

Boy Scouts No More

(Published as: “Boy Scouts No More: A Mother’s Lament”)

agangreatness.com/2017/10/14/boy-scouts-no-more-a-mothers-lament/

October 14, 2017

When I heard the news of the Boy Scouts of America allowing the admission of girls, I wondered if they would rename the organization the Bee Gees. They would have to get permission from that staple of 60s and 70s rock to avoid copyright infringement, but it would be consistent with the BSA’s efforts to overturn many of their longstanding traditions. The significant policy change was announced on October 11, which also happens to be the “International Day of the Girl,” as designated by the United Nations in 2012. The new policy allows girls in 2018 to enter the Cub Scout program, which is currently limited to boys ages 7-10. There are also plans for a program to begin in 2019 for older girls to attain the rank of Eagle Scout (the highest rank in Boy Scouts) which is now limited to boys ages 11-17.

BSA officials claim they will maintain the integrity of the single gender model by allowing Cub Scout packs to establish a new girl pack consisting of girl dens and boy dens or to remain an all-boy pack. The dens will be all boys or all girls. Packs and dens are the basic organizational elements of the Cub Scouts. The changes, according to BSA, were driven in part by requests from families who wanted programs that would serve all of their children. Prior requests to allow girls to join have been denied as recently as 2015 when five girls in Santa Rosa, California submitted applications for membership. There has also been a significant drop in membership; currently there are over 2 million in scouting programs, down from 4.6 million in 1997. Corporate sponsors as well have pushed for significant changes in recent years.

There are other BSA programs that currently allow co-ed membership. Venturing, founded in 1998, offers high adventure outdoor activities. Sea Scouts offer high adventure water activities. Both are open to teens who have completed the eighth grade through to the age of 20. A career exploration program, Exploring, is now open to young men and women, ages 10 – 20. There are also several high adventure bases in the United States (Florida Sea Base, Northern Tier, Philmont Scout Ranch, and The Summit) that offer co-ed and family programs in addition to their Boy Scout programs. Jobs at these bases are open both to young men and to young women. My son, an Eagle Scout, participated in a ten-day trek at Philmont as a Boy Scout and worked there as a summer ranger. He was paired with male and female rangers, all of whom had to meet the same physical fitness and application requirements. Female rangers were allowed to lead all-male Boy Scout crews. These speak to the many opportunities that young women have to participate with young men in a variety of programs already in place.

Allowing female participation, while a surprise to many, is among several other significant “social policy” changes in recent years. When challenged by James Dale, an openly homosexual male who sought to become a Scoutmaster, BSA had their status as a private association recognized by the US Supreme Court, thus reaffirming their control over membership and

leadership requirements. (See *Boy Scouts of America and Monmouth Council, et al., Petitioners v. James Dale*). In spite of this victory, BSA subsequently enacted policies permitting the appointment of homosexual scout leaders. Both the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts have also enacted policies to allow for participation of transgender youth. Some have called for eliminating the “duty to God” part of the Boy Scout Oath. In response to these changes, other youth groups have formed, including American Heritage Girls and Trail Life USA, both of whom aim to attract youths who seek an experience that is consistent with the original purpose of scouting. And, not surprisingly, membership in the Boy Scouts has dropped precipitously.

One might ask, with so many programs open to females, why is there such a push to make all programs co-ed? Is it a response to families who want a sort of one stop shopping for their children or to girls feeling slighted or missing out on achieving ranks including the coveted Eagle Scout? Is the mission of the Girl Scouts no longer attractive to young girls? Is it in response to BSA’s plummeting membership? Having been a parent involved in scouting for 12 years, BSA’s simplistic formula of girl dens and boy dens is unrealistic. While the new rules allow for separate packs, will a father divide his time between the boys and girls should he have a child of both sexes? Will a mother do the same? Dens are of roughly equal number, but what is the solution if they are unequal? Does the pack send the girls to another pack? There goes the one stop shopping. Regardless of how one answers these questions or addresses these issues, what is being ignored is the desirability of affording boys an opportunity to develop in a single sex environment. One of the few still possible.

BSA has said that they have no plans to change the organization’s name so while it is doubtful that they will seriously consider the Bee Gees, they should recall one of the Bee Gees’ more famous songs, Stayin’ Alive. Time will tell if these changes will contribute to the Boy Scouts stayin’ alive or if they will hasten the demise of an organization that, before it lost its way, had contributed to the formation of many fine young men (and women) in years past. The loss of a place where boys can develop skills and enjoy male camaraderie is unfortunate and sad. In reaction to the new policies, a scout remarked to me that there is always a change of dynamic when girls are present and it is now at the cost of guy time. Guy time (and girl time) in a world that is increasingly confused about “gender” is a great loss.