

The
STRUGGLE
 for the **SOUL** of the
BOY SCOUTS

WHO DECIDES who can be a Boy Scout? Will the future of the organization be determined by its 5 million volunteers and young members? Or will a secretive bureaucracy, tied to religious conservatives, tighten its control over policy and power?

THE GRAND COURTROOM OF THE United States Supreme Court was filled to capacity. A team from Bill Clinton's Justice Department was there, as was the chief justice of the New Jersey State Supreme Court. Busloads of law students and gay activists filled the spectators' gallery, and outside, television crews waited while conservative Christians held placards warning of hellfire and damnation. The case on the docket: Number 99-699, the Boy Scouts of America vs. James Dale. The issue at hand was the constitutional right of the Boy Scouts, a self-described private organization, to deny membership to

gays. The Boy Scouts' attorneys would argue today that homosexuality is immoral and unclean, and that a gay man like James Dale cannot exemplify and transmit Scouting's core values of loyalty, bravery and courage.

James Dale, who is twenty-nine now, had earned his Eagle, the highest award in the Boy Scouts. Through eleven years of Scouting, he had earned dozens of accolades, including membership in the Order of the Arrow, an honor roll for those who specialize in service to others. Dale's father and mother were active in Scouting, and James, who had become an assistant Scoutmaster, was looking forward to a lifetime in the organization. In July 1990, however, his local Scout council informed him that he had been expelled for being homosexual. Dale had never heard of any such rule against gays, so he sued for reinstatement.

B Y C H U C K S U D E T I C



1940 and 1957 Scout handbook for Boys

THE BOY SCOUT OATH

On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

Thus began an ordeal that would last ten years and would, finally, come down to a one-hour hearing in the Supreme Court on April 26th. In that decade, Dale's case had become a cause célèbre, the latest battleground in the ongoing culture wars. During that time, Boy Scout bureaucrats invented a rationale for the ban, based on the Scout Oath to be "morally straight." Still, Supreme Court Justice David Souter noted during the oral argument that the Boy Scout Handbook does not spell out any policy banning gays. "It doesn't say anything about arson or forgery, either," replied BSA lawyer George Davidson. Davidson, who had difficulty explaining the nuances of the Scouts' position (which is a variant of "Don't ask, don't tell"), claimed that it came down to the First Amendment right of an or-

diluting or imperiling the message that an organization wants to convey."

As lawyers and spectators spilled out into the bright spring sunlight, a few tried to guess the breakdown of votes. "Five to four, BSA," someone said. "No, I was thinking more like 6-3," a lawyer replied. The Supreme Court will publish its decision by late June.

No matter what the justices decide, the Boy Scouts of America has suffered irreparable damage. The *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning News* and other prominent newspapers around the country have lambasted the group for clinging to outdated prejudices. Highly qualified volunteers have abandoned it in protest. The United Way, which contributed \$83.7 million to the BSA in 1996 (the last year for

teers sound like the majority of Americans. They prefer to live and let live, and they express a wide variety of opinions on the gay issue. This group, I discovered, knows very little about the other half of the Boy Scouts: BSA Inc., the salaried bureaucracy whose well-being depends on constant fund-raising, much of it through alliances with old-line conservative religious groups like the Mormons, the Baptists and the Catholics.

In its ninety-year history, BSA Inc. has been resistant to cultural change and proud of it. It ostracizes dissenters. As it is secretive: Not a single current BSA official agreed to be interviewed for this story. When the organization's public-relations department learned of my inquiries, I received two calls informing that I was banned from contact with any troop in America, and to stop calling anyone connected to the Boy Scouts.



James Dale has reluctantly become the spokesman against the Scouts' discrimination policies.



THE BSA SAYS THAT gay men such as James Dale do not obey the Scout Oath to be "morally straight" and the Scout Law to be "clean."

organization to decide who can be a member.

Based on precedent alone, the odds are not good for Dale. This Supreme Court has shown an openness to state interference in a private group's right to freedom of association. Conservative Justice Antonin Scalia may have signaled how the court will ultimately frame the case when he said, "Our law simply prevents the state from

which statistics are available), has stopped funding Boy Scout activities in some regions, as have some corporate foundations. Traditionally tight bonds with local and federal government agencies have been weakened or broken. These trends are likely to accelerate if the Boy Scouts prevail.

Should Dale win the case, the BSA will face mutinies large and small - most significantly by the religious groups that the organization counts on for financial support. The Mormon Church, the largest

sponsor of Boy Scout troops in the U.S., is fiercely opposed to admitting homosexuals and has stated that it will end its nine-decade-long affiliation if gays can join. This would mean the departure of more than 412,000 Scouts who are sponsored by the Mormons - about twelve percent of the organization's membership - and the loss of massive organized adult support.

