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## Hill Street Cub Scouts

By Frank Kent Rogers

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Pioneer Drive and Hill Street about 1951, Bakersfield, California

**I** sit disconsolately in the lower right corner of this photograph, probably because I was new to scouting and this was my first photograph in uniform. It was taken on Pioneer Drive in East Bakersfield just two doors down from its intersection with Hill Street. I don't remember which den mother hosted this first meeting, but I recall the kindness of all the den

mothers in the neighborhood, who gave so generously of their time and limited means to host our Cub Scout meetings.

The older boy who is stealing the show with his Space Patrol pistols is Aaron Russell Allen. Aaron was a fortunate boy whose parents encouraged him to explore his interests without undue correction or scolding. They owned a large property that included a small orchard, horse corrals, and a brooder house for chickens. Aaron learned to ride at an early age, and he let me borrow a horse to ride with him.

In the early 1950s, most of the ground north of Niles Street was still empty, and we rode for miles through the local foothills. One day we found a shed that was marked "Danger, Keep Out!" Presumably, it contained explosives. Whatever it contained, the horses wanted no part of it and shied away from it. Later, when houses were being constructed in the same area, we found a bulldozer parked among the foundations. Apart from one bleak day when a pack of semi-feral dogs spooked my horse and sent me on a wild gallop between houses and under clothes lines, I enjoyed these rides immensely.

In the mid-1950s, as the open spaces gradually filled with housing tracts, we left the horses behind and rode bicycles. I had a

**Schwinn World Traveler, a 3-speed bicycle that let me climb hills with the rest of the boys and go very fast on flat ground or downhill. It had a headlight that was powered by a generator that snapped against the rim of the front wheel. The faster that I pedaled, the brighter the headlight shone.**

**Closer to home, there was a tall, old Eucalyptus tree with a thick trunk that had grown up next to Hill Street. None of the limbs were within reach from the ground, and to climb the tree, we had to jam one foot into a large crack in the bark and pull ourselves up to grab the lowest limb. Then we had to swing around to the side of the trunk, jam a foot onto another limb, and pull ourselves up until we were sitting atop the point in the trunk from which all the major limbs grew.**

**As usual, Aaron lead the way, and some months passed before I was able to master all the leaps and pull-ups necessary to follow. One day Aaron decided to prove his courage by hanging from “the death limb,” an old, discolored, and clearly rotting limb that looked as if it might fall away any moment. He got out on the limb and hung there until he couldn’t pull himself back up. I decided to run for help from a larger boy who lived nearby. I ran so hard that I fell rounding the corner of his house and skinned my hip. Nevertheless, I pounded**

**on his door and shouted that Aaron was falling out of “the Big Tree.” We started back to help, but just as we rounded the corner where I had fallen, we saw Aaron land on a chicken wire fence that cushioned his fall and left him almost standing erect. I never knew if Aaron planned to land on the fence or he was just lucky that it was there! He wasn’t hurt at all.**

**We had other adventures as well. In one “experiment,” we stuffed a length of bamboo with the contents of a railroad flare (both our fathers worked for the Southern Pacific) and propped it up over a picnic table in my backyard before igniting it to see if it would serve as a rocket. Somewhat to our surprise, it flew for fifteen feet or so, leaving a scorch across the picnic table and the back of the bamboo tube splayed out like an umbrella turned out by the wind.**

**We planned a more ambitious project using black powder. (If the ancient Chinese could do it, why couldn’t we?) We collected sulphur, saltpeter, and charcoal, and using a party-sized Coke bottle to grind the charcoal, we produced several pounds of black powder. Unfortunately for our plans to launch a rocket in the foothills, my father found the black powder, telephoned Aaron’s mother, and scotched our project. It’s entirely possible that he saved our fingers**

**and eyes, but at the time we were mightily disappointed and thought him a real spoil sport.**

**One of our more socially acceptable activities was taking swimming lesson at the Tommy Gallon Swim School on Niles Street. Although “Mr. Gallon” was obviously athletic and at home in the water, neither of us knew at the time that he had lettered in track and swimming at Kern County Union High School ('41) and had served in World War II and the Korean War. He was a patient but no-nonsense teacher, and we both learned to swim! If memory serves, we attended his school in the summer of 1955.**

**I’m sure that Aaron had other adventures that I knew nothing about, but we spent a lot of time together as children. Like all boys, we entered puberty and discovered an interest in girls, which diverted our energies away from riding bicycles and climbing trees into other interests.**

**Aaron’s early explorations served him in good stead as he continued through school. He ultimately took a bachelor’s degree in physics from the University of California at Berkeley, a master’s degree in physiological psychology from San Francisco State College, and a medical degree from the University of Southern California. He**

**proved to be an inveterate traveler and adventurer, living in Saudi Arabia and visiting many other countries around the world.**

**I wanted to become a rocket scientist, but my hopes foundered on the shoals of higher mathematics. I took a degree in English literature from the University of California, Berkeley, and two years of post-graduate work in the physical sciences at California State College, Long Beach, before becoming a technical writer and editor for the Navy Department, NCR, AT&T, and Qualcomm. I left the workforce in 2006. I occasionally write articles about aviation history and more recently reminiscences of my early life in Bakersfield.**

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