

School Safety Patrols 1961

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"I can't decide whether to join Brownies or Patrols" my friend Judy said on the first day of grade 5. "Which one are you joining?"

"I'm joining both," I answered excitedly. "We can sign up for Patrols now, and for Brownies after school."

We bounded up the stairs to the classroom where the applications were to be filled out, and signed up on the spot.

Training was the next day. Friendly Constable Gow, the patrol liaison officer from the Police Station over on Churchill Avenue gave a talk, and answered questions. We were shown a film on safety, then were issued our membership cards with the Patrol members pledge:

Report for duty on time
Perform my duties faithfully
Strive to prevent accidents, setting a good example myself
Obey my teachers and officers of the patrol
Report dangerous practices of students
Strive to earn the respect of fellow students

After school we were shown where the official white patrol belts were hung and the official STOP signs were stored. We were paired up with experienced patrols, followed them to their street corners, and observed power in action.

Kids waiting to cross the street crowded behind the patrol's outstretched arms. When the traffic thinned, she bellowed "Signs up", and she and her partner on the opposite side stepped into the street facing oncoming traffic, and the group scampered across. Cars, buses and trucks stopped until "Signs down" was called by the partner on the other side. Judy and I were very impressed and couldn't wait to take on that authority.

The teacher knew better than to put us together on a corner, so I was paired with Ricky, one of the grade six boys. He was very efficient and authoritative, making sure the kids waited obediently behind him. During quiet times in the winter he showed me how well the stop signs could chop ice and how they could be used as tennis racquets, sending snowballs across Wellington Street with perfect overhand

serves. These days, student safety patrols have been replaced by adult crossing guards who don't play tennis on the job.

During bitter winter weather, our principal allowed us to use the staff room to make soup after a shift on our corners. How important we felt, sitting around the table with our cups of soup while everyone else was in class. This was a huge perk. Another perk was that, of course, we had to leave class a few minutes earlier than everyone else, to pick up our patrol belts, stop signs and to reach our corners before school was dismissed.

Once a month the Ottawa Patrols were treated to a free movie at the Capital Theatre. Judy and I took the bus downtown for our first movie, and were excited to see the famous singer Brenda Lee in "The Two Little Bears" one Saturday, and a variety of other movies through the year.

The annual highlight was the Patrol Jamboree. Proudly wearing our white belts, we marched up Wellington St to Parliament Hill along with patrols from schools across Ontario.

Over the next couple of years Judy and I both worked our way up to the rank of Lieutenant. In Grade 8 I was appointed Captain, but unfortunately that status didn't last long. Getting lost in a book after lunch too often made me late checking that the corners were occupied, so I was demoted. That was bad enough, but the fact that I was replaced by one of my cousins was super embarrassing.

My patrol experience was a big learning curve. It taught me the hard way to be on time for my responsibilities, and is one of my best memories from grade school.