

My Scout Journey

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My motto: Be Prepared, Be Persistent. Be Creative

My scouting journey started when I was in 5th grade when my dad, sister and I were invited to an eagle COH which took place in the summer 2018. I remember walking into this church where so many boys and men were dressed in Scout uniforms decorated with merit badges and pins. The color guard marched down the aisle, each scout spoke and some read letters they received from important people who were honoring them in reaching the rank of Eagle. I saw the slideshow of all the adventures each scout took from backpacking, fishing, hiking and doing service projects. I held my Dad's finger and I remember whispering in his ear, "Dad, I want to join scouting". He smiled at me. After the ceremony we went into the gym area, each Eagle scout had a table with a binder and photos of Eagle scout projects. I saw the awards each scout received, the project handbook, and the photos of all the fun activities. In the car ride home, I said, I want to join the boy scouts. My older sister said, it is only for boys. Later that night, my Dad suggested we look at girl scouts. The next day, we googled girl scouts, but I did not want to sell cookies and I wanted to be outdoors hiking since I play soccer and do outdoor sports.

In the fall 2018, my Dad read an article that girls would now be allowed in boy scouts. I called my friend Jacob, who was in scouts, but he did not have any information. In January 2019, Jacob invited me to a troop meeting in February. I was so excited, I wanted to do those activities I'd heard about during the summer COH.

In February 2019, my Dad took me to my first meeting and I was so nervous. Would the boys be nice to me? Would I fit in? In the car before we parked, I told my Dad I was not sure if I should go. He said, let us go for 20 minutes and we can leave after that. So I went in, Jacob came to meet me at the door and I quietly introduced myself to a few boys/girls. The scout meeting started, I lined up with the other 8 girls and I saw about 50 boys lining up by Patrol. They made many announcements but one of them was my favorite. The troop was going camping... in the desert, in a tent, did I mention it was in the desert! So after the announcements, I asked my Dad if I could go. He asked when, where, with whom.... I just said, YES.. may I go? The scout leader gave me the trip packing list and I was so excited. The next morning, I made my first list, so I could prepare to go. I had no camping gear, so after school went shopping for clothing, tents, mats, sleeping bags. The list was long and my Dad was reluctant to let me go, but I was eager, persistent and told him I would be safe. So three weeks from when I joined, my Dad dropped me off at the scout meeting area and I went in a van with some of the girls in my troop and many cars with boys for a week in the desert camping. I had

the time of my life, it was cold, it was an adventure, it had a candy store stop and burgers. I came home dirty but smiling.

During the trip I learned about the merit badges and when I got back, I signed up for a merit badge day. It was a long day but was fun and so many scouts were earning different types of badges. I completed pets, art and electricity badges and learned so much in just one day. Not a bad way to begin my 1st month of scouting.

I don't remember every outing or activity but I have photos of them. I was organized, I did merit badges like sports and physical fitness while doing my 3x/week soccer training, which was easy for me. I had to decide if I wanted to go on camp outs or soccer tournaments each week. I made the decision once a month to go on weekend scouting trips and the other weekends do soccer. The family life merit badge was fun as I got to run family meetings and game time after dinner. My big challenge was finding merit badge counselors who could help me so I sent emails to adults outside my troop. All were so nice to me and I had to meet them multiple times to earn each badge.

So about a year into my scouting Feb 2020 COVID shutdown my scouting activities or at least made it much more challenging. So I regrouped, I made lists of what I wanted to work on and I found ways to work with other scouts and merit badge counselors. I realized that at that time it would be possible to become an Eagle scout.

My big plan Feb 2020: Scout summer camp to earn 4 merit badges. I'd never been to Canada or a scout summer camp so I was thrilled to be going.

April 2020: The news that summer camp was canceled; I was disappointed but persistent. I went over my list of what I had wanted to do in summer camp and changed merit badges which I worked on throughout the summer. But the big challenge was the Swimming and Camping Merit Badges. I started to ask my troop leaders, most said wait for summer camp to do the swimming. It is an easy merit badge. I did not tell them I was planning to become an Eagle by Spring 2021. So I stayed focused, driven and organized. I completed a bunch of merit badges in Spring/Summer 2020 and I pushed for some sort of camping solution.

Finally good news in June 2020, a few scouts were going camping in Yosemite.