How has the Boy Scouts of America found itself at this juncture? And what does it mean to be a Scout in the twenty-first century? After six months of looking into these questions, I've become convinced that the BSA is really two organizations. The first, its heart and soul, is composed of the millions of volunteers who spend their time with the kids, who put thousands of miles on their cars on camping trips, who say that less money and oversight from the national headquarters is perhaps better. For the most part, these volun-

PART ONE

The Heart and Soul of Scouting

THE VOLUNTEERS PROVE TO BE friendlier. One Saturday in April, more than 100 Boy Scouts and about fifty adults stand silently at attention in a parking lot at the Kinzua Bridge State Park in northwestern Pennsylvania. They pledge allegiance to the flag, then, reciting the Boy Scout Oath, they promise to do their duty to God and country, to help others always and to keep themselves "physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

The Scouts break ranks and spread out beneath the huge steel trestles of the Kinzua railroad bridge. At 301 feet high, the bridge was one of the world's tallest a century ago; now it is an antique observation deck overlooking the foothills of the Allegheny Moun-



ILLUSTRATION BY C. F. PAYNE

THE CLOUT OF THE CHURCHES

The Methodists, Mormons and Catholics provide the Boy Scouts of America with a steady source of adult volunteers and fund-raising opportunities. The Mormon Church in particular has deep and abiding connections to the BSA's professional organization. The BSA takes seriously the Mormons' threat that they would withdraw from the Scouts if the ban on gay members is lifted.

	Top Ten Boy Scout Sponsors	Scouts	% of Total Scouts
1	United Methodists	421,579	12.46%
2	Mormons	412,240	12.19%
3	Public Schools	362,989	10.73%
4	Roman Catholics	354,568	10.48%
5	Parents Clubs	186,821	5.25%
6	Lutherans	150,009	4.43%
7	Presbyterians	146,870	4.34%
8	Baptists	115,961	3.43%
9	Lions International	105,930	3.13%
10	PTA	98,870	2.92%

AS OF DECEMBER 1998

tains. Many park visitors drop litter from the bridge, and each spring Boy Scouts clean up the valley below.

Geoff Moshier is a curious seventh-grader who arrived with Troop 87 from Big Flats, New York, a bedroom community for people who work in the offices and laboratories of Corning Glass. All of the Scouts at Kinzua are here for a good time, but most of them, like Geoff, are also working toward a goal. "I want to get my Eagle," he says.

To qualify for the Eagle badge, boys like Geoff have to complete a battery of tests before their eighteenth birthday. Fewer than three in a hundred succeed. Geoff's dresser drawer already contains merit badges for wood-carving, archery, swimming, small-boat sailing, canoeing and other skills. Five more gets him there.

The merit-badge structure, the key element of the Boy Scouts program, mixes challenges and rewards to nurture self-esteem and to inculcate social values. It is a brilliant system, a gentle meritocracy that turns boys into citizens.

Ray Benjamin, an assistant Scoutmaster, directs the extraction of a picnic table that had been thrown into the valley. A reserved, sharp-eyed forty-five-year-old man, Benjamin gave up vacation time



Kevin Held (left) and Geoff Moshier prepare lunch during a day spent removing litter at Kinzua Park in Pennsylvania.

to come here. "A lot of people don't want to get involved," he says softly. "There ain't nobody gettin' paid here."

Since the founding of the Boy Scouts in the United States in 1910, volunteers like Ray Benjamin have taught boys like Geoff Moshier to fire rifles, shoot arrows, paddle kayaks and perform first aid. Donating their time — one meeting a week, one camping trip a month, plus commitments to fund-raising projects — the volunteers have also taught the Scouts how to act in an emergency, how to rescue someone from drowning, how to balance a checkbook and invest in the stock market. In talks around

the campfire, they have told ghost stories, taught the boys silly songs and passed on lessons about elements of life they have found most abiding.

About the policy banning gays, Ray Benjamin says he leans toward the status quo: "I had a problem once when I was younger. I was bothered by somebody." He divulges only that the incident occurred in a church group, not the Boy Scouts.

Like many Scout leaders I met that day, however, even Ray Benjamin says he would adjust if the Supreme Court rules that states have the right to prohibit the Boy Scouts from banning gays. "I would be uneasy if I knew

my sons had a gay troop leader — unless I knew him," he says. "And if the guy's an Eagle Scout, he's got to have decent credentials."

James Dale had more than enough credentials. In addition to being an Eagle Scout, he taught Sunday school in the local Lutheran church. With his square jaw and earnest countenance, he resembled the all-American boys who graced the cover of *Boy's Life*, the Scout magazine.

Dale says he came to Scouting because his father, a lieutenant colonel in the Army, and his older brother had joined the Cub Scout pack at church. "I wanted to join earlier than age eight," he says. Dale's brother, who is also gay, dropped out of Scouting early on. But Dale took to it with a passion and stayed with it during the years he attended a military high school, the Marine Academy of Science and Technology in Sandy Hook, New Jersey. "Boy Scouts was community," he says. "It was a place where I felt I belonged. I did other things. I was in soccer and basketball. But nothing fit as well as the Boy Scouts. I felt I didn't have to be the best football player or run the fastest. In the Boy Scouts, I could be who I was. They valued me for who I was."

