

HOMETOWN AMERICUS GEORGIA

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Chapter 7

On My Honor

Cub Scouts must be 8 years old to join the national scouting organization. Waiting for that 8th birthday was agonizing for me. I was born late in the year. These days I would have been held back a year and started school with the class of 64 but back then as long as you were six during the fall sometime you could go to school with the others. Griff was born in February. He had a head start on scouts and just about everything else.

That blue Cub Scout uniform was spectacular with all the badges on the pocket, names like wolf and bear and arrow points for awards. A group of Cub Scouts came over to Furlow School on a recruiting mission when I was in Mrs. Hart's room for the third grade. I was too young to join until October 7th and I wanted it bad. The promise of camping trips, the secret handshake and having a code to live by plus earning the respect of fellow scouts made perfect sense to me. It was an early lifestyle choice.

On or about my 8th birthday I was sworn into the Cub Scouts. My mom took me to Belk's downtown on Lamar Street to the scouting department to get me fitted out. A blue scout shirt, blue scout pants, the web belt and brass buckle, the brass pocket knife clip for the belt, the neckerchief, neckerchief slide and the blue cap with gold welt trim was mine. I loved being a scout. I wore it to school for my third grade school picture. Mom was instrumental in starting the first Webelos Den in Americus. The scouts in that den were George Hooks,

Charles Chappell, Henry Jones, Lamar Teaford, Erskine Carter, Bob Sumner, Samuel Freeman, and me.

Scouting was a huge part of my life in Americus from the time I was sworn in as a cub to staying on with Troop 21 as a Senior Scout until I graduated high school in 1963. After Cubs, my daddy took me over to Troop 21 and introduced me to the scout master, Charlie Hogg, who also lived on Glessner Street. I started as a pre-Tenderfoot.

The older members of the troop read like a who's who of Americus' future: Henry Teaford, Douglas Morris, Scheley Gatewood, John Argo, Dan Wallis, Bob Ivey and so many others. I felt like we were walking in the shadows of giants. I became a member of Indian Patrol with patrol leader, Billy Barron, and quickly earned my Tenderfoot patch and my 2nd Class Scout badge.

George Hooks would meet me on scout nights at the corner of Glessner and Hancock Drive after his family moved off of Horne Street out past my neighborhood as Americus expanded to the south. George and I would walk to scouts. It was a very pleasant time for us. Eleven years old is a perfect age for a young man, still a boy, with boyish thoughts and dreams and at least a year or two before the reality of growing up sets in.

George was a dedicated scout too and wore the uniform proudly. As an adult he worked for the Boy Scouts of America before becoming a long serving state senator. George's granddaddy and grandmother and his Uncle George lived on Glessner Street just two doors east of my family's home. We would turn left off Glessner and head

north on South Lee and take a right at Christine Brown's house at S. Lee and Dodson then over to the Troop 21 scout hut. We kept this routine up for several years.

One night George and I took the cut off next to Lee Street Methodist Church headed toward Elm Avenue. We met George's cousin, Gay Waldemeyer, standing at the back door of the beautiful old Gatewood home that's now a parking lot for the church next door. She was older and had been sickly and kept out of school but she was better now and would be coming into school in my class. I thought Gay was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. We were about to start high school.

Now, I have never been plagued with having too much ambition and I was satisfied to remain a 2nd Class scout. With rank came responsibility. Being an Honor Camper was recognition enough for me and a First Class Marksman. I enjoyed that but earning merit badges and advancing through the ranks held little fascination to me, that is, until 1960.

1960 marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of The Boy Scouts of America and the national scouting organization was planning a huge event to celebrate the occasion. Every four years, the scouts would hold a World Jamboree, usually at Valley Forge, but the 50th anniversary was special enough that they decided to hold it in the middle of the country and bring in 50,000 Boy Scouts from all over the U.S.

One night at the scout hut Jimmy Buchannon, the assistant scout master, announced that Troop 21 was going to join

with scouts from Albany and the rest of the Chehaw Council to take a month long bus trip to Colorado Springs for the jamboree. The catch was that the cost was \$300 a person. That was out of my family's budget, I knew, but I listened on. Charlie Hogg, the scout master told us that the troop would make five scholarships available to the five scouts who could get the most points by earning merit badges and rank. The scholarship would pay half.

Later that night when I got home I asked daddy if he would come up with the \$150 needed for the trip if I could win one of those scholarships. He agreed. I'm sure he thought that there was no way that I could or would earn enough points. I had never, as long as I was in scouting up to that point won much of anything. Even with the annual troop barbecue, my ticket sales approached the minimum of ten tickets each year. I was 14 years old.

During those few months between the announcements of the jamboree and the awarding of the scholarships I gained a new respect for merit badges and advancement. Everyday I was hustling for merit badges and with merit badges came rank and with rank came points toward the scholarship. My point count at the end was enough to earn me the top spot and I got the first scholarship in hand.

The reason I won, I'm sure is that I had had little ambition prior to the award of the world's best camping adventure; a month on the road with the scouts. Since I had so far to go, I was able to accumulate 35 merit badges and advance from a second class scout to the rank of Life and one merit badge shy of Eagle in three months. None of this mattered to me. I was going with the troop out west to camp for a

month. It turned out to be a great bunch of boys. Mr. Hudgins from Albany was our Scout Master for the trip.



