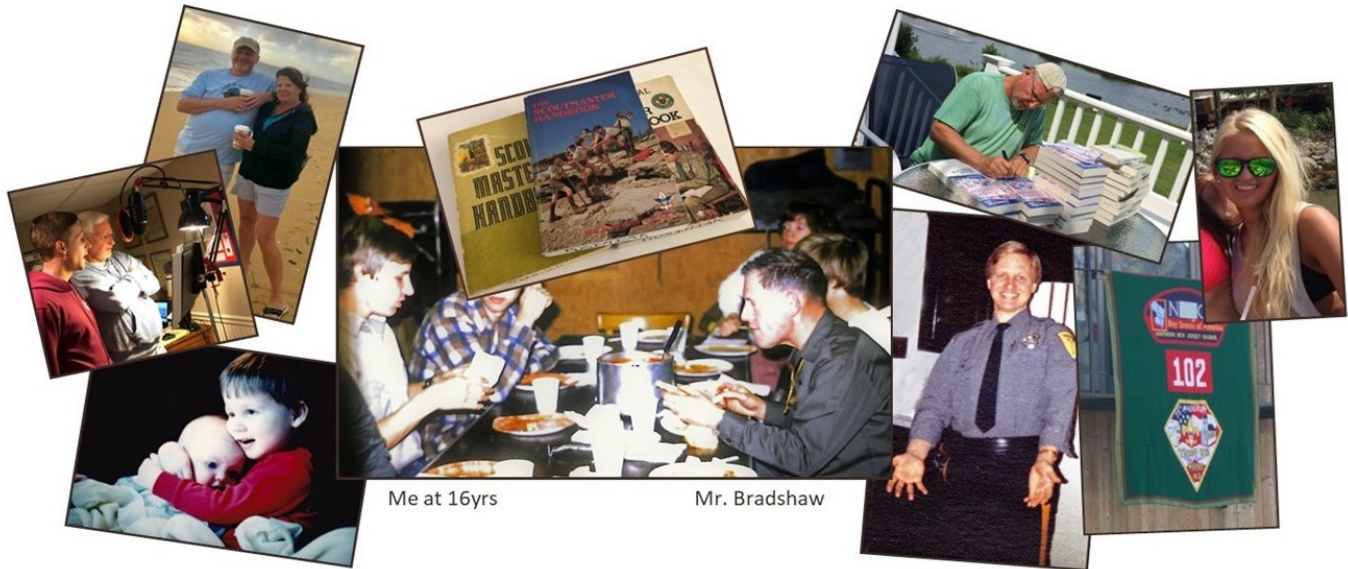


I'm Going With You

By Stephen Rusiniak

From the book: *Chicken Soup for the Soul The Advice that Changed My Life*



Me at 16yrs

Mr. Bradshaw

“We may never know the lives we’ve touched until one day, and if we’re lucky, we do.”

I was surprised that he was even up. As I was adjusting the knot on my tie, he was suddenly there, yawning, at my bedroom door. His thick mane of hair was noticeably disheveled and the sleepy look in his eyes told me that he probably should have just stayed in bed.

“Good morning. What are you getting all dressed up for,” my just home from college twenty-year-old son, Michael, sleepily said.

“I have to go to a funeral,” I answered.

“Oh yeah? Who died?” he asked.

“A man who’d meant a lot to me,” I told him. “A man who changed my life a long time ago.”

“I guess this guy was pretty important to you.”

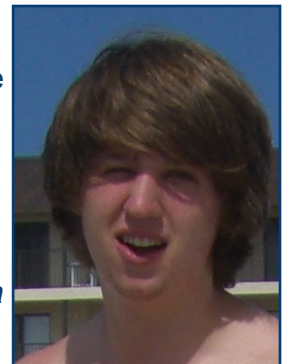
“Yes,” I replied. “He was.”

Michael pondered my answer for a moment and then said something that caught me totally by surprise.

“So, if he was that important to you then I guess that means that he was kind of important to me too.”

As I stood there, stunned by what he had just said, he continued.

“Hey Dad, if he meant that much to you then give me a few minutes. I’m going with you.”

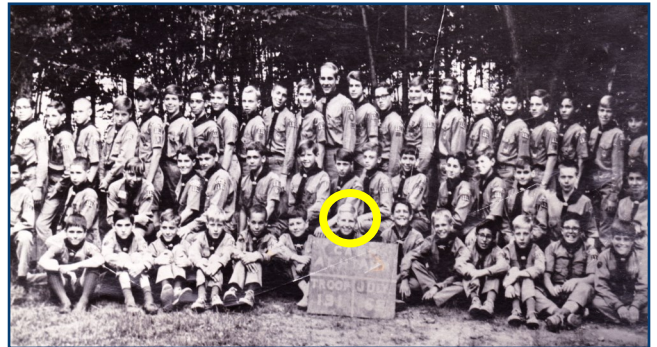


Michael, back then

Before I could even respond, Michael was gone; upstairs, to his bedroom, to get dressed. He returned a few minutes later and the transformation was amazing. His sleeping tee shirt and shorts had been replaced by a dark pullover sweater, docker pants, and real shoes instead of his favored basketball sneakers. And that thick mane of unruly hair that moments before seemed to have had a mind of its own was now combed into perfect submission.