Dale attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where he learned about the local gay community. At nineteen, having the support of others gave him the confidence to come out publicly at school. Within three months of joining the school's lesbian and gay organization in his sophomore year, he became

its co-president. But he did not mix his work in the Scouts with his work in the gayers gay alliance with his enthusiasm for Scouting. They were two separate worlds, says he did not know at the time that the Boy Scouts had a policy banning gay members.

After Dale's picture appeared in the local paper, the BSA sent Dale a letter expelling him from the Boy Scouts, without the courtesy of an explanation. Dale says he felt betrayed. "I felt betrayed. This was the organization that taught me how to be a man. He had to get an attorney to pry the reason out of them. The BSA then announced that it barred membership to homosexuals."

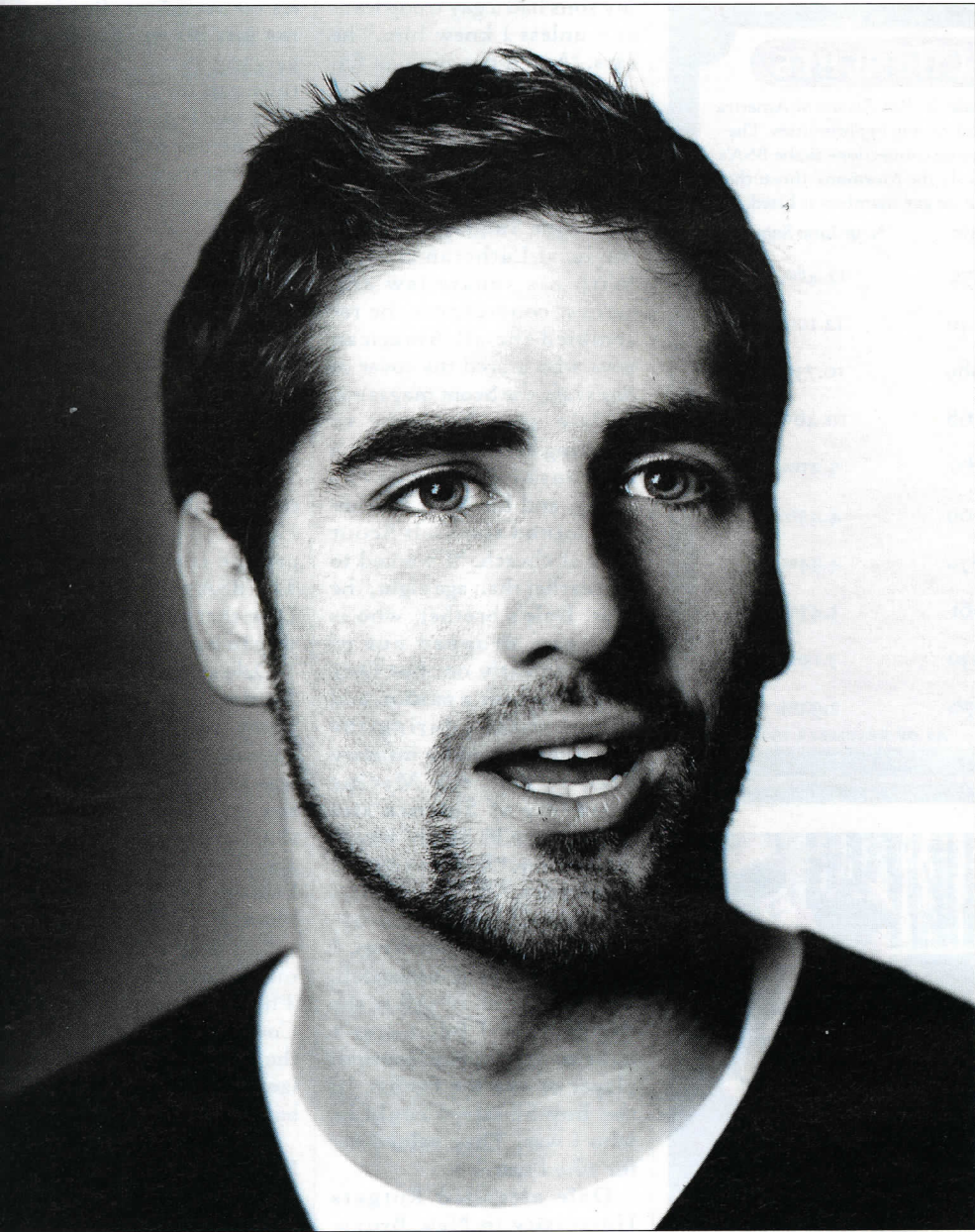
Dale sued in a trial court in Monmouth County, New Jersey, and lost in 1995. Patrick J. McGann's opinion was a diatribe against homosexuality. "Men who are those criminal and immoral acts," he raged, "cannot be held out as role models. I know that."