July 2020, the hardest month so far in my life. I had my Bat Mitzvah [when a Jewish girl becomes an adult], I went on a 5 night, 30 mile backpacking trip to Yosemite as the **only girl** scout (we had several adult female leaders who were wonderful), I earned my Life scout rank and I started my outline for my Eagle project.

August 2020, I went before the Board of Directors at my synagogue to explain and receive permission on my eagle project. I completed all but two merit badges for my Eagle ranking. Yes, by the end of summer 2020, I only needed swimming and one more camping night.

September 2020, California was locked down, pools closed to the public, no more camp nights. So that is when I started to make calls to 9 different pool places. I was either not a member, not old enough to rent a lane, or they were shut down due to COVID. So I expanded my search to Santa Cruz where I found 1 pool open, made a reservation for 8am on a weekday, and asked my Dad to take me. It took me 20 minutes to swim the needed laps as I had completed the other requirements in my backyard pool with the help of my cousin and my sister. I was so happy.

Now only 1 more camp night.. thought it would be easy... nope, the hardest part is yet to come.

During the summer I attended virtual camp night in my backyard via zoom. I was told it would not count for a camping merit badge but only for advancement. When my friends from another troop said they could use three virtual nights for a camping merit badge, I was a bit upset that the rules were not the same for all troops. In any case, scout elections were coming and I ran for SPL (senior patrol leader), I was already so busy but I knew if I did not fight for another night as the leader we would not go. In my speech to the girls troop, my platform was "vote for me, we will go camping"! I won easily, the girls wanted me to organize a camp trip. So after a few scout meetings, I finally, as the leader, got a small window for 1 night of camping within Santa Clara County. It was the best feeling being outdoors hiking with my Troop, starting a campfire, and working on a merit badge together; it was so wonderful.

October 2020, the Eagle has landed! I completed my camping merit badge. I also completed the Ner Tamid Jewish Emblem after working weekly with my Rabbi for 2 months. I delivered 4 custom new benches to my synagogue, I donated my extra funds to the synagogue teen program, and I became a member of the Order of the Arrow. I remember having dinner in late October with my dad. We were laughing and I told him, I was going to be an Eagle scout. He said, yes, I know, you earned it, now eat your broccoli.

November 2020, I completed my Eagle application packet, obtained all required signatures for the Eagle project, organized my blue cards, wrote emails to ask community leaders if they would write recommendation letters and wrote my Life statement. Now the hardest part..waiting...

I had to wait until the end of Jan 2021 (6 month from my Life completion date) to turn in my paperwork. So what to do with my time.. I made a new list :)

Jan 27th, my Eagle BOR, 2 years from the start of my journey, from a shy girl walking into a room full of boys. I was excited to have a moment to express my feelings about scouting to scout leaders.

And today Jan 28th, I reflect on my experience and have so much to give back to scouting, my community and to lead by example!

Want to know what is on my list for this summer:

1. June 2021 - Philmont 14days in New Mexico backpacking with scouts.
2. July 2021- Ramah Jewish summer camp. NYLT Leadership and/or San Diego soccer tournament
3. August 2021 - Start Freshman year of high school. Begin to work on the Etz Chaim Jewish emblem. Complete a palm (5 merit badges)

And my adventures continue...

[Erin Handelsman](#)

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Now for some words of thanks:

Thank you to my older sister Zoe, the one who tasted my food when working on the cooking merit badge. Floated in the pool and lake so I could practice life saving. The one who held the fire extinguisher when I was working on projects. The one who gave me her finger to work on knots.

Thanks to my Dad who smiled, laughed and just allowed me to do all the activities. Thanks for driving me all over the place to meet counselors, go to a conference to learn about snow camping, and to just give me encouragement. And most of all for loving me and saying "Yes!" even though most parents say no.

To my grandparents, thanks for loving me and helping me with diagrams on my eagle project. Love you so much. Thanks for attending all my ceremonies! And helping me sew on my merit badges as I moved up the rankings.

To my Aunt Libby and Uncle Josh, thanks for supporting me. To my cousins, I can't wait to see you all soon and show you all what I have learned.

To my adult scout leaders, thank you for encouraging me, being kind with your time and just great people.

To my Raven patrol... time for another campout and hike!

To Rabbi Alpert, Rabbi Roller, and Rabbi Sarah... your time and energy was very much appreciated.