

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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### **The Younger Generation**

“ Why do we only hear about kids who are in trouble? Why don't they write about these kids?” That was the question I was asked by a school volunteer last week. He was telling me about his involvement with schoolchildren throughout Western Massachusetts. He talks with students about his life as a World War II soldier, telling of experiences that range from landing in France on D-Day to liberating prisoners from concentration camps. He finds these children attentive to his stories and eager to learn the history that he lived.

During the past week news stories have once again headlined young people in trouble with the law, so I am taking this space to write about the good kids it has been my pleasure to meet in the same week.

First I celebrated an honors banquet with area 50 Girl Scouts and their families. Most of the girls were receiving Silver awards to recognize their activities in the community, and four Scouts received Gold awards, the highest Girl Scout rank. Each Gold award winner was required to complete a special project, and I was particularly impressed with the project of Ashley DeJong, a Ludlow Scout. Because Ashley relies on a wheelchair for her own mobility, she undertook to teach younger children to interact comfortably with the physically disabled. Ashley spoke with real maturity about the prejudices she has faced and with pride about the results she accomplished. The Scouts are lucky to have her as a member.

Next I was invited to talk with the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Conference at the Bay Path College campus. Delegates from 95 high schools attended the meeting, and the young leaders were eager to learn about the realities of government. One quality that emanated from the youthful audience was a unique enthusiasm for the mission, the speakers and the entire weekend. As the kids would say, “It is outstanding!”

Third, I spoke to Girls State, the annual American Legion Auxiliary conference for high school girls from all parts of Massachusetts. All of the 200 students share my interest in government, so we had a session of easy exchange, comparing my experiences in politics with their expectations for their own careers. I will be watching for those young women to take over public offices in the decade ahead.

The week was then topped off by one more of this season's DARE graduation ceremonies, a public recognition of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education curriculum completed by the Hampden fifth graders. I listened as the youngsters read their pledges to “Take a Stand; I watched their skits that dramatized how they would refuse offers of illegal substances; I congratulated them on their graduation.

Each of the programs required months of planning by the various sponsors, and each sponsor deserves our appreciation for a job well done. They have provided the platforms for the youngsters to use. It is these kids, the good kids that dominate our schools and our community. I am glad for the opportunity to write about them.