Last August, the case took a major turn in Dale's favor. The New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the BSA had violated a state law banning discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In my interview with Dale, it became obvious that the Boy Scouts had picked the wrong man to hold the line. Dale is a moral and unfit. Dale, who served in the Navy as a senior ROTC as a teen, is a very definition of a straight arrow. "Scouting is for everyone," he said. "Scouting wasn't about sexuality, about gay or straight. It was about being the best person you could be."

PART TWO BSA Inc.: Inside the Bureaucracy

THE BOY SCOUTS' 1.3 MILLION ADULT volunteers who drive the organization have a high degree of autonomy. The central office in Irving, Texas, applauds the self-sufficiency of the roughly 300 councils that run the local programs, each of which is generally made up of a volunteer board supported by a professional staff. But even



"I remember hoping to God I wouldn't be gay," said Dale Gribble (left) about his childhood.

teers who each have more than forty-five years in the Scouts, the BSA has heavy influence over much of the decision-making by the national board. Under the BSA's bylaws, the members of the national executive board are elected each year by several thousand voting delegates to the BSA's annual convention. These delegates, however, are only allowed to vote yes or no on a single slate of candidates. A nominating committee selects the candidates according to the recommendation of the chief Scout executive, says a volunteer. The delegates are not given the opportunity to vote down individual candidates without rejecting the entire slate. The delegates typically approve the slate and in so doing churn out boards that may defer to proposals made by BSA Inc. "It perpetuates the power of the professionals who run the organization with an iron fist, even though there is the appear-

cliff and his Number 1 man, Michael Hoover, have been the power brokers of the organization since 1993. ("I'm a man who has just succeeded," says Ratcliffe, Roy Williams, a well-respected twenty-eight-year veteran of the BSA, says insiders say may be amenable to change.)

Ratcliffe, a Tennessee native, has valiantly upheld the organization's exclusion of "gays, girls and the godless" otherwise known in Boy Scout jargon as the three G's. According to the text of a speech that he gave several years ago to Scout employees and volunteers, Ratcliffe proclaimed, "Another set of issues that we face are the constitutional issues we deal with — those referred to in the field as the three G's. Make no mistake on where the BSA stands on these issues. Our position is not going to change!" The BSA has successfully fought every law brought against it by atheists and has won at least eight legal challenges to its refusal to allow girls to join its traditional Scouting programs.

Scouting volunteers have

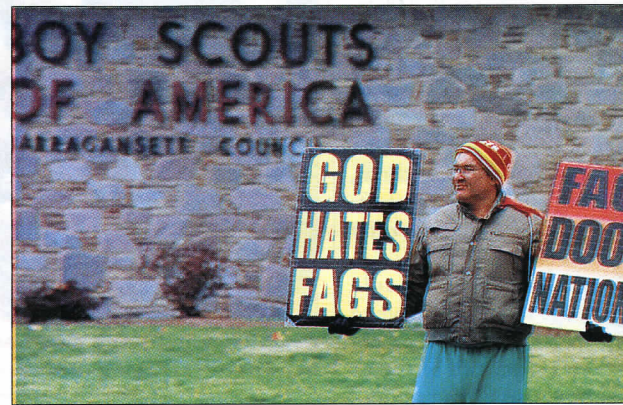
"THE BSA IS TELLING gay Boy Scouts they have to be honest and trustworthy - and lie about their orientation," says Wendy Becker, a social worker.



Lockheed Martin, the largest U.S. defense contractor; and Robert M. Gates, a former CIA director. Their prestige and power enhance the Boy Scouts' credibility and fundraising clout. But, volunteers say, as with other nonprofit corporations, the board members are too preoccupied with their busy lives to give much thought to the Boy Scouts. The board's president, Edward E. Whitacre Jr., runs one of the world's most powerful telephone and Internet companies, SBC Communications, the parent company of Southwestern Bell.

Whitacre did not respond to repeated interview requests. But notably, SBC, as well as other corporations run by members of the BSA's national executive board, does not discriminate against gays in its hiring policy.

According to two volun-



The Rev. Fred Phelps protests in front of a Rhode Island BSA office after a local gay teen is readmitted to the Boy Scouts.

ance of a democratic process," says a source.

The top paid executives of BSA Inc. work out of a modest four-story brick building surrounded by a well-manicured lawn in the wealthy Dallas suburb of Irving. The national executives form the top rung of a hierarchy of about 3,800 professional Scouting managers who work in the head office and in the 300 self-funded local councils scattered throughout the country. From 1993 until the end of May 2000, the chief Scout executive was Jere Ratcliffe. Volunteers say Rat-

Ratcliffe as a fund-raising genius who effectively wrings big donations from corporations. He has been credited with streamlining the organization and applying management techniques suggested by the BSA's corporate board members. During the year Ratcliffe spent at or near the top, the organization's national office saw its revenues strip expenses by widening margins. In 1989, the operating surplus stood at \$4.4 million; by 1998, it had risen to \$17.1 million, with total revenues at \$155 million from membership fees, sales



Jere Ratcliffe supported the ban on "gays, girls and the godless."

magazines and Scouting materials, investment income and contributions.

