

THE USE OF STORYTELLING BY THE FIRECRAFTER ORGANIZATION OF THE  
BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA IN THE CROSSROADS OF AMERICA COUNCIL

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2009

## Part 1: The Problem

Within the Crossroads of America Council of the Boy Scouts of America is a unique organization called Firecrafter. It is often called a Scouting Service Fraternity. Just as scouting was created to serve boys, Firecrafter was created to serve scouting.

In 1918 Francis O. Belzer, the chief scout of the Central Indiana Council, wanted a program to help keep boys coming back to camp. Belzer got the idea for Firecrafter and its camp rank system from his friend, Dan Beard. Beard is recognized as helping start scouting in the United States. Beard created Culver Woodcraft Camp where Belzer often visited. The Culver C incorporated into the Firecrafter emblem, is borrowed from Beard's Woodcraft Camp.

A two-level camp rank program began during the 1919 summer camp season. The first Firecrafter ceremony took place in 1920 at what is now Camp Belzer. Then it was called Camp Chank-Tun-Un-Gi located near Indianapolis on the banks of Fall Creek.

Firecrafter has evolved to what it is today, but it has never lost sight of its purpose. Members of the Firecrafter organization dedicate themselves to advancing the principles and ideals of the scouting movement. It is these principles and ideals that give Firecrafter a strong foundation, but stories help keep it relevant even after ninety years of friendship, leadership, and service.

The cultures of Firecrafter and Boy Scouts both have reasons to benefit from this creative project. There should also be a general interest in this documentary to anyone wanting to know more about youth, scouting, and building character.

Members of Firecrafter typically have a positive impact on society as a whole. This will help the general public have a better idea of the importance of storytelling to Firecrafter.

Firecrafter is unique inasmuch as it restricts membership to scouts in the Crossroads of America Council in the heart of Indiana. Also, scouts earn advancement through the three ranks only at summer camp. They must attend a ritual where they are tested one last time to complete their membership.

## Part 2: Review of Previous Creative Projects featuring Firecrafter

While there are officially no secrets in scouts, there are mysteries. The Firecrafter ceremonies and stories are an important part of that mystery. The two stories presented in this documentary are from ceremonies that, up until this taping, had never been recorded before. It was important that the organization and its officers approved the project before taping. Full cooperation was given and invaluable to the completion of the documentary.

With no prior recording of Firecrafter ceremonies and rituals, one can search for other published materials. The organization regularly publishes newsletters for members, but with little reference to storytelling.

The Firecrafter.org website provides an excellent historical perspective on the organization. There are other Internet resources that provide background and history of the organization. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firecrafter>, <http://www.usscouts.org/profbvr/firecrafter/>)

The story of the fire told during the Grand Ritual, is adapted from a published work, *Around The Fire*, by Hanford M. Burr, that is public domain. While the printed version is available, once again, no recording has been uncovered. Therefore, this project fills a gap not previously explored.

### Part 3: Method

*The Use of Storytelling in the Firecrafter Organization of the Boy Scouts of America in the Crossroads of America Council* explores the importance of storytelling to the organization, members, and initiates. This examination is captured and presented utilizing digital audio and video. This medium not only allows for historical documentation but also allows viewers to experience examples of Firecrafter stories in the intended environment.

Possible outlets for the documentary include, but are not limited to, broadcast television, the Internet, and DVD distribution through Firecrafter and Boy Scout service centers. These media are ideal due to the nature of how the original material was captured and the access by both organization's members as well as the general public. There is also the possibility of a large public performance at an upcoming Firecrafter event. Using a video projector and audio amplification, Firecrafters could watch the program together at the next Spring Fellowship, for example. The staff at Camp Ransburg is also another possible audience since the majority of them are Firecrafters. The documentary could be screened at staff development time before the next camping season begins.

The primary approach for the creative project is documentary. No narration is used. Interviews with Firecrafters are used to convey the main ideas. Video

sequences are augmented with original artwork to help illustrate the stories being told. The camera is the observer, which is an appropriate approach for this topic.

