

On the 2006 Adirondack canoe trip we paddled along a large lake the first day. The water was choppy, and the wind in our faces made it hard going. We set up camp that afternoon and stretched out our campsites along the lake. Later in the day I took a canoe from one of our campsites to the other. What a difference a few hours makes in the outdoors.

The water was now smooth, like glass, and the canoe glided almost above the water. The sun was down but the darkness of night had not quite arrived. The lake was quiet and peaceful. What a beautiful place and time to be in the wilderness.

In the outdoors, sometimes a few hours can seem like years, and sometimes years can pass and make changes that seem like no more than a few hours.

Along the side of the lake, I saw a man knee deep in the water. Shirt off, pants rolled up. Cleaning up and refreshing, the same way those explorers, Indians, soldiers, adventurers, and outdoorsmen have done for thousands of years. How many countless men had done the same thing that he was doing that night?

As I came closer to him, I could see that he was young and strong looking, with a sense of confidence about his movements as he walked through the water.

I thought about how the wilderness shapes the men that go into it. The wilderness, the woods, the wild, the outback, the forest, nature, what ever name you call it. I thought about the parts of the outdoors that are in almost every sport or action activity that you engage in. From swimming, baseball, football, hockey, hiking, running, bicycling, and tennis – you name it and if you think long enough every sport seems to have outdoor components in it.

I think that is what helps make sports so exciting and so important for boys and young men to take part in. Besides the teamwork and individual effort, the natural components of ice, water, dirt, weather, and ground all play into the shaping of a man's character as well as his body.

The wilderness, however, is the one true and complete arena. It is unencumbered by artificial rules and components that protect men from its full force. You can play a game to exhaustion on a football field, and then go home to a house, warm food, a hot shower. If you play hard and hurt yourself on a hockey rink, you can always go to the doctor. If you are hungry or thirsty after a basketball game, you can go into your kitchen for food.

If you exhaust yourself in the wild, if you hurt yourself in the wild, if you don't balance your eating and drinking in the wild, you may never go home again. Or, if you are lucky, make it home alive.

If you can survive and excel in the wilderness, you can accomplish almost anything in the civilized world that we live in.

I thought all this paddling through the waters towards the young man and my destination. As I drew close I recognized him, it was my son, a young man who had been shaped by years in the outdoors and the scouting program.

As a father, I am grateful to the great men and women that have helped him on his path in scouting. To those men and women, a father says thank you.

To you, the scouts of Troop 4 present here tonight and for all the Troop 4 scouts who have passed through the scouting program, I leave you with these thoughts:

- I am proud of each of you, in a very real and personal way. I've been asked many times "How do you know them all?" It's easy, because each of you are you and not like anyone else.
- What we do here is real – real fire, real mountains, real axes, real knives, real hikes, real sweat, and real accomplishments.
- Work hard, real hard, if you want to achieve anything worth achieving. Hard work will not hurt you, but being lazy will.
- Follow the scout oath and law in your lives. It is a very real way to help guide you. I am 50 years old and I can tell you from experience that the closer you stay to the scout oath and law in your daily lives and the harder you work the happier you will be and the more that people will look up to you.
- If you are in scouts, make Eagle Scout your goal. I have never met a man who earned it and regretted it, but I have met countless who wish that they had.

As scouts, you are better prepared, better motivated, more physically fit, and more mentally awake than most of your contemporaries. You should be proud of who you are. I am confident that I have spent these past years not just among boys and young men, but amongst you, the great leaders and explorers of the new age.

David Kirchner
Scoutmaster
Troop 4, Milford MA
1999 - 2008