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Dear Friends:

My Biggest Hero Was Nine Years Old.

By: James Garner

When my son was in second grade I was the leader of his Cub Scout Den. Before his third grade school year started, a Cub Scout Pack leader called and asked if I would take on another boy. We had a large group and I knew it wouldn't be easy, but so did everyone else in this age group.

The kicker of the deal was that Tray was a cancer patient and an amputee, one leg at the knee. I had a hard time making up my mind about exposing "my" boys to what I was almost positive would surely end in a lot of anguish and sadness for all of us. I finally decided to take him in, but before I said yes to our Pack leader I called all my parents to let them know what I planned to do and get their feedback.

To a person, they all supported my decision. Only one mother verbalized the fears I had for the emotional well being of my little charges, but she too supported my plan. We felt like it would help teach them compassion and generosity, it did and us too!

When Tray came to us I found out that not only did he have severe health and physical problems, his family was incredibly poor. But they wanted Tray to have all the experiences he could in what would most likely be a short life. His parents did their very best to provide it.

Tray was without a doubt the most enthusiastic member of my scout den. There wasn't anything he wouldn't try to do. When we did the things for all their little badges he was right in there with us, and most often excelling. ALL of my boys encouraged him and helped whenever they could, this carried over into their school life as well.

Even the physical fitness segment of our program he did well in, better than most other boys save for the broad jump. Tray just couldn't get far enough to match the standards the Cub Scout Manual said had to be met to achieve this badge. I passed him on this one because I deduced that the skills were written for boys with two legs and since Tray only had one his goal should only be half that of the other boys. Tray achieved that half and a great deal more, in fact was only just a little short of the minimum anyway.



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We all progressed along through Tiger, Wolf, Bear, and Lion ranks and went on to Webelos. Over the years our Pack's leadership made sure that somehow Tray had all the hats, uniform parts, etc. that was necessary for him to be just like everyone else. Most of the time I knew that some of the things required weren't in his folks budget but they found ways and when they couldn't we found ways to make sure it just happened.

We all suffered with Tray on days he had just come from chemo and was so sick he couldn't go 10 minutes without a trip to the bathroom. But he was in there with all of us and insisted on coming to meetings when any one of the rest of us, child or adult, would have been too ill to go.

Just before the end of the Cub Scout program I took them all to a Boy Scout meeting to see how it was and help them make the final yes or no decision to continue on in the Scouting program. Tray was ready. I helped him choose a Troop and introduced him to their leader and such to prepare him for the sixth grade year when he would move to Boy Scouts.

My proudest moment was to watch all my boys go through the Arrow of Light ceremony, Tray included. This ceremony marks the transition from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts if they choose to go on. All my other boys' interests had changed over the years and they were into sports, band and other things; not Tray, he would be my only Boy Scout.

The summer before sixth grade came and went and just before the next school year was to start Tray was taken from us. I like to think he was just asked to join another troop whose leader is far better than I could have ever hoped be.

We all learned a lot from Tray; "my" boys, their parents and me. Yes, there is a plan and purpose for us all and, I think, I am not the only one in my community who has a nine-year-old hero.

Now, when I am in difficult situations I often think of how Tray would have handled it. This makes the going a lot easier because I know he would have tackled the challenge with greater gusto and zeal than anyone else and finally succeed in the end.

'Nuf Said.

Larry Herman, DC Mary Beamer, DC Jan Herman, DC

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