

Boy Scouts

By Papa Jack Hoeschler



I was a Cub Scout, then a Boy Scout at Blessed Sacrament School in La Crosse, Wisconsin. I never got to Eagle rank, Scouting's highest award, which Uncle



Fritz achieved. But I did get my Life Badge, the next highest step↑.

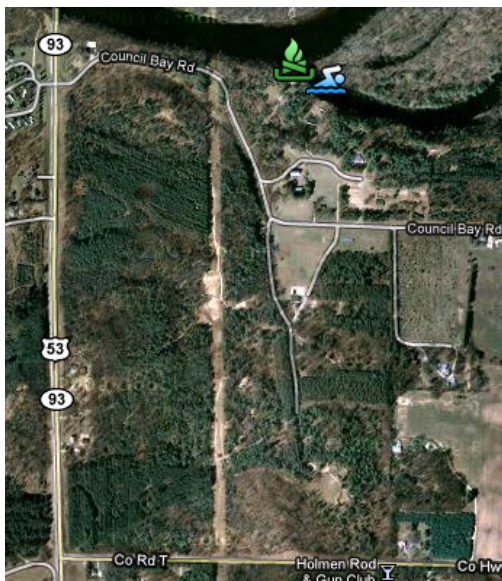
We had an exceptional Scout Master who was also a professional Scout administrator at the La Crosse district office. Because of his regular work with



other troops, we had to hold our meetings at ←Blessed Sacrament on Sunday nights. That was the evening that the *Wonderful World of Disney* show ran on TV. It was disappointing to miss the show, but



good Scouting activities are always worth the sacrifice.



Each summer I would spend about two weeks at ←Camp Decorah, the Boy Scout camp on the Black River near Galesville, Wisconsin. It had a rifle range, as well as the usual crafts and other camp activities. We slept in surplus Army tents on raised wooden platforms (1969↑). We had



to clean up our camp areas daily, including sweeping all the paths.

I also played the \sphericalangle baritone bugle in the La Crosse Boy Scout Drum and Bugle Corps for 3 years. This took a lot of time since we had weekly practice sessions starting in the spring, parades almost every summer weekend, plus pageant competitions during late summer and early fall.



We were pretty good, but not in the first rank of really great Wisconsin drum and bugle corps, such as the Madison and Racine Scouts who competed all over the United States.

I liked the drum and bugle corps because the routines were more creative than regular band routines. But I still played trombone in my high school and college bands.



When I was a freshman in high school, I got a summer job in 1957 as the Assistant Waterfront Director at Camp Decorah, where I had previously been a camper. The camp was run by Mr. Sam Hagerman, a professional Scout leader. His family members all played major roles in the camp operation. Mrs. Hagerman ran the kitchen, and their oldest son, Fritz, was Waterfront Director. Sam Jr. also worked at the camp, and the youngest Hagerman son, Topper, was our mascot. *(Sam Sr. and Fritz, 1967)*

I am amazed that I was given so much responsibility at so young an age. Fritz Hagerman had to go away one time, and I had to manage the waterfront → show for the parents' open house. We had a three-ring circus show planned,



with high diving, lap swimming, and a beginner lesson demonstration.



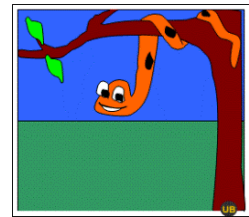
As I was announcing the events, another staffer ran up to me to report that one of the beginners had choked on water, and was being resuscitated on the banks of the novice area. I had to quickly introduce another

event and then run over to the make sure that the kid was all right.



At the end of the summer we used some of the camp canoes to take an all day trip down the Black River to La Crosse. My father and another adult were part of our group. We had about 4 or 5 canoes and my father had all the lunches in his boat.

My father's canoe got ahead of the rest of ours when we were fooling around, trying to get a snake in a tree to drop into one of the other canoes. While we were distracted, my father talked a passing motorboat into letting him hook a ride. He got several miles ahead of us, so that we had a very hard time catching up when it was time to have lunch. Such was the type of stunt that my father loved to pull.



Now if you do your duty to God and country, like good Scouts, the next time you can learn why and when Nonna used her flashlight in church!

Easter Chicks and Other Pets

By Papa Jack Hoeschler

When my family moved to Ebners' Coulee in La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1951 there was also a barn on the property. It had stalls for our three horses, plus a chicken coop where Jimmy and I raised fancy pigeons. Because we had a barn, some friends would give us their baby chicks that had been Easter presents. They got tired of caring for the darling chicks after about a week or two, as the chickens lost their fluff and tirelessly ran around our friends' homes and yards.



Leghorn chicks...



Leghorn pullets...



Leghorn rooster!

Some years we had 20 to 30 chicks living in our coop and running around our yard. These yellow balls always grew up to be Leghorn roosters (boys). As the chicks grew over a 2 to 3 month period,



they developed white feathers and could fly if we threw them out of the barn's second floor hayloft. Jimmy and I developed a game where we would throw the first chicken out of the barn in a high arch. We would then throw the next bird

hard and straight, and try to hit the first bird as it would come down. This didn't seem to hurt the chickens, other than ruffling their feathers.



What happened to the chickens? Eventually they all seemed to die. Either the foxes ate them or we ate them. But then again, it made room in our coop for next year's Easter chicks.



We also had a series of baby lambs. None of them lasted long, so eventually we gave up on the idea of having them as pets. My mother ran over one that



was sleeping in the shade behind our car. Another got caught in a rain storm and died of pneumonia. A third hung himself when he jumped out of a manger in the barn where he had been loosely tied, but could not reach the floor on the other side. When we found him the next day we all felt extremely sad and remorseful. (*Janice,*

lamb and I, 1952)

For about 6 years in the 1950's Jimmy and I raised and showed pigeons, usually winning blue ribbons at various shows and fairs. We kept the pigeons in a coop on the second floor of our Coulee barn. This photo of us is from a 1956 *La Crosse Tribune* article titled: "Pigeon Hobby One Way to Curb Delinquency." I wonder who dreamed up that crazy headline. After all, I *was* an altar boy.



