

## “THE DAYS OF DENS AND PROJECTS”

During a recent conversation with my seven year old grandson Nicky, a recent inductee into Cub Scouting, about his first experience camping out with his dad Bruce and their Cub Pack, triggered off many fond memories. Today just about everybody has a den or a family room, but in the mid 1950's, the age of the parlor, the name den was associated only with bears. The only place you could find a den would be in the wild or by joining the Cub Scouts.

**February, circa 1950:** The excitement of the Christmas holidays are but a mere memory now and the winter weather has us looking toward the spring with anxious anticipation. I am looking forward to tonight's Cub Pack 245 meeting; because we will be begin making an Easter gift for our mothers. During the Christmas holidays many of the women in our neighborhood made raviolis or manicotti. We were each instructed by our den Mothers to collect one used Maggio Ricotta Cheese tin with a handle on the top. "Aron, let's go before we are late for the meeting," Aunt Martha says as she adjusts my blue Cub Scout Cap. As we walk out our door, den Mother Rose Carpinello and her son Anthony and his cousin Richard Campolei greet us. We all walk together with our tins in hand, up Indiana Avenue to St. Mary's Church. When we arrive at the hall the excitement mounts as we greet all our buddies and fellow Cub Scouts. It isn't that we haven't seen each other for a long time, because we were in school with each other earlier today. Perhaps it's because of the circumstances of getting out of the house on a school night that certainly is a time for excitement. In the hall everyone is called to order by Hank Salvato, who instructs us to separate into our respective dens. Jimmy DiGiacomo who we affectionately call the Janitor, but is more like an all round maintenance man for the parish church and

school, is setting up trash cans near each of the many tables set up in the hall. Frank Borgioni and Bob Simone, both neighborhood carpenters, are setting up jig saws on two of the tables. They begin giving instructions to some of the fathers on how to use the saw to cut out a pattern similar to the shape of a scrubbing brush handle, out of ply wood.

At another table under the direction of Jim Citro, Sr., Frank Sciarra, Paul Blasetti, Joey Rulli, Nicky Marcellino, Bob Gatto and Frank Lavanga are sanding those plywood pieces so they can be shellacked. Den Mother Josephine Pistilli is helping Anthony Picarello, Mario Amici, Steven Borgioni, Walt Cannon and Robert Marsh to paint the fancy "L" shaped brackets white. Mario Chiarolanza and his brother Al are teaching Val Pistilli, Jimmy Citro, Louis Bonitatibus and Clem Martino how to use a screwdriver, so that they can eventually attach the brackets to the shellacked plywood pieces.

Den Mother Helen Citro is patiently giving Michael Chiaorlanza, Ronnie Chiarolanza, Michael Milluza, Michael Contignola and Jackie Bilardo instructions on how to paint the ricotta cheese tins a bright pink color.

Den Mother Martha Domenico is applying flower decals to the side of a painted tin can, as Domenic DiPiero, Dom Triolli, Joey DeLarso, Maurice Malagio, and Franny DiRosato anxiously wait to get their hands on the decals.

After the decal is applied to the finished can, we are all summoned to the front of the hall where Julie the florist gives us instructions on how to stuff the cans with this green mossy material and make an artificial flower arrangement. The night is moving all too quickly and at the half- way point we stop for refreshments. In a loud but orderly fashion we move to the side of the hall where we are given the

traditional drink known as "bug juice" this is a mixture of grape, lemon and I think orange juice. It is very good and goes perfectly with the TastyKake Chocolate Cup Cakes and Jelly Krimpets. After we finish our snacks Den Mother Josephine Chiarolanza calls us back to order. The rest of our project time slipped by so fast and it was time for our meeting to come to an end.

Uncle Al begins to make an announcement about the spring father and son camping trip to French Creek, New Jersey, but barely gets a chance to finish as we all begin to cheer. This is something that we have all been waiting for since we joined the Cub Scouts. Mario Gregorio and Lou Leggieri who are the Boy Scout leaders give a short talk on what we need to know, what to expect, and they give us each a mimeographed sheet of what we need to bring and what the deadline is for handing in our \$2.00 fee needed to go on the trip.

We all simultaneously begin to sing which is what we usually do at the end of the meeting. "The more we get together, together, together, the happier we'll be. The more we get together, together, together, the happier we'll be."

Fr. O'Malley our Scouting Chaplain enters the hall as we finish the song and makes a few positive remarks about our Easter project. He then gives us a spiritual reminder about the beginning of Lent next week and gives us some suggestions on what to give up as a Lenten sacrifice. "Boys don't forget to stop eating candy and cake for Lent. Also remember to put your dimes in your mitre box for the Pagan babies." He ends with a prayer and we all clean up and immediately return to our homes!!!

I can truly say that scouting was one of my most favorite pastimes as a boy growing up. The memories of all the Den Mothers and Scouting Men Leaders are absolutely all positive. It was for most of us a welcome diversion from city living!