

The Flying Eagle Patrol

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [June 28, 2011](#) issue

In the high summer of my thirteenth year on this lovely planet
I was mailed to Boy Scout summer camp in a sprawling forest
For a life term, though I guess it was really only fourteen days.
I was muddled at woodcraft as I was at everything else then,
And finished very nearly last in tracking, swimming, canoeing,
Archery, and orienteering, this last an utter conundrum for me;
I recall my patrolmates finally gently taking away my compass
And asking me to just sit quietly until they would lead me back
To our camp, my spectacles knocked away by jeering branches.
I remember when we got our orienteering assignment someone
Would lead me to a little open knoll in the rippling sea of pines
And oaks and maples and I would sit there happily in the broad
Sun for hours, I guess, watching for birds and speculating about
Lunch. I wonder now that the Flying Eagle Patrol was so gentle
To me, its most useless member, and these were the years when
Boys are cruel to each other, for fear of being least and weakest;
But they *were* kind, and I remember their totally genuine delight
When I earned my single merit badge, for making both a roaring
Fire and a stew. I remember their faces, around that startling fire,
How they laughed—not at me for having finally done something
Well, but at the surprise of it; the gift of unexpectedness, perhaps.
Or maybe they were smiling at my probably hair-raising stew; but
They ate every scrap of it, and the one among us who was best in
The woods was the Eagle who quietly washed the pots and plates.
Perhaps, all these years later, I should remember my helplessness,
And either chew my liver or try to smile ruefully, but it's the pots
Clean as a whistle that I remember, and the whistling of the Eagle
Coming to retrieve me from my knoll high above the seas of trees.