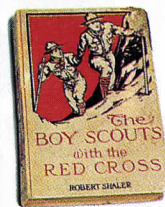
Ratcliffe received a compensation and benefits package worth \$537,314 in 1998. Roxanne Spillett, head of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, a nonprofit corporation of comparable size, had a package of \$265,962. The BSA national

office's financial success may help to explain Ratcliffe's salary, and why the board apparently took no action against him when he was arrested in 1997 for trying to carry a loaded handgun and twenty-eight bullets onto a commercial airplane in Florida. Ratcliffe issued a statement saying it was all just an

honest mistake, but news reports said he did not even have a license to carry a concealed weapon in Texas.

Ratcliffe oversaw one of the biggest charities in the country, rated seventeenth out of 400 in a recent *Chronicle of Philanthropy* survey, with income of \$649 million in 1998 and total expenses of \$566.6 million. The United Way is a significant financial backer, but it ties some of its funding to the Scouts' efforts to involve minorities. The BSA may have crossed the line in its effort to produce high minority-recruitment figures, as demonstrated by a recent scandal in the Dallas area – just ten miles from the BSA headquarters.

The United Way in Dallas has contributed more than \$10 million to the BSA's local Circle Ten Council since 1991. In April, inspectors from the U.S. Postal Service raided the council's offices in Dallas. According to the *Dallas Morning News*, they were acting on a tip that the council's paid executives had pressured employees into inflating membership rosters by up to thirty



Boy Scout
Red Cross
Book, 1915

THE BOY SCOUT LAW

*A Scout is trustworthy,
loyal, helpful, friendly,
courteous, kind, obedient,
cheerful, thrifty, brave,
clean and reverent.*

percent and had left inactive troops on its registration lists in order to back requests for millions of dollars in donations from the United Way and others.

Dale Draper, a former employee of the Circle Ten Council, blew the whistle. "When you get funding, they want to know if you're serving minority areas," says Draper, a Mormon and a graduate of Brigham Young University with a specialization in Boy Scout management. Draper says Circle Ten's executives used money from the council's budget, which is largely covered by contributions from the United Way and other organiza-

tions, to pay registration fees for Scouts, volunteers and troops that did not exist. The money went to the national office of the BSA. Draper resigned his position with the council seven months after internal BSA auditors reported that there was no wrongdoing at Circle Ten. "You know how you've got the good ol' boy system," Draper says. "I think that was in place in this situation." The local BSA council president admitted some irregularities occurred but denied that the problem was widespread.

The BSA is dependent not only on the United Way but also on many government-related organizations – even

though the Boy Scouts has maintained through two decades of discrimination lawsuits that it is a private organization. But since its earliest days, the BSA has sought to maintain strong ties to church and state.

Every United States president since William H. Taft has been the BSA's honorary president. In 1916, Congress granted the BSA a charter as a "patriotic society," a privilege it now shares with the United States Olympic Committee, the American Legion and similar institutions. This charter, which can be repealed or amended at any time, is crucial to the BSA's paid employees, because it effectively grants the organization a monopoly on the Boy Scouting program in the United States, and even on the term *Boy Scout*. An act of Congress permits the BSA to use uniforms similar to those of the Army, Navy and Marines. Congress has also authorized the U.S. military to loan equipment to the Boy Scouts without charge and to sell the BSA obsolete or surplus material. "Every single Scout camp depends on equipment from the military," says Bill Kirkner, a former volunteer Scout who ran a Boy Scout camp in Maryland for several summers.

Every four years, a U.S. military base, Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia, hosts the National Jamboree, a giant camping festival that attracts tens of thousands of Scouts from all over the world. Government support for the BSA also comes in the form of access to public schools, including opportunities to recruit boys during school hours. Public schools, police departments, fire departments and other civic organizations also sponsor troops. But, volunteers say, these and other secular Scouting participants do not have as much influence on policymaking at the national level as the churches that support large blocks of Boy Scout troops.

"Power in the Boy Scouts of America has gravitated to the professionals, and they derive their power from the groups with the largest financial dona-

tions," says a volunteer. "These tend to be the Mormons and the Roman Catholic Church." Another volunteer, with more than fifty years of involvement in the BSA, says, "It would take a major effort from outside the organization to change how the BSA views the Mormons and Catholics."

The Mormons in particular have deep bonds with the Boy Scouts. Almost all of the church's top leaders achieved the rank of Eagle Scout as young men, and Mormon elders use the Boy Scout program as an integral part of its youth ministry. If the Mormon Church carried out its threat to withdraw from the BSA, the Boy Scouts would not only lose about twelve percent of its membership but would also potentially be cut off from millions of Scout alumni who have supported the organization with their time and money. In 1995, Elder Jack Goaslind, the president of the Mormons' young men's organization and a member of the BSA's



James West (with Franklin Roosevelt in 1935) helped the BSA get a monopoly from Congress.

national executive board, was asked during a civil hearing how the top leaders of the church came to discuss their willingness to leave BSA if it becomes gay-friendly. Goaslind referred to the lawsuits against the BSA brought by the parents of children who had suffered sexual abuse by troop leaders. "Well, to be direct with you," Goaslind testified, "it was because of the number of cases that have come before the courts on different homosexual-conduct acts that it's been discussed thoroughly there. And the decision has been reached."

