

Why Wear A Uniform

by Sylvia Stark
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My husband and I are registered Scouters and attend the majority of Scout functions. It disturbs us that many Scouts and their leaders choose not to wear the official Scout uniform at these gatherings or even at their troop meetings.

I would like to relate an incident about how wearing the Scout uniform may have prevented a serious accident or fatality. We were driving our Scouts to Schiff Scout Reservation and the BSA national office in New Jersey for a weekend. The boys fussed a bit about having to travel in their uniforms. But my husband, their Scoutmaster, always insisted that they wear their uniforms at any Scout event.

Along the way a passerby signaled us that the gear from atop one of our cars was coming loose. We pulled into an emergency breakdown lane. Everyone got out, some to stretch and other to tie down some sleeping bags. It was dusk, and a lone woman driver stopped ahead of us. She was in a state of panic. The entire lighting system on her car had gone out. She explained that for some time she'd been looking for an exit or a safe place to stop. With darkness coming on she feared that someone would drive right into her on the heavily traveled turnpike. But when she saw all our Scouts in uniform she knew she would be in safe hands and could probably get the help she needed. Fortunately, we were able to make the repair and the woman was most grateful.

This past summer a young man moved into our town from Massachusetts. While he was walking down the street he spotted some of our Scouts in uniform. He caught up with them and asked if they were on their way to a troop meeting. When they said "yes" he followed them to the Scout hall. This man, an Eagle Scout, is now one of our committeemen and has already helped us immensely. He told us that because he saw our boys in uniform he decided to become involved in Scouting in our town.

Three boy leaders and two adult Scouters from our troop-313, sponsored by

the United Methodist Church, Berwick, Maine-were present at a breakfast given President Ford in Dover, N.H. last February. We were the only youth organization there in uniform. Because we were, the newsmen and their entourage of cameramen moved in to take close-up pictures, of us. President Ford, an Eagle Scout stopped twice to shake hands with our group-on the way into the hall and when he left. We presented the President with our troop's original neckerchief and four days later received a letter of thanks from him.

During a Bicentennial parade we stationed our Scouts in uniform at various points about town. We notified the press that our Scouts would help arrivals locate the street on which their division was to form. We later received word that the strangers to our community really appreciated our help. That's just one more example of how a Scout in uniform can be so helpful.

When we attended a camporee this past fall in our home state, one large troop, including the leaders, never once appeared in uniform during the entire weekend. This was a televised event. Where, I wondered, is the pride of Scouts who are reluctant to wear the uniform of a movement that has produced so many great leaders in this wonderful nation, including our astronauts? If all of the 3,000 Scouts at this particular camporee had appeared in Levis, I can't help wondering how the public viewing this event would react. During hours when anyone could view the exhibits, two of our committee members walked around with me talking to leaders of other troops about how they felt about uniforms. One said that it was difficult to get all his boys to wear them especially when three of them didn't even own one. I mentioned that we maintain a supply of used uniforms (from boys who outgrew them, or leave the troop) that are passed on to the less fortunate. He agreed that his troop should do this too. Another Scouter claimed that parents are negligent about keeping the uni-

forms washed in time for meetings. My husband had heard this excuse in our troop too. When he attended the 1973 National Scout Jamboree in Moraine State Park, Pa. his Scouts washed their clothes by hand during the week they were there.

One other point that I would like to emphasize is that a leader who never wears a uniform neither sets a good example nor does he give his Scouts the incentive to wear theirs. On Uniform Day each February, my husband, Paul, wears his complete Scout attire to his office at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. He listens to all the flack and responds with, "What are you doing for the youth of today?" Last year they did photo feature on him-in uniform-in the Periscope, the Navy yard newspaper. I was proud of him.

To sell the uniform idea, we not only rely on personal example, we also conduct our troop on a point system our leaders devised. Points are given for wearing the uniforms, for work sessions, for attending meetings, etc. The more points a boy accumulates during the year, the less he has to pay to go to summer camp, with the troop fund paying the balance.

Each year our troop also enjoys a tour on a submarine in Portsmouth, N.H. My husband refuses to let any boy attend this event, unless he is in uniform. Three boys who said they had outgrown theirs somehow obtained one in a hurry when it was time for the tour. We concluded that there are few times when a Scout can produce a legitimate excuse for appearing without a uniform.

My hope in writing this is that Scout troops that have been negligent about wearing the uniform might have second thoughts about this matter

I'm proud to be part of this movement. To all Scouts and Scouters, let's visibly show that you are, too.