

Boy Scouts of America

By Howie Flomberg

Independence is defined in Merriam Webster as “the state of being independent.” Now we know. The Revolutionary War was also called the “War of Independence”. I think we all share the common definition of independence as being politically oriented. However there is much more to that.

Our government and our system are based on personal independence. We pick our own educational path. We pick our profession. We are free to pursue our own successes. We are also free to pursue our own failures. In a Stalinist society, such as the one in North Korea, children are mustered into a profession based, not only their qualifications, but also the needs of the government. Communism has one freedom we don't have – the right to a job. Think about that. That “right” can only be guaranteed by controlling society to a degree that we would not stand for in America. Independence not only guarantees freedom, it also demands responsibility.

For most of my life I belonged to an organization that taught responsible use of freedom coupled the responsibilities it demands. Boy Scouts of America is again under fire for being slow to adapt to the changes required by society. When I was a young scout there was only one position open to women – that of cub scout Den Mother. When I was an adult scout leader that was changed. Now all adult positions, including Scoutmaster, are not gender specific. Scouting's teenage program, formerly called Exploring, now called Venturing is co-educational. Shepherding a group of co-educational young teenagers on an extended camping trip has impositions that do not exist with younger men. Scouting is a bottom up organization and these current changes are finally being discussed at the national level. Perhaps the slow approach is healthier?

Let's look at the positive side of Scouting. A well-run troop is run by the youths. The Patrol Leaders and the Senior Patrol Leader plan and run all activities with the advice of the Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmasters. Logistic support is provided by the Troop Committee. I had the opportunity to see the effects of this organization as a college teacher. Occasionally one of my old scouts would come through our college. They were invariably “A” students. I now have the opportunity to watch them in their careers and from my point of view they are successful. Both my son and my daughter came through scouting, boy and girl scouting. They both have an excellent work ethic.

The skills taught by scouting have an unusual way of popping up in life. When I was in the Air Force I discussed my scouting background unobtrusively, I thought. However on occasion I was able to use my first aid training.

Our unit was called upon to take turns with perimeter patrol. When I was preparing my personal gear I was called into my sergeant's hooch.

“Flomberg, I need a man with your talents.”

This is never a good thing to hear. I was handed the squadron first aid pack. Then I got another present. I was handed a map and compass.

“I've marked off the route. You take point and make sure we all get back.”

Point means I am the first man on patrol. Point is another word for target. Unfortunately I'm a big man and easy to spot. I was extremely successful. I did not get purple hearts, bronze or silver stars. It's amazing how well I can hide a large man behind a small tree.

Patton reportedly said: “You don't win a war by dying for your country. You win a war by making the other son-of-a-bitch die for his country.” I took this advice to heart.