PART THREE

The Myth of the Gay Predator

IN A SMALL TOWN IN RURAL WISCONSIN, A nineteen-year-old Eagle Scout is deciding whether to leave home to make a career in movies. Like Steven Spielberg, who earned his merit badge in photography by turning his Scout buddies into actors in an 8mm film called *Guns Mog*, this young man has earned a merit badge in filmmaking. For now, he's an assistant Scoutmaster. He owns four full uniforms - shorts,



Dale (seated) was active in Scouting and Bible school.

The HISTORY of the BAN on GAY SCOUTS

Lord Robert Baden-Powell invented the Scouting program in England in 1908. He adored children and was appalled by the performance of young British troops in the Boer War in South Africa. War was looming in Europe, and Britain was struggling to maintain its imperial supremacy. Baden-Powell wanted to find a system that would organize lower-class and working-class boys," says Michael Rosenthal, a Baden-Powell biographer, "and turn them into loyal, responsible and disciplined citizens who would be prepared to fight and die for the empire." From its earliest days, the organization had to cope with men who were attracted to Scouting for the opportunity to abuse boys. In the United States, but not in England, the Scouts made a practice of quietly expelling men believed to be gay, in an attempt to prevent this problem.

Misinformation about sexuality was common in the early and mid-twentieth century. A Boy Scout handbook in the U.S. called masturbation "the source of a very considerable personality disturbance." For decades, Scout leaders wrongly believed that gay men were more inclined toward pedophilia than everyone else. But in the Seventies and Eighties, faced with multiple sex-abuse scandals, the Scouts learned a perhaps counterintuitive fact: that men who are sexually attracted to boys often have no adult sexual relationships. Those who do have them are just as likely to sleep with women as with men. In the mid-Eighties, the BSA instituted a child-abuse prevention program which pointed out that gay men are no more dangerous than straight ones. But Scout officials decided to maintain the ban, calling gay men unfit role models. They continue to espouse the traditional religious view of homosexuality as unnatural and immoral.

• **1911** A year after the Boy Scouts was founded in the U.S., a system called the Red Flag List was introduced, based on the Grey List used by the Scouts in England. These confidential files listed men expelled due to questionable character. If a Scoutmaster was discovered to be gay, he would quietly be asked to leave, and the local council would start a file on him so that he could not return. This system is still in place today.

• **1972** The Scoutmaster's Handbook perpetuated the false homosexuality-pedophilia connection: "Incidents of sexual experimentation that may occur in the troop could run from the innocent to the scandalous. . . . It is important to distinguish between youthful acts of innocence and the practices of a confirmed homosexual who may be using his Scouting association to make contacts."

• **1978** A February memo from the central office to all Scout executives expressed the BSA's support for a Minnesota Council's decision to exclude two gay boys. A March memo to all Scout executives dictated that if a member was alleged to be homosexual, he should be investigated in "a discreet and responsible fashion."

• **1980** Tim Curran, an eighteen-year-old in Oakland, California, was kicked out after the local paper reported that he escorted another boy to a prom. He was the first gay man to sue the BSA for discrimination. California's Supreme Court ruled against Curran in 1990.

• **1990** James Dale of Middletown, New Jersey, was expelled. The BSA told him that it "specifically forbids membership to homosexuals." Dale sued.

• **1991** Catalyzed by such cases, the BSA asked its communications department and PR firm to develop a position statement, which reads, in part, "We believe that homosexual conduct is inconsistent with

the requirement in the Scout Oath that a Scout be morally straight and in the Scout Law that a Scout be clean in word and deed, and that homosexuals do not provide a desirable role model for Scouts."

• **1993** Chief Scout Executive Jere Ratcliffe, the highest-ranking BSA officer, declared, "The BSA has always reflected the expectations that Scouting families have had for the organization, and we do not believe that homosexuals provide a role model consistent with these expectations."

• **1998** Scott Teare, Ratcliffe's assistant, testified that "if a person says that he is a homosexual, he cannot be a member of the Boy Scouts of America. . . .

There should be no ifs, ands or buts."

• **1999** Joe Long, director of the Middle Tennessee Council, which administers a Scouting program for 45,000 children and 8,800 adults, told a reporter, "We believe homosexuals are not the appropriate role models. . . . [If we think a man is gay] we'd ask [him] - no question about it."

• **2000** BSA attorney George Davidson argued before the Supreme Court in the James Dale case, "Scouting does not investigate the sexual orientation of applicants and only excludes those that are open about their sexual orientation. . . . Scouting regards homosexual conduct as immoral."