We left for the cemetery.

It was a long time ago. I was a Boy Scout, on a weekend camping trip, and although I knew better, I broke a cardinal camp rule and wandered away from our site. And in no time at all, I became lost in the woods, but after a while, and by some miracle, I somehow found my way back just as local law enforcement, park rangers, and my troop leaders were about to set out to find me. I was otherwise unharmed, except, of course, for my pride.



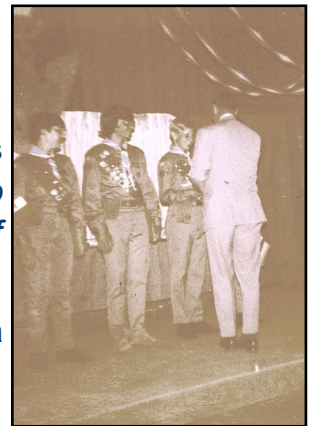
Me, a 13yr old Boy Scout, circled in yellow

Embarrassed, not only for my actions but for the subsequent search that my carelessness had nearly caused, I abruptly quit the troop.

A few days later one of my adult leaders came by my home to talk with me about my decision to leave Scouting. He said that although what I had done was wrong, to quit would be far worse. He said, "Steve-o," he always called me this, "*if you stay in the troop, somehow, someday, you're going to find out that Scouting will forever remain an important and influential part of your life.*"

By the time he left our home that night, my membership was intact—a lesson was learned.

Three years later I became an Eagle Scout and two years after that, an assistant scoutmaster serving under the very same man whose compassionate counsel had persuaded me to remain in Scouting. I would one day become the scoutmaster myself, and as well, would ultimately serve in various volunteer positions within the program for the next forty years.



The new Eagle Scout (me) receiving my medal

But, as my onetime mentor had predicted, it was my ongoing membership that profoundly influenced my eventual career, and as well, my life.

While being interviewed for a patrolman's position within my community's police department, my interviewers neglected to ask me a single question concerning my interest in law enforcement, but rather, they inquired about my Eagle Scout project and my experiences as a Boy Scout leader.

I was sworn in as an officer shortly afterward—a career that I'd long dreamed of entering—a career that could provide the financial security that I hoped would



The Scoutmaster, me, left, in red jacket, camping with troop members at one of our favorite cabins

someday support my future family,

The following summer I married the love of my life, Karen, and a few years after that, we started our family—Michael came first and two years later, our daughter, Tracy.

But it was also my service as a scoutmaster that contributed to my being selected as a detective assigned to the department's Youth Bureau. This new position required my participation in countless speaking engagements which necessitated the need to craft relevant speeches that were both entertaining as well as informative. When one such engagement resulted in a noticeable emotional response from my audience, my prepared speech became the basis for my first ever published piece, and just like that, a newly minted freelance writer was born!

So, you see, my career, my marriage, my family life, and later, my writing successes, were all the direct descendants of a membership decision that was decided during my more formative years.

I now needed to share this information with someone special.

Not long after retiring from the department, I visited with my one-time scoutmaster, who was now, in his mid-eighties. That night, as we reminisced, I reminded him of things that he'd taught me—of the many lessons learned, and about the time when his astute advice convinced me that it was a far better decision to remain a Scout than not. I reminded him that just as he had predicted, Scouting, in one way or another, has remained an influential part of my life.



The detective, me, in a school promoting a then popular drug resistance program

But then, it occurred to me. There was something else that I needed to say— something else that I needed for him to hear, and so I sat down on the chair next to him and began.

“How different my life might have been had you not talked me out of quitting the troop,” I told him. *“You changed my life, more than I can ever say, and for this, I will always be grateful.”*

And it was true. The path on which my life would eventually travel was a direct result of his counsel—Eagle Scout, scoutmaster, police officer, husband, father, detective, writer.

I stood up and extended my hand, the good Scout—anticipating that we'd share the official handshake, but instead, he slowly rose from his chair and hugged me as he softly whispered, *“Thank you, Steve-o.”*

We may never know the lives we've touched until one day, and if we're lucky, we do. My old scoutmaster, after so many years, finally, he knew.

It was the only time that I ever saw him cry.

As we were gathered graveside and as my troop leader was being laid to rest, I thought about my earlier conversation with Michael.

