Scoutmaster's Moment
Fall Court of Honor – September 13, 2021
Written and delivered by Troop 150 Scoutmaster Todd G. Bolick

Setting: The members of the Patrol Leaders' Council and the Scoutmaster Corps are prepared to sing the National Anthem with me after I call them to stand on either side of me at the conclusion of this Scoutmaster Moment.

I was in my second week of eighth grade at Edgar Allen Poe Middle School. While this day started normally, it quickly became disrupted during my first and second period classes by interruptions from the office calling students to leave school for the day. I thought that wow, lunch must have been bad the day before. My second period class was English, and the classroom was immediately next to the main entrance of Poe. I could see a stream of students leaving the school with their parents, which made me thing that lunch really had to have been bad the day before. Further, other teachers kept coming into our classroom and talking to my teacher in hushed whispers. While that was very unusual, I didn't think much of it.

Then the classroom's overhead P. A. speaker crackled back to life with an office staff member telling my teacher to send me to the office with my stuff to leave for the day. I immediately started wracking my brain for what I had done wrong the day before, but I couldn't think of anything. When I looked down the short distance from my locker to the Poe lobby, I could see my Mom talking with an office staff member and she looked very upset. As I walked to her, she just told me to get to the car. I couldn't think what I had done to get in trouble and she wouldn't tell me why she was there, even after I asked.

Once I got in the back seat of our Saturn station wagon, she turned on the radio to the WTOP station, as she often does. There were strange reports of the

World Trade Center buildings on fire in New York and of an attack on the Pentagon. I completely could not comprehend what was going on. I had recently seen the twin towers on a past trip to New York and saw the Pentagon often on the side of the highway. I thought it must have been missiles that had attacked them.

My Mom whisked me to Parklawn Elementary School, where she was working. Through the rest of the school day, I learned that airplanes had been used to cause massive terrorist attacks on our country. My Mom and I couldn't tell her 5th grade students about what was going on so we had to pretend like everything was normal.

After we got home and basically barricaded the house and finally got ahold of my brother, who was a Freshman at James Madison University, we watched the news in horror about the un-folding details of this tragic attack on our nation. Later that day, I was able to go outside and call friends. While talking, I looked up and saw a jet surrounded by fighters flying screaming fast toward Washington D. C. It was President George W. Bush on his way back to the capital.

Your parents likely have more dramatic stories about their day on September 11th, many may have even been working for the government. I know one of our parents was the lead FBI agent responding to the Pentagon. Our 24th Scoutmaster's wife worked in the White House complex. I am telling you my story because I was the age that all of you either are now or are just around.

I can not adequately describe the climate of fear and sense of not knowing what was going on or going to happen, that we felt. Terrorism was not a word I had had experience with before but was one that was quickly thrust upon me.

However, there was also another powerful sense. Our nation entered a period of blissful unity. You've probably heard reporters remark about that on the news over the last few days, but it was real. Everyone was sincerely nice to one another. Everyone wanted to know what they could do to help. There were no differences of party affiliation, race, or religion, we were all just Americans.

The Boy Scouts of America movement is often called in to action during national crises and after the attack, On October 11th, we were once again mobilized, to raise money for children in Afghanistan and generally to help our nation, by President Bush. Boy Scouts across the country rose to the task.

As the Scouting Magazine blog reported, "Across the country, Cub Scouts, Scouts and Venturers collected supplies, helped displaced families reunite with loved ones and supported first responders. In the months that followed, they organized blood drives, planned patriotic rallies, and organized events to promote tolerance and understanding among Americans from all ethnicities and religious groups." The list of service that the Scouts undertook goes on and on.

The famous quote of, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" is a striking reality and therefore it is incumbent upon those of us who lived through the 9/11 terrorist attack to teach you about that time. However, the history also shows us how our nation and how our Boy Scouts of America movement have unified to overcome those horrible events and that is important to learn from as well. As President John F. Kennedy proclaimed, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country," I also ask that you, as Boy Scouts, in our patriotic movement, to work to benefit our great nation.

Now, will the members of my Patrol Leaders' Council and my Scoutmaster Corps please join me up here [allow the members of those bodies to assemble in front of the audience, on either side of me]. We are going to sing our National Anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner" together in honor of those lost on September 11th and in a unified spirit of our great nation. Troop and audience attention. Troop salute [count off to three and start singing the National Anthem].

National Anthem lyrics:

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

You may be seated. Thank you.