A ruling on the legality of the Boy Scouts' policy is expected in June.

—ERIKA CASRIEL

socks, shirt and belt - and he wears them when he's working with his troop at campsouts and jamborees. But he has a secret. "If I were to stand up and do what was in my heart, I'd be kicked out," he says.

"When I was eighteen, I thought that I would never be strong enough to tell anyone that I was gay," he wrote to me in an e-mail. "I was scared of the public humiliation, and I was scared of myself. I went to a park with a railroad bridge towering over a river. . . . I walked to the middle of the bridge and I stopped. I sat down and cried. I then remembered something a teacher I had once said: 'Suicide is a permanent solution to a tempo-

ple say they are gay or lesbian." "Gay kids experience a great deal of social isolation," says Wendy Becker, a social worker who works with teens in Rhode Island. "A group experience like Scouting can be greatly beneficial, but not if the gay have to hide who they are." Gay Boy Scouts are living in a dichotomous world where BSA is telling them they have to be honest and trustworthy and lie about their orientation. For a Boy Scout who takes that oath of honesty seriously, this is a very difficult duality to live with." She says that enforced silence only worsens their depression.

Because the BSA has been vague about its reasons



BOYS WHO ARE SCOUTS for five or more years are almost twice as likely as their peers to build households that earn more than \$50,000 a year, according to a recent study.

rary problem.' That's when I decided that what I needed was change. I walked off that bridge holding my head a little higher. It was that day that I first spoke to anyone about my sexuality." He has since come out to a few friends, but not to his family.

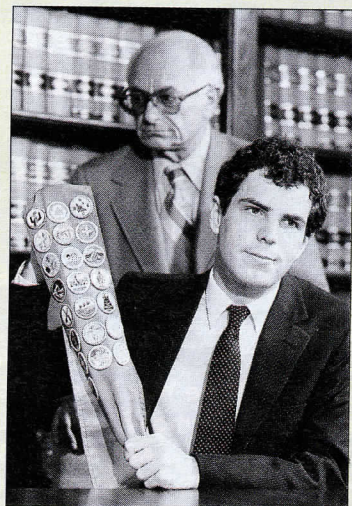
"I suddenly became more scared of what could have happened that day," he continued, "than I was of the truth about myself. Since that point, it's been an upward battle with myself. Just knowing that there are young men in that same situation should be enough to wake the BSA up and show them the pain and hatred they are promoting."

It is ironic that the BSA, whose program for developing self-esteem has proved so effective, has chosen to bar adolescents who could arguably benefit more from the program than their straight peers. Gay teenagers have a much harder time coping with their sexual identity than straights. Physical abuse and suicide are disproportionately higher among gay teens. More than four of every ten homeless young peo-

the anti-gay policy, many volunteers don't realize that one of the main reasons for its disappearance. The ban is historically rooted in an old myth which holds that gay men are more likely than straight men to prey on young boys. This prejudice has been disproved by pedophilia experts.

"Having an interest in children is a sexual preference, just like having an interest in men or having an interest in women," said Robert Prentky, a forensic psychologist who has worked with sex offenders for twenty years. The Boy Scouts has, in fact, clearly recognized this point since the mid-1980s, when it published a pamphlet called "Youth Protection Guidelines" that dispelled the connection. But the policy against gays survived, due not only to lingering homophobia but also to the BSA's aversion to change and its desire to please its most loyal supporters.

According to James Tan, the chief Scout [Cont. on 15]



Timothy Curran, an ousted Scout, sued the BSA and lost.

BOY SCOUTS VS. GAYS

UPDATE BY CHUCK SUDETIC

ON JUNE 28TH, THE UNITED STATES SUPREME Court ruled 5-4 that the Boy Scouts of America has a constitutional right to bar gay men and boys from membership. The case pitted the BSA against James Dale, whose Scouting membership was revoked in 1990 after its leaders found out that he was co-president of an alliance for gays and lesbians at Rutgers University ["The Struggle for the Soul of the Boy Scouts," RS 844/845].

The victory for the BSA means that the organization will retain important financial supporters, such as the Mormon Church, which sponsors more than 412,000 Scouts. Religious conservatives might supplant the United Way and more moderate religious groups like the United Methodist Church as primary funders, and the culture of the BSA could become increasingly right-wing. The outcome will ultimately depend upon the public's attitude toward gays.

