

WHAT WONDERFUL MEMORIES

By Harry “Chigger” Danciger

You know the old saying about someone who asks what time it is and you tell him how to build a watch. Well, this is one of those stories. Way back in 1941 when I joined Troop 13, the minimum age for scouting was 12 (not 11 like it is today). My active scouting was over as a kid by the time I was 15. By then I had accumulated Life Rank with 29 merit badges; I still needed Camping (50 nights on the ground) merit badge as well as Bird Study (40 birds to identify).

The problem was that gas rationing was applied during all of World War II, and the extent of camping was mostly confined to Camp Currier. And those trips were limited to only occasional excursions. My dad, Henry Dinkelspiel, had been at KKK as a kid, became a member of the waterfront staff, was a Council Scout (forerunner of OA), and was an Eagle with 33 merit badges. So, my chance for the Eagle rank was looking bleak.

Now let's fast forward to when I was 19. This was the minimum age for ARC Water Safety Instructor. At the time, it was given at the old Hotel Devoy in downtown Memphis. Not only did I get the rating, but I met a lifelong friend who was in the same class by the name of George Billingsley. I went to Ole Miss and George went to the University of Arkansas. Between my junior and senior year Uncle Dudley called me. “You need two merit badges for Eagle and I need a waterfront man,” he said. “We can pay you \$5.00 per week plus your meals.” He continued, “Sleep in the camp demonstration area to get your nights on the ground for Camping, and take the birding hike course which starts at 5:30 a.m.” It was an offer I couldn't refuse.

So, Charlie Marcus and David Peters, who taught birding and were about 15 or 16 at the time, were my teachers. I was 22, but in those days there was no time restriction on becoming Eagle Scout by 18—or we wouldn't have this story to write. We learned (and I still know) most of my birds through sound and not sight because of the thick Ozark foliage. I remember once calling a tufted titmouse (peter, peter, peter) in my early learning stage. Charlie said, “Well, it does sound like a tufted titmouse, but continue to listen to the other calls. That's a mockingbird imitating a titmouse in the midst of other calls.” Amazing! Even today I marvel to listen to the realism of how a mocker can duplicate other species.

The summer was waning and my list of identified birds was 38 and holding. Our feathered friends had started migrating and were becoming scarce, as August was upon us. So, Charlie suggested that if I got a new bird I should tell David Peters or Jim McWhorter (waterfront, but a crack birder), and they could relay the information to him. Well, I finally got 39, but no fortieth was in sight. Then one morning I was sitting in a canoe in the middle of the river in the waterfront section.

All of a sudden, flying in formation only 20 feet above the river coming upstream were a pair of American Egrets. Jim McWhorter was down river in the slough in a canoe. I started screaming, “Hey Jim - McWhorter— American Egrets! American Egrets! American Egrets!” They had by divine messenger flown right over McWhorter as well. He yelled, “Yes! You got it!”

And thus ended my quest for the coveted Eagle. I also proudly passed Canoeing from George that summer and if my memory is correct he issued only four merit badges for this the entire camp period. If George gave you canoeing, you earned it.

What a summer...what wonderful memories!

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