



Memories and the Legacy of Tony Dries

When I heard that Tony Dries had died, I went to the *Commercial Appeal* website to read his obituary. It stated in part that Tony had been a Boy Scout Scoutmaster for six years and he had donated labor and materials to build Camp Kia Kima. Well, that may be fine for an obituary, but Tony deserves more as he left a legacy with the Boy Scouts, Kamp Kia Kima, and definitely with me.

I began my Boy Scout career with Troop 200 at St. Stephen's Methodist Church. At that time I learned all the basic skills of Scouting with our games of Capture the Flag, Steal the Bacon, and even Red Rover. I had been on the campouts and learned how to burn food, get wet and muddy, and shiver in the night when my official Boy Scout blanket did not stay covering me. I had experienced the fear when Indians came to a campfire grabbing other Scouts and feeling how glad I was that they passed me by. Well, that was before Tony came in my life.

With the statement that Tony had been Scoutmaster for six years, that makes me pretty much a legacy of his tenure as I must have been with his Troop for the total time. He had some strange behavior when he first came as now there was to be a plan for the Troop meetings and we would be learning different Scouting skills like knot tying, nature, singing songs, and Morse code. I certainly had not advanced much in Scouting ranks at that time as some of those basic Scouting skills were just not the type of thing that I had gone out on my own to learn.

Although he was certainly "Mr. Dries" to us at that time, he quickly became Tony to all of us. Looking back, it is amazing that he really was quite young at the time, but of course, our perception was that he was much older. One of the first things he did is change the whole camping out process. He got brand new canvas two man pup tents that we could actually carry as they were so light. We no longer brought our meals in a can to heat up, as everything was cooked from scratch. Tony certainly had cooking skills and his spaghetti recipe was great but he had us do the preparation, cooking, and cleanup. Particularly the emphasis on cleanup, no dirty pots and certainly no soot or grease was tolerated. He came up with challenges for us on campouts to test our mettle and practice our skills. On our first campout, he had gone to a friend's place in Raleigh and decided

that we needed to build a bridge across a creek. His selection for a base log was pretty intimidating as we knew we could never move it. However, he used a chant that went something like “Say in agaya, Unh!” It was the teamwork that everybody was synchronized on saying “Unh!” that moved that log to all of our amazement. We also found out that singing was just something that we better become accustomed to as he was going to lead us. Of course, he had some of his own songs that he used like the “Good Morning Breakfast Lovers, It’s Time to Get Up” one that became our morning wake-up call and his two favorites – the “Great Speckled Bird” and “Picking Up Paw Paws”. We certainly did not know what a Paw Paw was, but we picked up a lot of them with all the required motions as we sang.

Somehow he picked me out as a leader – must be because I was never leading anything. That was his way of challenging you to do more than you would on your own. My first big job was Troop Quartermaster. Now I am sure that had nothing to do with the fact that we lived next door to the church and we had a garage where the troop trailer could fit. However, I took to the job of signing out equipment to Patrols (yes, those were the days when Patrols did things on their own), taking inventory, cleaning equipment, etc. Maybe not too much leadership, but certainly responsibility. I also now was advancing in rank, as I was now mastering and completing those Scout skills to get First Class. That got me to be a Patrol Leader – the Ranger patrol. We did hikes, went camping in the Wolf River bottoms, and even did cycling merit badge together.

We now looked forward to a camporee as we could compete with the best of patrols. But the big change in camping was that we would now be going to summer camp at Kamp Kia Kima - the real adventure started there. Since our troop had not been to summer camp before, we asked around and all got different perspectives, but now we were going to experience it firsthand. Now Tony felt the only way to camp was to do it at Slick Rock – no dining hall for us. That first year, we did all the normal things in camp and learned a lot. I knew how to swim – or at least a good dog paddle at that time, but in the South Fork river I learned all the strokes in the sand like everyone else and practiced them in the water. So with lots of dirt and some merit badges, I thought summer camp was the greatest. But what we did not know is that was just the introductory course. By the next year, we all had a lot more experience and by then I was the Senior Patrol Leader. Before our normal week, I spent a week in base camp with the provisional troop so I could concentrate on earning merit badges as I was closing in on Eagle. That was a great experience but now a lot was expected from me, as Tony felt our troop should be the best troop at Slick Rock that week and we should win all the awards. Well, we worked hard to earn the Eagle Coup as Tony had us line the trail to our campsite with rocks and whitewash them and make plenty of camp gadgets. Then we also took the competition in the water carnival and the skills event. So we achieved what he had set as our goal. We thought we had reached the pinnacle, and then Tony said he had one more adventure for us – a midnight beeline hike back to base camp. That is a story in itself and certainly one that singled out our troop for all of Kia Kima. Back at base camp for the big campfire show I now was one of those Scouts the Indians sought out and I was no longer afraid.