*The Use of Storytelling in the Firecrafter Organization of the Boy Scouts of America in the Crossroads of America Council* is best demonstrated, illustrated, and explained through the documentary genre.

#### Part 4: Results and Discussion

*The Use of Storytelling in the Firecrafter Organization of the Boy Scouts of America in the Crossroads of America Council* captures the impact of storytelling to the Firecrafter organization. The importance of storytelling is reflected in the stories told during rituals and ceremonies. These stories serve to motivate as well as educate scouts working through their Firecrafter candidacy. Firecrafter history is kept alive through storytelling. This documentary helps by preserving some of the ceremonies on digital audio and video for Firecrafters of the future. Firecrafter members old and young add their comments to the documentary. These comments provide personal insight to the organization and define what the stories mean to Firecrafters.

Those in the organization will remember their own experiences from their candidacy by viewing this program. Scouts who are not members of Firecrafter will also be interested to learn more about the organization that compliments their scout careers.

## Part 5: Final Overview

Storytelling is important to the Firecrafter organization. It is used during ceremonies and rituals to inspire and to pass along the history of what is often called a Scouting Service Fraternity.

This creative project began in January of 2008 with the idea of using Firecrafter as the basis of a documentary. Permission was sought from both adult and youth leaders in the organization. Once the green light was given, planning for production began.

The Firecrafter program is based at summer camp so it was fitting production should begin during the camping season. Camp Ransburg is the largest summer camp in the Crossroads of America Council and is a primary focus of Firecrafter. Production began during the fourth week of camp and then picked up again for the remaining three weeks of the nine-week season.

Four weeks of production allowed not only several opportunities to capture Firecrafter activities, but also to build relationships between the producer and Firecrafter leaders at camp. This helped all parties understand the goals of the project and work towards them.

The story of the fire occurs at two ritual ceremonies each year. The first was mid-summer ritual. Production during the weekend was prohibited by inclement

weather. Torrential rain would have wreaked havoc on the equipment so no taping took place.

The second and last opportunity to capture the ceremony was at the Grand Ritual. The weather cooperated and important interviews and footage were captured to complete production.

A total of 15 DVCAM tapes were shot with a PD150 borrowed from the Ball State University media lab. Through editing, most field footage was not used in the final project but includes an additional 3,000 still photographs. 720p high definition footage was also shot as an experiment, but was not used in the final production. This HD footage was of historical photographs and artifacts from Firecrafter's past and captured with a Nikon D-90 digital single lens reflex camera.

*The Use of Storytelling in the Firecrafter Organization of the Boy Scouts of America in the Crossroads of America Council* achieved its goals by both explaining how the organization uses storytelling, and showing examples of the stories in their intended environment.

The documentary begins with a brief on-screen explanation of Firecrafter followed by the title screen of the Firecrafter logo with the title superimposed over it. The title letters are animated and resemble flames burning.

The first section shows various Firecrafter members telling a little about Firecrafter. They range in age from 17 to over 60. The subjects then address the

theme of storytelling, by setting up a traditional inspirational talk at summer camp. Then viewers listen to the talk as it was videotaped.

Next the members tell about the Firecrafter Grand Ritual and introduce the video portion. The Story of the Fire from the ritual is told as memorized by a Firecrafter member. The first part of the story is illustrated through artwork depicting scenes from the story. The documentary concludes with the singing of the Firecrafter song that traditionally ends every campfire and meeting of the organization.

The primary limitation of this project was that the Firecrafter ceremonies typically occur after sunset; the darkness made videotaping difficult. A nearby security light supplied the only illumination during the first talk in the documentary. Consequently the video appears very dark.

The evening footage shot at the Grand Ritual was not much better. There was a full moon that helped the exposure, but it still was not enough light for the Sony PD-150 to record video at an adequate level. Once the fires were lit, the flames provided enough light to improve the exposure of the video.

The Sony PD-150, like most professional video cameras, utilizes a three liquid crystal chip imaging system. Light enters the lens of the camera and passes through a prism dividing it into three paths. The paths lead to three chips, red, blue and green. These chips along with other electronic circuitry convert the light into a digital video signal. This three chip system requires more light to make an image

than a single chip system. The resolution of images created by a three-chip system is much higher than a single chip camera. The result is superior video quality.

