

One of my most pleasant memories of my days as a Boy Scout would have to be the weekends I participated in the Order of the Arrow conclaves in Kentucky or Tennessee. The Order of the Arrow, Scouting's national honor service society, and a part of the national Boy Scout program, has Lodges within each local Boy Scout Council; frequently, those nine Lodges in Kentucky and Tennessee would meet together once or twice a year, with one of the Lodges hosting the event, called a Conclave.

I enjoyed the event for several reasons: the fresh air; the examination of different summer camp facilities than the ones I was used to in Oldham County and at Rough River. The program itself of the Conclave, which focused on ways that Arrowmen can be of further service to their communities and to their Councils. The meeting of fellow Arrowmen, boys and adults whom were elected by their peers in their Scouting units "not so much for what you've done, but rather for what you will do."

There were two reasons in particular, however, why I enjoyed the Spring and Fall Conclaves. The almost endless card games, in which while playing Skill Award Poker or Super UNO (which required four decks of special playing cards!), a group of us could also talk about our Scouting experiences and why we are still playing the Scouting game while our school peers were "playing other games".

And the patch trading and appraisals of your patch collections!

Several older Scouts or perhaps a couple adults would sit or stand and take a look at your patches, offering advice on either keeping them or trading them. "That patch is worth about three," the person would say, indicating the number of patches that it would trade for. "This one, I wouldn't even bother. Everyone has one of those."

The appraisals were done both as a combination education and teaching tool as well as a way not to waste others' time in trading or collecting items. I appreciated it, because I was interested in the sport not so much to increase my collection of what I had but to know just what it is that "makes a patch worth more" than the others. A good variety of colors. A design which is unique or which has not been copied to everything else. Sets of patches - especially complete sets. Old stuff.

I enjoyed knowing the history behind those pieces of cloth and thread. When I get a chance to do so, I spend more time educating Scouts and Scouters on where a patch came from, or the type of person that would wear that position patch, or as much of the history of the Boy Scout Council that I was aware of and when it was merged or split up for better service than I would explaining the relative worth of a patch.

In the 80s, people started to contact me about selling patches to me. I wanted to trade some older patches for some shirts with various rare (at least to me) knot emblems to a gentleman. He insisted that I buy them from him instead.

"I know that I have some pretty valuable patches and items in my collection," I explained to the man. "No, I'm only selling them. I've got too many patches as it is now!" he responded.

I wrote the check, and took the shirts. I only wanted the special

embroidered knots and patches found on those shirts. But since then, it seems that I have done much more "trading" in which I would trade money for whatever they had, than I did actual trading: I have a patch you want; you have a patch I want. We swap the patches, we shake hands using the Scout handshake, and we walk off. If it's been a good trade, we would swap addresses and phone numbers and keep each other in mind for similar type items.

I sat down during a tradeoree with an old gentleman whom have been playing the game of Scouting for as long as I've been alive. We had traded items several times in the past by postal mail, but this was the first time I was to meet him in person. I asked him why wouldn't more people trade like we do simple and uncomplicated.

"Money. People see riches when they see old stuff, whether it's patches or books or old furniture. They see the opportunity to get rich."

He showed me a patch from his notebook he carried around with him to trade shows like the one we were both attending. The patch was small, a one-inch by two inch piece of cloth. An old Eagle Scout badge. I let out a silent "Wow".

"This is one of the first Eagle Scout cloth badges. People want to give me almost two thousand dollars for it". I wouldn't trade it for all of the tea in China. Why? Because it's mine. I earned it. I love showing it to people because they haven't seen one that old before. Not to brag, but just to show it off. I don't ask for money for it - I just have it in here with the other stuff I collect."

A Scouter appraised my complete Scouting collection, consisting of several hundred council emblems, a couple of uniforms, a framed set of knot emblems and the first council emblems from places in Kentucky, and some books. He told me that based on the guides he used, that my collection is worth close to four thousand dollars. But then, Ken looked me in the eye and told me "Don't go out and spend it, though. You would have to find someone that wanted all of this right now - and you would have to let it all go in one lot to get that price."

My wife and I attended one tradeoree held in connection with a National Order of the Arrow Conference. She almost screamed when she saw one of the patches I had framed on the wall of my office room back home.

"This is just like yours - did you see the price they want for it??" A small piece of cloth, sewn into a black and white square knot with a red border. Five hundred dollars.

"That's about right," I spoke, and walked off. "Why can't you sell yours for that much - we can do so much with that money, Mike!" She was right. We could do so much if I went home, took the knot from the frame, returned to the site and sold that patch.

"You think that someone will buy it for that much? Not likely. And even if I went home and sold my patch, I would have to find someone first who needs it to their collection, and second, whom would pay my five big ones for it? That guy's dreaming!" I kept on walking away. It never sold while we were there.

While doing research for this article, and to find a scan of a particular badge I needed for a webpage, I went onto eBay, the largest online auction

house in the world. I've purchased some items from others on eBay, and I've sold a few old certificates and emblems online. I enjoy reading the descriptions and seeing some of the prices people attach to "stuff they've found and want to sell." The auction house has become a large storehouse of just about anything and everything Scouting. For sale.

PT Barnum was absolutely right. Sucker -er -people would pay \$400 for a \$12 medal and presentation kit, sterling silver or not. \$100 patches are commonplace on the forum, and one guy was selling "Scout pins" stamped "1911" on the backside for \$40 each. Most of the Scout badges made and sold in the 60s had "1911" stamped on the backside -the year that the insignia was copyrighted. There are some valuable items on eBay, but there are also Charter certificates signed by "a bunch of people" which goes for \$30 and climbing.

What cracks me up are the descriptions: "Medal, boy scout. You guys know what this is for, and what it's worth to a veteran Scout master. So make your bid and get it before someone else gets it!" At least the guy didn't try to lie and say that the contest medal he was auctioning was a "medal given to my grandson for scout work by Baden Powell himself!" Hard to do when the medal was created in 1963!

And "Outdoor Code and Scout Pledge card" which is going for \$11.00 even though the card itself was sold (and is still being sold!) for thirteen cents! Oh, the Scout Pledge on one side is NOT the "Pledge that Scouts say each week at their meetings" but rather a commitment on the part of the Scout to take care of America's outdoors. This guy or gal has NEVER been around Scouts before, for sure!

Oh give me a full day, whereby all I do is sit and show or trade my various badges and items that I've collected and shared over the last twenty years. Where like in the old days, those more knowledgeable about what I have than I ever will be will come by, sit down with me, and look at the insignia and books and other items I have collected over the years, telling me what's good and bad about it all. We can share a cup of coffee or a soft drink and talk about our Scouting lives and what we do for a living. And others would come by and exchange badges with me, only offering their items and their hand in fellowship as the only bond, the only promise, that I was not being taken. I leave with the money I came in with, but with a mind full of great stories and experiences and my pockets full of cards and names and phone numbers and now, email addresses of others whom enjoy the same hobby I do -and whom are willing to trade.

I have a patch you want; you have a patch I want. We swap the patches; we shake hands using the Scout handshake. And if there's enough time, we might whip out a deck of UNO cards and play a couple hands.

I'm too old and gray for Conclaves any more, but I wish I wasn't.