

Monday 10 September

The World Scout Movement

A very long time ago, when I was in Primary School, I became a Cub Scout. In many ways, I was destined to join the Scout Movement. My older sister was a Cub Scout leader and my father was the Scout leader. Scouting was a part of my family.

I still remember my first Cub Scout meeting. I had a new uniform, a selection of colourful badges, a cap and scarf. I had to learn the Cub Scout Promise, that is, "Cub Scouts always do their best, think of others before themselves and do a good turn every day." I was very proud to be a Cub Scout and wanted to 'do my best' above anything else. That enthusiasm continued when I became a Scout. Each Wednesday evening I went along to the Scout Meeting, excited about the activities we would do, the games we would play and the friendships I would enjoy. That anticipation always reached a climax at weekends when my Patrol would spend Saturdays hiking or cycling or canoeing or simply having fun. But nothing was better than going away on Camp every summer holiday. The buses would be loaded with tents, sleeping bags, ropes, paraffin lights, ground sheets, cooking gear and enough food to feed thirty hungry scouts for one week. As a teenager, scouting was my life. Over the course of one year, when I was 15 years old, I spent a total of six weeks in a tent. When there was not a camp coming up, I would sleep in my own tent that I pitched in my garden at home. I was a mad, keen Scout.

I discovered many things while I was in the Scouts. I found out how to open a tin of baked beans using my scout knife and then eat the baked beans cold; just in case we had lost the can-opener during a torrential rain storm and could not light a fire. I found out how to tie a bowline knot, a knot that doesn't slip or jam; just in case I needed to lower myself from the roof of a building. I found out how to lash six logs together to make a raft; just in case I needed to cross a river. Over the past forty years, not once have I needed to tie a bowline knot or build a raft. However, I still enjoy eating cold baked beans.

There were other skills I learned that were more practical and long-lasting. I learned out how to cook a meal; how to wash and iron my clothes; how to read a map and compass; how to administer simple first aid. I was awarded many badges along the way and proudly stitched them on to my uniform. Yes, I was also taught how to sew. I also collected souvenir badges from all the places we visited while on camp and stitched those on to a camp-fire blanket that would keep me warm at night.

I mentioned to you last week that I visited the World Scout Jamboree last month while I was in England. The word 'Jamboree' is based on the Swahili (East African) greeting 'Jambo' meaning 'Hello' and is now an international term for a large gathering of Scouts. Well, this year's world jamboree was certainly a celebration. Over 40,000 scouts and guides from nearly 200 countries attended the twelve day camp near Chelmsford to the north east of London. This was the largest gathering of scouts ever and the scale of the operation simply amazing.

Let me give you some statistics. The campsite covered an area 8 times the size of Disneyland in California. Over the course of the twelve days the scouts ate: 60 tons of apples; 133,000 lettuces; 33,000 loaves of bread; 30,300 chickens; 5,700 kilograms of cheese; and drank 567,000 litres of milk. They consumed: 16,000 bottles of tomato ketchup; 900,000 carrots; 800,000 eggs and 27,000 bunches of bananas. Furthermore, the Campsite required 9,600 tables; 2,200 gas burners; 14,000 cooking pots and frying pans; 31,200 cooking utensils; 5,600 mixing bowls; and 38,400 bin bags. To complete the picture, the scouts slept in 1,350 tents complete with 30,000 tent poles and 2 million tent pegs.

The Jamboree was a wonderful experience for the scouts at St. Paul's College who were able to attend. You will find a large collection of photographs from the Jamboree by following the link on the College website to the 10th Hong Kong (www.10thhkg.org). I am sure that our boys returned from the Jamboree energised and determined to continue with their scouting. The Jamboree gave the boys a new outlook on the world in which we live. They met other teenagers from around the globe, shared stories, told jokes, exchanged souvenirs and made friendships. As a consequence, the Jamboree has made each of them a better person.

I did not have an opportunity to take part in a jamboree when I was in the Scouts. What was important, however, was that being a scout had a lasting affect on my life. I found out how to follow instructions; how to work as part of a team; how to make friends; how to be loyal to my mates; how to help those less fortunate than me; how to serve others; how to be respectful to my elders and to people in authority; and, how to be a leader.

When a boy joins the Scout Movement, no matter from which country, he makes a promise. In Hong Kong, a scout will say: "On my honour, I promise that I will do my best, to do my duty to God and to my country, to help other people, and to keep the Scout Law." I made that same Promise forty years and have tried to uphold the Promise over the years since. I certainly believe that being a scout made me a better person.