

"What will Barbara say about this?"

My boss gave me the travel document and waited for my answer.

"She'll throw a fit. Then she'll ask me where I'm staying, and if I don't come up with a quick enough response," I stated, looking at my boss' face as I received the paper from him, "she'll find someplace for me to stay at and make sure I got something to eat."

"And how long has the two of you been together?"

"It'll be ten years this month...." I had to think about that day a bit before responding to Art.

I was on a book tour, promoting my first book called "Patches and Pins." My book broker arranged for me to go to a series of Borders bookstores and some Boy Scouting conferences in order to sell the paperback. The book was about my life before and with Scouting, and how those things intertwined with my personal life. It ends as I make one of the most important decisions in my life up to that point.

The book was an easy sell to Scouting people -- they have been reading my columns, advice and information on several Scouting-related forums for about eight years before the release of the book. This was good marketing on my part and an enjoyable part of my life while waiting for the book to be published.

It was those who had no idea who I was, let alone what the book is about -- those sales waned. If I was lucky, I got 2 minutes to promote the book's universal values to an early morning television show audience. If I was really lucky, the person interviewing me would have actually read the advance copy of the book I sent him or her. Most of the time the questions were generic:

"Mike, tell me about your Scouting experiences" (it's in the book, if you had taken the time to READ IT before asking me!).

"Mike, can you tell me how you felt when you saw that girl kill herself?"
(well, at least you browsed through the book and found the juicy parts!)

"How do you pronounce "Setta...settum...settummankie, is that how you say it?? Are you an American Indian?" (it's explained in the BOOK, freak....and it's pronounced exactly as you read it!)

But I smile, my dimples showing the audience and the reporter that no harm has been done, and answer those same questions over and over again.

It was in Richmond, Virginia, however, that the reporter provided me with an opportunity to really explain what the book -- and me -- was about.

"I loved your book," she lied coyly, "and I wanted to know if you could summarize your book into a paragraph, what would you say is the book about?"

She never read the book, or it would have been obvious to her. I smiled and then asked her, "Summarize my life into a paragraph or two? That's like trying to explain how to get to this station from the airport, or how your city was formed, or how you were hired."

She stopped smiling. I went on.

"The book is about my life and how the rules of a game called Boy Scouting, shaped my life, once I knew what the rules -- the Scout Oath and Law -- and those unwritten rules which goes along with it, were. The book is about how the various experiences I have had in school, church and community got me where it did and about some of the people that assisted with the shaping and designing of my life. It is a wonderful book for a parent to share with his or her child; a super book for a Scouter to share with his or her youth members; and it is universal in nature as you do not have to be familiar with Scouting in order to read or understand the book."

I then looked at her and asked, "How did I do??"

She commented that I did well and that I was to appear at the Borders bookstore that afternoon after 1pm, to autograph copies of "Patches and

Pins" and to meet up with people from the Richmond area. The interview was over and she tossed it to the weather person.

After the lights went off, she looked at me cross-eyed and said "You didn't have to be that way..."

"If you would have even just skimmed the book, Nancy, you would have realized what it was about and we could have shaved off 45 seconds of the interview. I don't have time to give you and everyone out there the "Readers' Digest" version of the book...I want them -- and you -- to READ THE ENTIRE BOOK." I took off the microphone and placed it on the seat of the chair as I straightened my jacket and walked toward the newsroom.

There was a crowd at Borders. The manager let me and two cases of my books in the backdoor and explained that the phone has literally been taken off the hook and his voicemail was full of questions about what time and which Borders I was going to be at. "There's only one Borders in town, Mike, and I'm it...but I've got people driving in here from all over wanting to see you. Please tell me you can stay another hour or so...."

"I can stay two more hours, but I do have to get back to work." I smiled as I assisted him in off-loading the books from the cart onto the floor under the table that was set up for me.

"I think your interview this morning with Nancy Cook did it.... Nobody has ever told her off like that on camera, and you really stung her with your comments! I think most of the people here coming here to see you are just coming to shake your hand. She's a real bitch...." We stacked the books three deep on one side of the table and the manager placed a set of Sharpie markers on the other side of the table.

