

Items that Link to the Past



I got a present from my sister a few days ago. She had been rummaging around an old chest at my Mom's place and pulled up these two items in the picture above from the bottom. She knew they belonged to me, so when she flew out to Calgary last week, she brought them with her. I hadn't seen either of these links to my past in decades.

So, I think everyone can tell the red sash was from scouting. The hat (yes, it's a hat), known as a wedge, I wore for a very short time when I first joined air cadets in Sudbury, Ontario. I say a short time because I joined the band and began my career as a piper within a week of joining and was handed a hat called a balmoral to wear. I tried the wedge on, realizing that my head was considerably smaller when I was 13.

Seeing these two items got me thinking about what they represented and how scouts and air cadets shaped my life in my teens. Changed it. With scouts, along with camping trips with my family, I got my love of nature. To this day, there is nothing I enjoy more than a walk through forests away from civilization. I learned how to handle a canoe, start a campfire, pitch a tent, and shoot a .22 calibre rifle. The solitary nature of walking through the woods alone with nothing but a camera is very calming for me. Now, living in Calgary, there is no better wilderness than a one-hour drive west to the Rocky Mountains.

Scouts is supposed to be where you make life long friends and learn teamwork. Well, I learned the teamwork stuff, but I've always been a solitary figure. Scouts never brought me out of my shell. I was good friends with one boy back then, but our friendship predated scouts. Apart from him, I don't really

recall anyone else. I never considered myself a leader or had the confidence to step up when I was a scout. I was just one of the boys and kept to myself mostly.

Air cadets was a different story. I was older when I joined and learning the bagpipes there became the doorway to acceptance into a society of kilts and music. I don't think any of the gang I played pipes with back then continued in the art like I did, but some have drifted back to it. I remember many more friends from my air cadet days and still keep in touch with a few. It was the music and the sense of us being, and I use this term in the kindest way, "elite" that bound us together more strongly. I was a good player and the feelings of confidence that were missing in my personality before formed me into the confident person I am today. Being in the band, where to sound right and march right made you much more cognizant of the people around you. We had to work together so we didn't look and sound like a rabble. My life changed greatly during that time. I left my shell behind.

The things we save to remind us of our past are also links to who we are. Who we have become. We all start out as blank slates with some genetics from our parents that will form a baseline of our personalities. But our true selves develop through our experiences. Certain keepsakes, talismans if you will, mark the guideposts of turns in our lives. Our choices make up who we are. Our painful times. Our good times. Our successes. Our failures. If we can learn from each guidepost, we can emerge a better person. By ignoring these guideposts, we don't change, and the world leaves us behind.

Learning is a never-ending process. Take out some old family heirloom or an item from your past that you have kept. Take the time to define what it means to you and how it was a guidepost, marking a significant change in your life. They say change is not easy, but these items show that we have all handled successfully major change in the past. Maybe it's not so hard after all.