The winners of the Jamboree Trip announced in the paper.

For the life of me I can't remember all the Americus scouts on that trip but I'm sure that Lamar Teaford, Bucky Turpin, Parnell Odom, Tim Furlow, Oscar Bryan and Thad Wallis were there. Wright Davis wouldn't have missed it for the world either. We were all good friends. It was the trip of a lifetime for all of us. 50,000 scouts gathered at Colorado Springs and we represented

Americus to the Boy Scout nation. President Eisenhower came and talked to the troops as did the Lennon Sisters.

Hiking and wilderness camping at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico was the true highlight of the month long trip and going to the top of Pike's Peak with my friends was another. The adults that ran Troop 21 always made sure that their scouts had quality adventures to take. Without them I would have never had the chance to camp on an island in the Okefenokee Swamp or to camp with the Native Americans at Cherokee North Carolina or be on the staff at Camp Osborne.

Every summer we spent a week as a troop at Camp Osborne. Osborne had five or six screened in cabins, a few un-screened lean tos, a community latrine with showers, the leader cabin, swimming pool, canteen, lake and mess hall. Troop 21 usually stayed in cabin two or cabin three.

One summer we had some sort of creature invade our camp. We never knew exactly what it was but it was designated

the Mad Crapper.

Every evening there would be some sort of scouting program. We would walk back to the cabins in the dark. Part of your required equipment was the scout flashlight just for this purpose.

It started the first night. When we got ready for bed, everybody starting to pull their covers back, they put a

bunch of scouts barracks style in a cabin, and someone would find that, and how do I say this delicately, some had actually laid a log, and I'm speaking metaphorically, in their bed. Scout leaders were summoned. Boys were assembled and talked to. It wasn't someone from our cabin because we had all been together at the program that evening.

It happened the next night, and the next, each time to a different scout and speculation was running wild as to who the *Mad Crapper*, the creature had been dubbed this by now, was.

The last night of camp, the night before we go home the next day, there is a special assembly at the council ring and all scouts are supposed to be there. Our cabin was speculating about the *Crapper* and who it was and would it strike again.

Later, after assembly, we got back to the cabin and everybody gingerly spread their covers back and looked. It looked like the *Crapper* had spared us. Scouts started looking under their beds and in their foot lockers.

The *Mad Crapper*, this time, had singled out Oscar Bryan's box of Indian beadwork he was working on. He was keeping it in a box under his bunk. This incident pretty much ruined our stay at scout camp that summer.

The truth is, as far as I know, the *Mad Crapper's* identity was never discovered. There was speculation, of course, about some of our fellow scouts from close by cabins but it seems that either the *Mad Crapper* acted alone and has

kept the secret all these years or it was actually some creature that lived in the swamp around Camp Osborne. One thing for sure, it wasn't a ghost.

Toward the end of our time as scouts and coincidentally the end of high school days too, Wright Davis, Oscar Bryan and several others of us formed *The Americus Indian Lore Society*. Wright was elected Big Chief. He had made a beautiful Plains Indian style feather head dress from a kit from Grey Owl.



Troop 21 of the Boy Scouts of America circa 1957

We decided to do a big program at the local scout camp, Camp Shehaw, in the woods at the council ring. We had all gone through *Order of the Arrow* initiation and training at Camp Osborne near Albany and we all felt an affinity with the Chehaw Tribe that once lived here.

We planned to celebrate the end of our lives as school boys and scouts before we all moved on to college and beyond. We developed the program and worked on the set. Parents and bystanders were invited to meet at Camp Shehaw and be led through the woods by a breach cloth wearing brave from the troop carrying a torch.

We had developed an elaborate plan to get the program started off. A wire had been rigged from the top of a tall pine and extended at an angle to the council fire in the middle of the ring. A brave had been situated in the top of the tree to light a torch and send it sliding on a ring down the wire to start the blaze.

As medicine man, I wore the horned hat of my ancestors. The horned hat of my ancestors was actually a kit from Grey Owl Indian Supply made of rabbit fur and cow horns. It was very spooky looking. Mema had stitched me up a buckskin suit out of some fake buckskin fabric from Grey Owl.

We all sported breach cloths with our *leggings* and moccasins. Years later, my mom would give the fur *horned hat of my ancestors* to Mrs. Teaford for her kindergarten to play with but that night I wore it proudly as the tribe's medicine man.

I stood behind the fire pit piled with logs and made the command for fire. The audience of parents and others interested in scouting watched in awe and then surprise as the fireball slid about halfway down the wire and stopped, snagged on something. It hung there blazing threatening to set the forest afire.

We had to start wiggling the wire to make it come the rest of the way down completely destroying the illusion we had created. Laughter broke out in the audience. The torch finally made its way to the fire pit and the fire started, helped along by some good *Boy Scout water*, which is what we referred to gasoline as. We finished the program and put our costumes away satisfied that we had said goodbye to childhood and the scouts.

For several years after that though, the group of us would meet at Camp Shehaw during the Christmas holidays and camp out for old times sake. I'll never forget the scouts and will always be one.

WWW.