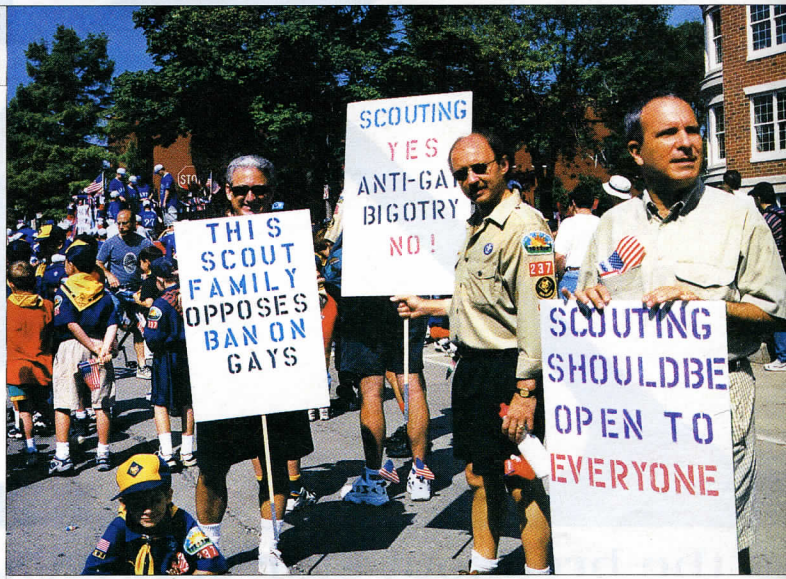
Dale, who is now thirty years old and the advertising director for *POZ*, a magazine for people infected with HIV and AIDS, says of his loss, "The real loser will be the Boy Scouts of America." He cites the protests of the policy within and out-

side the BSA: "These little fires are going to keep burning. The BSA has taken a step backward. They're making themselves less relevant to today's youth."

In his opinion, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist relied on the majority's definition of the Boy Scouts as a purely private institution. "The forced inclusion of an unwanted person in a group infringes the group's freedom of expressive association," he wrote, "if the presence of that person affects in a significant way the group's ability to advocate public or private viewpoints." In dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens wondered whether homosexuality can be called a viewpoint: "Under the majority's reasoning . . . [the gay] label, even though unseen, communicates a message that

permits his exclusion wherever he goes. His openness is the sole and sufficient justification for his ostracism. Though unintended, reliance on such a justification is tantamount to a constitutionally prescribed symbol of inferiority."

Gay-rights activists, together with the leaders of gay-friendly churches, are preparing fresh assaults that will focus on the public support the BSA receives, especially from schools. They argue that the public-private boundary is transgressed whenever schools sponsor troops or permit recruiting during school hours. Another primary target will be corporate foundations whose funding guidelines forbid contributions to organizations that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. SBC Communications, a giant telecommunications company, has just such a policy. Its chairman, Edward E. Whitacre Jr., is also the president of



THREE FAMILY GUYS PROTEST: MICHAEL WEINBERG, RICK TARNAS AND JUAN MONTENEGRO (FROM LEFT)

the Boy Scouts of America. An SBC spokesman says the company does not plan to decrease its support for the Boy Scouts. But United Way chapters in Illinois, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maine, New Mexico and California have already cut off BSA funding in recent years as a result of the anti-gay policy, and the drop-off is expected to accelerate.

The United Methodist Church - which sponsors 420,000 Scouts, more than any other group - sent mixed signals in its public response to the decision, noting that internal factions disagree. On July 10th, delegates to the Episcopal Church's annual convention passed a resolution calling on the BSA to grant membership to gays. The Rev. John Buerhens, president of the Unitarian Universalist Associations, issued a statement saying that it is time to re-examine the BSA's Congressional charter.

BSA supporters argue that cutting off contributions to the local councils would hit hardest in poor inner-city areas. Gay-rights activists counter that other youth organizations, like the Boys and Girls Clubs, which do not discriminate, should receive additional funding to take up the slack. They note that gay youth are particularly at risk for physical abuse, depression and suicide, and have an urgent need for such programs.

PUBLIC PROTESTS AGAINST THE Scouts' position began with an unscripted act of dissent by a trio of family guys in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park.

Michael Weinberg, a lawyer, and his friends - Rick Tarnas, who works in corporate banking, and Juan Montenegro, a radio-station manager - organized signs protesting the BSA's gay policy they marched with their sons' Cub Scouts packs in the local Fourth of July parade. "There are so many wonderful things about Scouting," Weinberg says. "I'm ashamed of the uniform right-wing."

BSA volunteers have been expected to be merely telling young Scouts that it is not okay to be gay. Among them are Scott and Dave Rice, the leaders of Scout for All, an organization that has been pressing since 1998 for the BSA to lift its membership ban. On July 5th, Scout for All held a protest rally outside the BSA's local office in Baltimore. The organization plans nationwide demonstrations on August 21st, including one at the headquarters in Irving, Texas.

Robert Cadwalader, a fifty-year-old Scout volunteer, and his sons, who are all involved in Scouting, stood up for the BSA during the more protest. "If someone wants to be a homosexual, be my guest," he told *Washington Post*. "But don't tell my boys that's normal. I don't want someone telling me what values to instill in my boys."

Activists hope that millions of Scouts affiliated with Scouting will stand up for gay youth, since a majority of the Supreme Court refused to. But the Scouts' distaste for homosexuals is a hard tradition to break.

CHUCK SUDETIC wrote "The Struggle for the Soul of the Boy Scouts" in RS 844/845.