Several improvements could be made to address the lack of light. Adding artificial light to these ceremonies would improve the atmosphere of the presentations. Staging the ceremonies during daylight hours would make for properly exposed video, but once again, detract from the tradition of the event diminishing the exact detail this documentary intended to capture.

Another limitation is the need to protect the mysteries of the Firecrafter organization. Arrangements and permissions were granted well ahead of the videotaping to make sure the leaders of Firecrafter were informed and granted permission for the ceremonies to be captured on video.

Using original artwork to illustrate the stories helped the video presentation. It is understood viewers will realize the artwork was created only for the documentary and it is not a part of the actual ceremony.

The creative project maintains high production values while respecting the organizations mysterious aspects. Viewers are able to witness stories used in ceremonies that have never been recorded since their origin in the 1920's.

By keeping the focus narrow, *The Use of Storytelling in the Firecrafter Organization of the Boy Scouts of America in the Crossroads of America Council* is an effective documentation of the stories of the organization.

This project proved to be a good model of digital storytelling as an economical advantage. If it were shot on film for example it would have cost almost \$13,000. That doesn't include editing.

Four hundred feet of film is about eleven minutes long. Raw stock cost around 35 cents a foot for 16-millimeter film. To transfer the film to video, runs anywhere from \$160 for Betacam SP to \$700 for high definition. That is for machine time not for finished hour of footage. That translates to no more than 20 minutes of footage per hour of work time. The project used 15 tapes of raw footage at 40 minutes each. Those 600 minutes raw film stock would cost approximately \$7,700 for 22,200 feet of film.

Processing costs approximately 10 cents a foot for a total of \$222. The Film to video transfer cost range from \$4,800 on the low end to \$21,000 on the high end. Total estimated cost to shoot on film including transfer would be at least \$12,722.

While Boy Scouts around the world have been working their way toward the rank of Eagle Scout, Hoosier scouts have the opportunity to advance through the three ranks of Firecrafter; Camper, Woodsman and Firecrafter. These ranks compliment the Boy Scout ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class. The requirements are included in the appendix to this report.

## Appendix

### **Camper**

1. Understand and demonstrate the principles and high standards of Firecrafter in personal attitude and example, showing respect for your fellow campers and your environment.
2. Repeat from memory the Scout Oath, Law, Motto and Slogan. Be able to give the Scout Sign, Salute, and Handshake. Tell the meaning of each in your own words.
3. Tell how Scouting began and how it came to America.
4. Hiking
  - a. Tell what to do to take a safe hike.
  - b. Plan and take a hike in the field demonstrating proper methods and courtesies.
5. Compass:
  - a. Explain how a compass works.
  - b. Give eight (8) principal points and their degree readings.
  - c. In the field, follow a route through three different degree readings.
6. Using a topographic map, demonstrate your knowledge of (10) common map symbols—including contour lines.
7. Demonstrate at least one way to find your way by the stars.
8. Whip the end of a rope. Tie and explain the uses of the square knot, bowline, clove, and taut-line hitch.
9. Demonstrate the proper handling, use, and care of a pocket knife.
10. Do one hour of service above what is normally expected.
11. Read the requirements for the rank of Woodsman.

## Woodsmen

\*Prerequisite: Have or receive the Camper Rank.

