

### **Stuck with my own pitchfork**

At the 1997 National Jamboree, I was Scoutmaster for Troop 1724 from the Blue Ridge Council in Greenville SC. A standard jamboree troop consists of 36 Scouts and 4 Leaders with the Scouts being assigned to four patrols of eight Scouts plus the four troop leaders. In our troop, one of the patrols, the "Griffin Patrol" consisted entirely of Scouts from my home troop.

The Griffins were a unique patrol. All of them were very intelligent young men and had already advanced to First Class Rank and a few to Star. They were very active in our home troop activities and rarely did any of them miss a camping trip or meeting. I was excited that they had all signed up for the National Jamboree and we had all been looking forward to attending.

Fort A. P. Hill is usually a hot and humid place in July/August and this summer was no exception. From the first day we arrived on site, it had been challenging to participate in the many activities without dropping from dehydration and fatigue. So none of us were very joyful when we learned that the appointed time for our troop picture would be at 2 PM – right in the heat of the day.

My Senior Patrol Leader was very specific at our troop assembly that morning. "Okay, guys. Everybody needs to be back in camp and in full uniform no later than 1:30 this afternoon for our troop picture. As soon as we get that done you can drop your shirts and go back to your activities. BE ON TIME!"

It was another hot one and I was already wet with sweat by the time I put on my full uniform and started rounding up the Scouts that afternoon. By 1:30 we had everyone in camp and almost ready except for two of the Griffins.

"Where are John and Brian?" I asked James, their Patrol Leader and John's fraternal twin.

"I don't know, Mr. Smart. We saw them earlier and they said they would be here but that was a couple hours ago. Do you want me and Eric to go find them?"

"No." I knew that would only lose another couple of sheep from the fold. "Let's head on over to the picture area and hope they show up in a few minutes."

As our appointed time of 2 got closer, there was still no sign of John and Brian. I asked the photographer if we could reschedule for a little later. He was a bit aggravated but said that we should just come over when we were ready and he would work us in as soon as he could.

"Guys." I told my 37 other hot and miserable companions. "Let's go back over to our campsite and wait. Don't take off your uniforms because we need to be ready to come back as soon as John and Brian get here."

With considerable grumbling and dissatisfaction, we headed back to camp. And the Scouts weren't very happy either!

We had been back in camp for about 15 minutes and everyone was really beginning to get antsy when I looked up and saw my two problem boys running across the street from the bus stop. As they staggered into camp, they started their excuses. "Mr. Smart, we lost track of time and missed the bus and it took a lot longer than we thought it would and we got here as fast as we could..."

"I do not want to hear it!" I was definitely aggravated but I feigned being much more angry than I really was. "Just get on your uniforms so we can get this over with. Everybody is upset with you two and we'll talk about it later."

They rushed to their tent to get their shirts and we managed to squeeze into the picture line within not too many minutes. As soon as the photographer said "Good." they all scattered to drop those hot shirts and resume their fun.

"Just a minute." I said to John and Brian. I continued my "act" of feigned anger. "I am so upset with the two of you that I cannot even talk to you about it right now. I want you to stay in the subcamp the rest of the afternoon and we will talk after dinner." And with that I headed back to change out of my hot uniform shirt as well.

My intent was to let them "stew" on what their punishment might be for the rest of the day and then discuss some reasonable punishment later.

I was scheduled to eat with the Blue Orb Patrol that evening but before I joined them I stopped by the Griffins to remind John and Brian of our appointment after dinner. They acknowledged this with a silent nod but I knew it would be a topic of conversation all through their meal.

As the sun began to sink and the dishes were being cleaned the two of them approached my tent area and said that they were ready to talk if I was. We pulled a chair for me and a bench for them over to the shady side of our central tarp.

"Guys." I began. "I am still very angry with both of you. I have decided that you need to tell me what you think is a fair punishment for your thoughtless action this afternoon. You made the whole troop miserable." And that said, I quit talking.

Seminars on negotiation technique teach that in most situations "the first one to talk loses" and I have no trouble staying quiet. We sat in silence for several minutes with an occasional glance between them from time to time but with no offer of repentance or penance.

Finally, I got up and headed back to my tent. "When you are ready to talk, let me know." I said without looking back.

Within moments, they were surrounded by the rest of the Griffins and I could hear them chattering like chipmunks as they discussed options and alternatives. Finally, Brian shouted to me that they were ready. As I returned, the rest of the patrol quickly disappeared.

"Mr. Smart." Brian was the spokesman. John tended to be talkative with his peers but not as much so around adults. "Do you remember that devotional story you told us at summer camp this year?"

I had no idea where this was headed but responded, "I told you guys several devotional stories, Brian. Which one are you talking about?"

"The one where those guys brought the woman who committed adultery to Jesus."

I was still not quite sure how this related to their being late to our picture, but now very curious, I said, "Yes, Brian. I remember telling you that one. What does that have to do with this situation with you and John?"

“Well, Mr. Smart. You said that when those guys asked Jesus to punish the woman, he said something about throwing stones and then he forgave her. Mr. Smart, we sort of look at you like Jesus, and we didn’t mean to be late, and we thought that maybe you could just forgive us this time.”

On one episode of the old Andy Griffith show, Andy’s son Opie trapped him in a similar situation and Andy made the comment that he had gotten “stuck on his own pitchfork.” I now knew what that felt like. I did my best to keep a straight face and let the silence settle over us.

“Brian. John. First, let me say that I appreciate that you would somehow consider me in the same way as our Lord. But I want you to know, and I’m serious about this, that I am not in any way worthy of that consideration. Jesus was perfect and I am far from perfect. He could do things that none of us, including me, can ever hope to do.”

“However, you make a good point.” They began to smile. “I am going to forgive you.” Their smiles got bigger. “But...” The smiles disappeared. “Do you remember what Jesus told the woman before he forgave her?” I was doing my best to come out of this without too much damage to my authority.

They looked at each other and quickly acknowledged that they were clueless on this point.

“He told her, ‘Go and sin no more.’ Do you two think that you can make it through the rest of the jamboree without giving me any more grief?” I asked.

“Yes sir.” They said almost in unison. They knew they were almost free.

“If you don’t, you are going to see me like the angry Jesus who cleaned the thieves and moneychangers out of the temple. I told you that story too, didn’t I?” I looked at them with all of the seriousness that I could muster. “Now beat it and don’t let me have to do this again.”

They were instantly gone and out of the corner of my eye I could see them “high-fiving” with their patrol members and I am sure telling how they had outwitted their old Scoutmaster.

Actually, “all’s well that ends well” as Shakespeare wrote in one of his plays, I forget which one. And Brian and John managed to make it through the rest of their jamboree without any further incident of misbehavior or mischief.

Brian eventually made it to the rank of Eagle Scout, graduated from high school with honors and attended Georgia Tech (like his old scoutmaster). John got stalled at Life Scout before dropping out for other interests.

I continue to tell the story of Jesus and the woman to a new generation of Scouts, but now I always remember to stress the part about “Go and sin no more.” Somehow, I imagine that each time I tell it, the Lord chuckles a little bit and I always remember Brian and John.

*Russell Smart is a Scoutmaster in Greenville SC. He has recovered nicely from his pitchfork wounds but knows that it’s only a matter of time until he gets stuck again.*