just Christian; you have to have a belief in God. We don’t define that God for an individual member. We let their families and their sponsoring organization figure that out.”

Having said that, from the early days of the Scouting movement to the present day, churches have organized Scout troops. According to the Boy Scouts of America, of the 7,375 registered troops at the close of 1915, more than 4,000 were chartered to Protestant churches, and 1,645 Scoutmasters were ministers. When church troops became numerous, some of the denominational bodies

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decided to give recognition to the values of Scouting as a resource for the churches in their youth ministries.

Among the earliest endorsements were from the Northern Baptist Convention, 1918; Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1918; United Lutheran Church in America, 1918; Congregational Churches, 1919; Methodist Church, 1919; and Southern Baptist Convention, 1923. Today, Protestant churches have organized more than 26 percent of all packs, troops, and crews, making them the largest user of the Scouting program.

Churches who desire to attract more youth and families to their church should seriously consider chartering a Scout program. Chris directed me to a great resource on the P.R.A.Y. web site in their publications section. It lists forty different ways in which Boy Scouting can help churches develop assets in youth. You can download and print the document by visiting [http://www.praypub.org/pdf\\_docs/assets\\_bs.pdf](http://www.praypub.org/pdf_docs/assets_bs.pdf). For your convenience, there is also a link on the home page of the LIVING Christian magazine web site at [www.livingchristianmagazine.com](http://www.livingchristianmagazine.com).

Wanting to make sure other kids have the same wonderful experience I had as a Scout, I asked Chris how LIVING Christian magazine readers could get involved or help the Lincoln Trails Council reach more kids and have a positive impact on them.

"We never have enough volunteers," says Chris. "Something else is we could really use more charter partners, more churches out there that think that Scouting could be a help to both the kids and themselves. Becoming a charter is really a partnership between the Boy Scout Council and the church. We would encourage the organization to use Scouting to help them meet their youth and family needs. It's a way to bring younger families and kids into the church. You remember that statistic about 12% of Scouts get their first contact with the church? That's important here!"

Chris reminds me, "The charter organization does need to provide the leadership for it, though. It's not something that just happens, it takes a little bit of effort." I can personally attest that having a Scouting program at church is more than worth the effort.

Chris adds, "The Scout Troop can be a group within the organization or it can be an outreach to the community. Even if the Scouting program is instituted as an evangelistic effort, that's fine too because it's all for the good of kids.

Everything we do, Ted, we ask, 'Is it good for kids?' That's what drives us here. If we can make good kids, we're going to have a better world. And the thing is, you don't just get kids, you get families. It's about getting kids together with positive role models, learning respect, improving communication, coming closer to nature, it's all those things that are good for young people.

We typically keep about 72% of our kids from one year to the next. That's a pretty good approval rating. In the

inner city it's even greater than that. That shows you how starved young people are to have a role model in their life."

After visiting with Chris a wave of memories floated through my mind. The first time I led my Patrol on a field hike, the time we went to Philmont National Scout Ranch, and of course the yearly Lincoln Pilgrimage March in Springfield with Scout Troops from all over the State. I also remember trudging through the snow with that huge cardboard case of cookies around my neck. That year I sold enough cookies to send the whole troop to camp the following summer.

But most importantly, I remember the values Scouting instilled in me and I will always be thankful to those who cared enough to volunteer their time, talent, and resources to make a difference in my life. Not just during my years as a Scout, but for my entire life.

If you want to really make a difference in the life of a boy, get him get involved in Scouting. Better yet, get involved yourself. It's a difference that will last a lifetime.

For more information about any of the Boy Scout programs, contact the Lincoln Trails Council office, located at 262 W Prairie Ave in Decatur. You can call them at (217) 429-2326, or toll-free, at (800) 416-2328. You can also visit their web site at [www.lincolntrailscouncil.org](http://www.lincolntrailscouncil.org).



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