"I didn't mean to hurt her feelings," I said. I lied. I meant every word I said.

At one p.m., the line formed. The first person in line was a Boy Scout. Marketing for the store, I was told. We took photos together -- someone from the newspaper and then his mother and sister, and then some other

person with a camera. I signed his book as he asked and things went from there.

"Thank you for what you said to Miss Cook this morning!" one woman stated. "She deserved exactly what you dished out to her!" said another. "She can be a true bitch when she wants to be," said a guy somewhere between the end of the first hour and the start of the second. Amazingly, there were more people who read the Internet parcels and wanted to just meet me and tell me about their favorite Internet "chapter".

Barbara was in the line after the first hour was over.

"I was told this book is going to be a good seller, and I have a nephew who's earned the Eagle badge. Would this make a good gift?" She had a voice that reminded one of an older Southern Belle. It was not put on, but genuine.

"I think whatever you gave him, as long as you gave it to him from your heart and not your purse, would be treasured by him..." I responded, opening up the cover and looking at Barbara's face for the first time.

Barbara's face looked young, but there were appearances that she was an old woman. The corners of her mouth dropped downward into a frown, while her dark brown hair had streaks of gray. She wore glasses that were thick and the line down the center of each lens revealed they were bifocular in the brown frame. Other than those features, she could easily pass for a woman of 30 or perhaps even late 20s. She had a body that most women at 48 would literally die for. While not large-breasted, she was well proportioned for her small size and weight. Very little fat, and where it was, was covered very conservatively by the top and sweater she was wearing. She looked like someone's mother - not someone's grandmother.

"Who am I signing this to?" I asked.

"Ethan." She smiled and I could not help returning the smile. It was as if the sunlight was brought into the room and shone in my face. The crooked sides of her face turned upwards into a smile, and she looked directly at me. It was plain to me that she loved Ethan and was so very proud of his personal accomplishment.

I returned the glance and then returned it back to the book inside cover and wrote "Ethan: I hope you treasure this book as much as you treasure the person who took the time to find something special for you on your occasion in becoming an Eagle Scout. Congrats!" I then signed my name.

"I'm sorry but I have to ask. When was the last time you ate?" She accepted the book and placed it in under her left armpit.

I had to think about it a minute. "This morning, why?"

"I would like to fix you supper. That's all."

YES! I thought to myself..."That would be great...thank you very much!" I spoke aloud.

"I'll stand right over there until you get done here, Michael, and we can talk about what you would like for me to fix for you..."

"Mike," I corrected her. I smiled as Barbara moved away from the table and allowed the next person to receive a book.

When the last person received her signed copy of "Patches and Pins", Barbara moved behind her and grabbed another copy of the book. She opened it and placed her name, address and zip code, and email address in the book. She then closed the cover and handed it to me.

"I don't do nothing from a box, and I'm not a real fan of take-out unless it's Chinese. So, tell me what you want to eat and I'll fix it for you. No, I'm not some nut...I just know how to get to a man's heart, that's all." She gave the book back to me, and I stood and extended my hand.

"I'll be there and even bring the wine" I spoke back.

I arrived at her trailer in the small Virginia town 30 minutes before I was supposed to, with the wine bottle in the paper sack it was given to me in. I

knocked on the door and when it opened, I saw Barbara wearing an apron, her hair a little tossed than when she was there at the bookstore earlier.

"Hi Darling", she said, hugging me. "I've got to go back to the kitchen. Come in and have a seat..."

Dinner was served a few minutes later, complete with the wine I brought. Roast beef, so tender I could eat it with a spoon; peas, carrots, real mashed potatoes and brown gravy from the roast, and biscuits.

"I don't get a chance to really put on a spread like this," Barbara said, "so it's nice to feed someone who appreciates good country cookin'."

And I did.

"Aw honey, "Barbara spoke over the phone, "You're going to miss my roast again! Where are you going and where will you stay this time? Do you need me to help find a place for you to stay at??"