Another tradition started by Tony was the big campfire and Court of Honor after summer camp. Again, we just happened to live next door and had a big back yard. At that time you could actually have a bonfire there without permits and the Memphis fire department at the door. With the Kia Kima OA dance team being an integral part of the campfire featuring Steve Horne with his six hoops and Bobby Spray with his fire hoop, an elaborate lighting of the fire (that required Plan B sometimes when it did not work), the big teepee set up, and certainly some singing, it was a great end of the summer event.

After my introductory years as a camper at Kia Kima, I now became part of the staff. So I was not with the troop at camp, but Tony still expected things from me. That sort of relates to the part where he was working at Kia Kima doing pretty much all their electrical work and anything else they needed. I was now part of his work crew any time there was work to be done. So some extra duty in the evenings during summer camp and a lot more trips to Kia Kima during the off season.

To numerate all of the stories about Tony would make this a novelette at least. But a few tidbits may sum up his dedication and character – he really was a character.

- Like the night at Sitting Bull dance hall when Sam Tuminello came in to see if Tony could tow his car out of the woods – seems like he had intentionally put it there with his date but did not expect to be stuck. Nothing to it for Tony as he probably remembered his own similar experience.
- He told me never to wear a tie that was tied on, always wear a clip on. He then related a bar fight story where the other person used his tie as a handle to beat him up.
- Tony was a dancer and liked to dance with all the girls. My sister Bev was one of his regular partners.
- Tony was driving to Slick Rock one day behind Virgil who was pulling a load of canoes. One of the canoes had come loose and was dragging, so Tony sped up and started honking to get Virgil to stop. However, Virgil thought Tony's brakes had gone out and sped up. Those fiberglass canoes just did not hold up very well being dragged on the gravel road.
- On another trip with Tony at night on the Slick Rock road a fox came out and was running down the center of the road. So Tony sped up and ran it down. Really could not tell where it had been hit so Tony felt he would skin it for the pelt. So back at Base Camp, he skinned it using his headlights for his light source. With the deed done, it was time to go back to Slick Rock – but the battery had drained so I spent the night sleeping on the back seat. You can do that when you were my age and still get up in the morning with no pains. In the end, Tony never did get the skin tanned and ended up throwing it away.

- One of the Scoutmasters at camp had car trouble on the way up to Kia Kima, so Tony volunteered to tow his car back to Memphis. First he thought perhaps that he could fix it, but it was a diesel and Tony was not aware of the pressurized oil system. So with all the oil now spurted out onto the filling station parking lot, it was necessary to get it hooked up to tow as fast as possible.
- Goodwill had the bag drive each year, and Tony set his sights on getting the most bags filled of any troop in Memphis. He probably would have achieved that with the quantity he got, but he had us emptying all the bags and packing them again loosely. So one bag with all folded clothes could potentially make three bags when you fluffed them up and put them back in. He easily got the most bags that year.
- Tony had me go out to Millington for some Scout training event. I was not sure of it at the time, but now I know it as a Junior Leader Training Course. He again helped me achieve more than I would have on my own as he brought along materials for me to use to make a Patrol flag. Our patrol was the only one there with one.
- Being such a close friend, we honored him one night by wrapping his house in toilet paper. He never said anything to us about that, but I do remember some extra chores afterwards.

However, these are only stories and memories of the past. What is most lasting is the impact this one person had on my life personally. I owe my total success in Scouting as a youth to him. Besides my parents, his personal interest certainly added to much of what I did afterwards. Perhaps he is the reason that I am still involved with Scouting as he instilled the love of the program and what it can do for youth. I hope one of the Scouts whom I have taught, challenged, and provided those special opportunities they would not have had will remember me some day in the same light. Thanks Tony for all you did and your spirit will continue to be with us forever.