“So, if he was that important to you then I guess that means that he was kind of important to me too.”

As I stood there, stunned by what he had just said, he continued.

“Hey Dad, if he meant that much to you then give me a few minutes. I'm going with you.”

I also remembered a prediction made years before: *Scouting will forever remain an important and influential part of your life.* Of course, he was right—the proof of which was standing next to me and wearing a dark sweater, dockers, and real shoes—my son, Michael, a direct descendant of a membership decision decided during my more formative years and of whom, I couldn't have been any prouder.

It seems that as we were saying goodbye to him, my former scoutmaster, Mr. Bradshaw, had taught me one final lesson.

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(Note: Photos not published in book)

the backstory:

We may never know the lives we've touched, until one day, and if we're lucky, we do. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to share with Mr. Bradshaw how much his compassionate counsel had influenced my life; how his guidance had long ago pointed me towards the path on which my life would eventually travel.

I truly believe that time & circumstance have a way of influencing our lives. Any one occurrence, the smallest of details, can become the catalyst causing change and altering the arc of our lives. Such a theory, more commonly known as the *Butterfly Effect*, says as much:

Small causes may have momentous effects

or this:

A cumulatively large effect that a very small natural force may produce over a period of time

So true.

"How different my life might have been had you not talked me out of quitting the troop," I told him. "You changed my life, more than I can ever say, and for this, I will always be grateful."

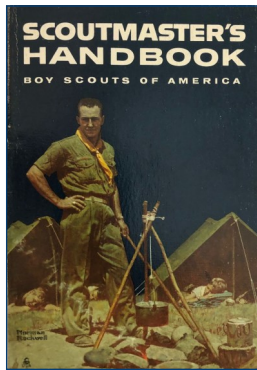
A few years before he passed away, Mr. Bradshaw attended our troop's annual Pancake Breakfast—during which I shared with our families of how his leadership, so many years before, was still influencing our troop. (I'd learned and freely copied many of his program ideas—most of which remained long after my 16-year tenure as Scoutmaster was over). Later, on that very same day, Mr. Bradshaw also attended my son Michael's Eagle Scout ceremony. I was absolutely thrilled—both for Michael's achieving the coveted rank and for my old scoutmaster present to witness the event.

We may never know the lives we've touched until one day, and if we're lucky, we do. My old scoutmaster, after so many years, finally, he knew.

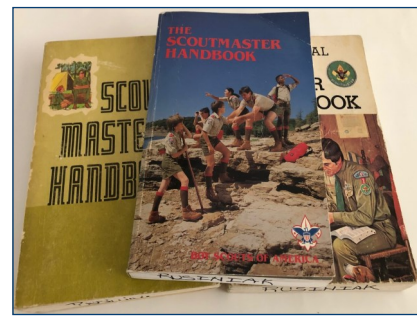
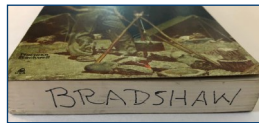


Dinner during a troop cabin camping trip. That's a 16yr old me sitting, left-front, across from Mr. Bradshaw

(backstory continues)



Mr. Bradshaw's official *Scoutmaster's Handbook*, circa 1967, given to me by his son, Bob III following his dad's funeral. I was honored to receive it



My collection of *Scoutmaster Handbooks*, updated every few years and used during my 16-year tenure as a Scoutmaster

an update:

It had been a year since one of my pieces had been published in a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book. I hadn't submitted work to my *Soup* friends for a while but when I saw that they were soliciting stories for a new book regarding *advice that had changed my life*, I knew I had something to contribute: my remembrance, **I'm Coming With You**. I submitted, they accepted, and that was that.

Except it wasn't!

Every publication reserves the right to edit submissions they intend to use and mine was no exception. When I received the edited version of my piece I quickly noticed two things:

First, my verbiage was virtually unchanged—a very big deal as I take changes to my wording personally.

Second, and this was a major difference: they changed the title from I'm **Coming** With You to I'm **Going** With You. For a moment, as you might have guessed, I wasn't happy. My title was a direct quote from my son, Michael. However, while I could have objected to this change, I didn't because ultimately it amounted to little more than semantics. (Read each title to yourself and you'll find they mean the same.) And of course, my verbiage was otherwise unchanged!

All things considered, I agreed to this edit!

In March 2023, **I'm Going With You** became my 18th piece to be published in a book, *Chicken Soup for the Soul The Advice that Changed My Life*.

And one last thing:

The original radio story/podcast version of this piece, recorded by Michael and me and shared nationally on OUR AMERICAN STORIES radio can still be heard and with original title and verbiage by visiting my "**radio stories**."



Michael and me recording ***I'm Coming With You*** for a radio show