How Scouting’s values shaped them for life.

Paul R. Christen joined the Boy Scouts of America on the eve of the United States entering World War II. "My first Boy Scout hike was on Dec. 7, 1941," he recalls. "I'll never forget coming back and finding out what had happened."

Since then, Paul and his wife, Muffy, have been longtime Scouting supporters. Paul earned the Eagle Scout rank as a boy, and he later became president of the Phazen Council in South Dakota, chairman of Region 13, and a member of the BSA national executive board. His awards include the Silver Beaver (1960), Silver Anvil (1966), Silver Buffalo (2015), and the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award (1961).

Paul recalls his early Scouting days as some of the most vivid in his life. The Scouts themselves also collecting paper, costume jewelry, and much more in support of the war effort. "They needed dogs, so I shipped my dog to war," Paul recalls.

The experience of wartime Scouting shaped Paul forever, he says. "You learn to serve your country and get a patriotic background by doing those things."

Scouting also helped Paul develop skills he later used in a successful career in banking and other businesses—as well as in Scouting as an adult.

"I got into leadership as patrol leader and then as senior patrol leader," he says. "And I got to be assistant Scoutmaster because the assistant Scoutmaster got sent to war. From that, I really developed a desire to be a leader for some reason I liked leading. And it taught me you have to respect people, build consensus, and develop a team."

As a scout, the Christens, as well as their two daughters, believe Scouting is a right fit with their values. "When I see what's been done for my husband it's easy to say I'm happy to support Scouting," Muffy says. "I grew up with Paul being a Scout, and I've seen how strict it is and how it changes kids."

The Christens have been active philanthropists for decades, supporting a variety of causes in South Dakota and elsewhere, as well as being significant donors to Scouting. Muffy, in particular, has held high-profile roles with civic and charitable organizations, including United Way, colleges, and hospitals. Along the way, Muffy says, they've used the model for fundraising they learned early on with the Boy Scouts. "We used Boy Scout leadership methods as we served as chair of local and statewide philanthropic organizations through the years," she says.

While the Christens business success enables them to make significant financial support to Scouting, Paul stresses that there are many other ways to help. "Every gift is important," Paul says. "Everybody can give some time."

The important thing, in the Christens' view, is to do something to give back, and they see Scouting as a vital vehicle for that purpose. "It's our organization for youth that's trying to teach you values to live by," Paul says. "We need to help all that all young people can have the opportunity to be in the Scouting program."

Although many major donors to Scouting talk about their desire to give back, Paul and Muffy Christen say that's a little more important to them than most to walk the talk. "I owe my life to Scouting," Paul explains. "I would not be alive today if not for the Boy Scouts of America."

On May 1, 1940, he says, a small plane in which he was a passenger crashed on takeoff. He and the pilot, the only occupants, survived, but both were profoundly injured. As he lay in the wreckage, Paul realized his foot had been severed and his hand was severely cut. That's when he had a vision.

"I saw the old Boy Scout blue handbook from a long time ago," he recalls. "It was the page where they talked about uniform and made a uniform around my arm. I took my belt off and made a tourniquet around my thigh. My improvised first aid allowed me to get to the hospital alive, despite heavy bleeding."

The experience gave the Christens the motivation to encourage others to support Scouting as well. Today, their preferred mode of giving is by challenge grant, in which other donors are challenged to match the amount the couple pledges. And the Christians prefer gifts that support different activities rather than facilities. "I don't believe in bricks and mortar and putting names on buildings," Paul says.

"I'm interested in programming. So our gift is going into a foundation, and the earnings from that will go to support the Christian High Adventure Base and the Summit Reservation," he says.

Whether they are supporting programs for youth or encouraging others to give through challenge grants, the Christens never have a problem remembering that morning in May 1940 and why they support Scouting today. "I think Scouting is outstanding," Muffy says. "There was no question about giving funds to Scouting."

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