

ONLY HARD WORK REVEALS HEROES

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I do not like TV commercials. When I try to dodge them, I often end up on the NASA channel. On one recent visit I came across a documentary with a message still relevant for our time.

The date was September 12, 1962. The place, Rice Stadium, Houston, Texas, when and where President John F. Kennedy announced that the United States intended to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. As a fourteen-year-old Explorer Scout, I remember being enthralled by the President's proclamation. It even topped my adventures of the previous two weeks when ten of us had canoed one hundred fifty miles in nine days, portaging between lakes that straddle the U.S.–Canadian border, west of Lake Superior.

On that so called “outward bound” trip, even those of us who were athletes were not prepared for the hard job of hauling aluminum canoes, tents, and food up and over mountain trails. We had to prove to ourselves and the others that we were strong enough to pull our weight. At first not all were.

On the first day, I remember struggling halfway up a steep trail and finding a heavyscout sitting next to his canoe in tears. He could not go on.

When our young guide arrived, he told me to help the boy carry his canoe to the top of the footpath, but not beyond. I did as he instructed. The weeping scout managed to get his canoe down the other side of the mountain alone, long after all the others.

We said nothing to the other scouts about this ordeal. The next day the guide again positioned me behind the boy. The trees along the first portage trail were thick and dark, so that no light came through to brighten the scout's mood as he fought his way along. To my amazement, he hauled his canoe and gear up and over the steep trail on his own. When he reached the bottom, knees and elbows bloody, the guide slipped him a tiny piece of candy. He beamed as though he had won a gold medal.

I fear that many parents today would not even allow their children to take on such a challenge. Their goal in life seems to be to shield their kids from all things hard or disagreeable, so they will not fail. In her New York Times bestselling book, *The Price of Privilege*, author

Madeline Levine, Ph. D warns against such parenting. She wrote “We are doing a disservice to our children by protecting them from mental, emotional, and even physical strife. Affluent kids [in particular] are often so protected from even the most minor disappointments and frustrations that they are unable to develop critical coping skills.” In other words, they develop no self-accountability.

I do not remember the name of the victorious Explorer Scout, nor do I know what became of him. But, of one thing I am certain, he will never forget that day in the northern woods when he first faced and overcame real adversity. I am equally certain that he has no idea that sixty years later I would still recall witnessing that heroic act.

John Kennedy faced some hard challenges during his presidency, including a battle with the USSR for world domination. But, on a blistering hot Texas morning in 1962, he fought back with a message that remains as true today as it was then: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.”

We could use more of that grit today.