1. Understand and demonstrate the principles and high standards of Firecrafter in personal attitude and example, showing respect for your fellow campers and your environment.
2. Using proper woodsmen's tools and two matches, build a fire from natural materials. Set the fire to burn for 15 minutes without additional wood or alteration.
3. Whip the end of a rope. Tie and explain the uses of the square knot, bowline, taut-line hitch, bowline-on-a-bight, sheet bend, timber hitch, sheep shank, two half hitches, clove hitch, and lark's head.
4. Demonstrate the proper sharpening, care, and transportation of the knife and axe.
5. Demonstrate proper methods in the use of woodsmen's tools, use dovetail notches to make a useful camp gadget.
6. Repeat from memory the Outdoor Code and explain its meaning in your own words.
7. Nature:
  - a. Identify five edible plants in the field and explain in detail their preparation.
  - b. Identify and name five trees in the field.
  - c. Identify and name, by sight or sign, five wild animals.
8. Demonstrate proficiency in first aid by showing the proper treatment of minor wounds and injuries, bandages, used to hold dressings in place, handling of "hurry cases" and general procedures for all first aid cases.
9. In the outdoors, cook a simple meal without utensil. The meal must include one raw meat one raw vegetable, and a bread prepared from scratch. Demonstrate proper fire safety methods and leave the cooking site clean.
10. Complete leadership responsibility while in camp by assisting scouts to advance.
11. Do two hours of service above what is normally expected.
12. Read the requirements for the rank of Firecrafter.

## **Firecrafter**

The following interpretations shall be placed on the requirements of the Firecrafter Camp Rank:

1. At the time of the Firecrafter Ritual:
  - a. Be at least 13 years old or have been an active registered Scout for at least two (2) years.
  - b. Be no more than 20 years old.
2. Have or received the Camper and Woodsman ranks.
3. Be a First Class Scout.
4. Understand and demonstrate the principles and high standards of Firecrafter in personal attitude and example. Showing respect for your fellow campers and your environment. Discuss the ideals of Scouting and Firecrafter with your unit leader.
5. Complete a daily uniform and tent inspection
6. Read the history of Firecrafter and tell when, where, and by whom Firecrafter was founded.
7. Complete leadership responsibilities in camp by assisting Scouts to advance in your troop or in a program area of camp for at least one hour.
8. Build a fire-by-friction set, unassisted, using a set made by the candidate while in camp of natural materials (except thong), and keep the fire burning for 15 minutes.
9. Complete all the tasks listed.
  - a. Write out the following on paper and explain fully, in complete sentences, using your scout handbook as a guide:
    - i. Checklist of personal and patrol gear needed for a typical overnight campout.
    - ii. A backpacking menu including two breakfast, three lunches, and two dinners.
    - iii. How to construct a latrine for yourself.
    - iv. How to properly pack a backpack.

- v. How to protect your camp, including food and gear, from animals, insects, and wet or bad weather.
  - vi. How to protect yourself against any type of weather if caught on a trail with only a pocketknife.
  - vii. The proper way to dispose of garbage and rubbish in the wilderness.
- b. Complete the following as directed by the Firecrafter Vice-Chief:
- i. Go on an overnight campout.
  - ii. Bring a backpack which includes the following: sleeping bag, flashlight, completed paper work from section A, fire building materials, and any other necessary items for an overnight campout.
  - iii. Construct a proper shelter using ground clothes, ropes, and stakes.
  - iv. Sleep in the shelter, using a comfortable ground bed.
  - v. While on this campout, cook a meal over a fire using materials provided by the consul.
  - vi. Strike camp and properly clean your assigned area.
10. Make a useful camp equipment using square, diagonal, and sheer lashings.
11. Demonstrate one of the following: eye splice, a back splice, or a short splice.
12. Swimming:
- a. Explain the Safe Swim Defense Plan.
  - b. Explain water rescue procedures and methods.
  - c. Demonstrate a reach and throw rescue.
  - d. Swim 100 yards.
13. Identify, by sight or sign, 10 wild animals, 10 trees, and 10 plants.
14. Plan, prepare, and conduct a campfire program (or suitable substitute approved by the fire) that demonstrates leadership.
15. Do three hours of service above what is normally expected.
16. Complete successfully the inspections review and Unknown Test of the Firecrafter Ritual.
- a. Upon completion of the first 12 requirements, candidates will receive a ritual invitation. Requirement 13 can only be done at the ritual. It cannot be completed during a week at camp.

## Bibliography

*Around The Fire*, by Hanford M. Burr

<http://www.firecrafter.org>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firecrafter>

<http://www.usscouts.org/profbvr/firecrafter>