Our pigeons were fancy show birds: fantails, pouters, rollers, tumblers and homing pigeons. The ←fantails were generally white and had showy tails like turkeys. The



pouters→ were bigger pigeons which would show off by expanding their chests and throats like big balloons.

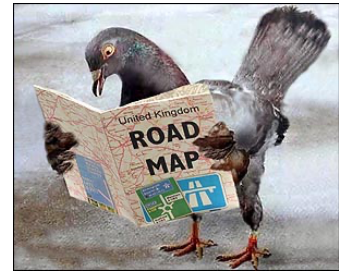


The ←rollers and tumblers→ had a dramatic habit which was bred into them. As they flew, we would clap our hands, and they would start to roll, tumble and fall to the ground. Just before hitting



the ground they would fly up into the sky again. This behavior had been developed in order to escape predators such as eagles and hawks.

Our homing pigeons could be trained to come back home from more than 100 miles. Jimmy and I would teach them to do this by taking them a short distance away, then letting them fly home. Over several months we would take them farther and farther away, so that they could eventually fly home long distances.



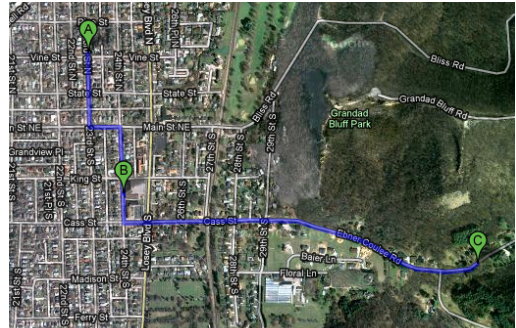
All in all, it was fun to have all of these animals, but we had to make sure that they were fed and watered daily. This was good training for life, as my mother would often say.

Now if you continue to be take good care of all your animals, including the wild birds at the feeders, the next time you can hear about the day some kids surprised everyone at Papa's school and got their photo in the newspaper!

The Day Our Goats Went to School

By Papa Jack Hoeschler

When I was 9 years old in 1951, our family moved from 303 North 23rd Street (A) in La Crosse to Ebners' Coulee (C), just outside the city. My brother, Jimmy, and I went to Blessed Sacrament (B), a Catholic grade school, about a mile from our house at the bottom of the Coulee on Losey Boulevard.



In our Coulee horse barn we also kept two or three goats as pets. The goats could roam freely in our yard, but could not travel too far since each dragged a 25-foot long chain attached to a concrete cinder block. (1952 Christmas card photo)



We had gotten these goats from neighbors of my grandparents, Willie and Mabel Bowe, who lived on a farm in Fox Lake, Wisconsin. My father drove the goats 140 miles home to La Crosse in the back seat of our 1949 Buick. I remember sitting with the goats and trying to keep them calm. The whole idea of taking goats in a nice car for such a long distance seems unbelievable to me, even today.



At Ebners' Coulee the goats could walk out of the barn



and up the hill to our house. On the way, they could nibble low branches on the trees. Sometimes the goats would climb on our cars or those of our visitors. Needless to say, our guests did not like the small hoof prints on their hoods or roofs. It was our job to keep the goats off the cars.



One nice fall morning in 1951, the janitor of Blessed Sacrament opened the doors to air out the building an hour or so before school started. At the same time, our goats somehow got loose of their chains and cinder blocks and left home on a walk. About 7:30 the janitor found two goats walking the school hallways. He notified both the police and the local radio stations, and asked them to help find the owner to pick up the goats. My father called in when he heard the radio announcement.

When I arrived at school at 8 o'clock, everyone was joking that our goats, named The Madame and Archibald, had beat me to class. The students were quite excited by the unusual visitors and wanted to pet them. The local newspaper, the *La Crosse Tribune*, photographed the goats with my class and wrote a short story about the episode (December 5, 1951).



My father brought the drug store delivery truck to school loaded up the goats, and took them home. He told the news reporter, that the goats "must have become tired of working for us for alfalfa, and thought they'd get an education and work for real hay." My father loved publicity and enjoyed giving memorable quotes.

Once back in Ebners' Coulee, we reattached the goats to their chains and blocks and hoped for the best. But no one was mad and I was a local star for a few days!

Now if you promise not to climb up on anyone's car or wander off, the next time you can hear about Papa's pet who really smelled—or did it?!

My Skunk at Viterbo

By Papa Jack Hoeschler



The Franciscan nuns who taught us staged an annual fashion show at one of their other schools, ←St. Francis School of Nursing. All the female students designed and sewed outfits that they modeled to an audience.



This fashion show always had a theme, and the year I was 12, it was famous fiction. I was asked to play ←Huck Finn in the show, a 19th century kid who has Mississippi River adventures. As such, I was supposed to walk down the auditorium aisle holding a skunk. But the only prop the nuns had to use was a mangy stuffed skunk mounted on a pathetic base.

I told my mother about the lousy skunk I was supposed to carry, and how awkward I felt. She found a black and white fur piece that looked believable when I cradled it in my arms.



On the day of the show, I was a big hit since people thought I was holding a real skunk. I would pet it and talk to it, and tell it to be calm and not to run away. The folks in the audience were afraid that the skunk would spray them all with its smelly scent. But of course, the skunk was quiet and didn't do anything!

Now if you don't play any stinky tricks on us, the next time you can hear why Nonna's cat raised her kittens up in a tree!