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Written Thoughts, WAPA 2: The Desires of American Girls

Luther H. Gulick

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WRITTEN THOUGHTS

WAPA 2

THE DESIRES OF
AMERICAN GIRLS



CAMP FIRE GIRLS

PRICE TEN CENTS

The Desires of American Girls.

Luther H. Gulick.

I am in constant communication with those who say frankly that they do not understand their daughters and say frankly that they do not think their daughters are to be taken seriously. These daughters seem to them to be a giggling, fun-loving lot of girls, who are not seriously doing anything—girls who love to dance and copy the latest fashions as closely as they may—girls who are not devoted to the domestic tasks in the way in which their mothers were when they were girls, and who are on the alert for most anything to do so long as it is outside of the home.

On the other hand, it is a good thing for us in middle life to remember that no generation ever trusted the young people of the next generation; that adults are always trying to get children to adopt their point of view, to do what they had to when they were children, rather than equipping and helping the children to do the work that they will have to do when they grow up. In order to help in this situation I have been putting together all the facts that I can get hold of which tell what girls of today really want and which indicate how we ought to treat these desires of American girls. By the desires of American girls I do not mean mere fads nor the desire of any particular girl. I mean those desires which are general among the girls of the entire United States.

1. One of the most obvious desires of American girls is for some money, preferably money she has earned herself

and which she can do just as she pleases with; that is, her own money. This desire seems to be based upon natural self-respect and independence of character. It is neither new nor is it particularly feminine. In the old days, when the entire family worked together, producing what the entire family used, they were all equally dependent and equally independent; but when man's work came to be done predominantly in the community—in a store, office, factory, on the railroad or in the telephone system—then he began to be paid in money and this belonged to him personally, which gave him a standing different from that held by the rest of the family. This difference is now beginning to disappear because women also are having to work in the community—in stores and factories and workshops—where their work has preceded them. So woman also is commencing to be paid in money, and again that self-respect which comes with mutual independence, as well as mutual dependence, is in sight.

I do not mean that girls have thought this all through, but that they are simply tending toward it as the root seeks water.

2. A second great source of restlessness on the part both of parents and girls is that the girl wants to find something to do in which she can use her own abilities. And yet, in the main, we parents want our girls to sit at home even after they have grown up, and even though the most of the work which involves skill is done outside of the home or by somebody employed for the purpose in the home. Girls are becoming educated more than they used to be, and are increasingly aware that they are able to do something. One of the great causes of unhappiness in the world is having

power without opportunity to use it. Mere drudgery in the home is not what our grandmothers did when they were young, nor is this any more adequate to develop interest in work than is drudgery in an office with no chance of promotion or of fellowship with others. Drudgery is both inevitable and necessary, but except as a means it is inadequate.

3. A third peculiarly interesting desire is the old, old desire for friendship and comradeship working itself out so as to meet the new conditions of school, college, factory or camp. These new community relations are promoting friendships among groups of girls to an extent that is quite new. It has long been said that men learned team work by playing together as boys—*e. g.*, baseball—and that the friendships which boys formed during their teens and twenties in the main formed the basis for those big co-operations between men which must be based on personal trust and knowledge. We see now that girls are similarly forming their groups; are establishing deep and firm friendships and are growing up to be women who understand and believe in each other and are able to do team work.

4. There is another desire of girls which is deeper than any which I have so far mentioned. It is not expressed loudly—it is not to be heard by those who listen merely for words. This is the desire for Home. Girls are seeing that there are many thousands of women who have gone out into the community to work and who do not have homes. They no longer assume what the world has always assumed—that there is a home for every woman and that this home is her inevitable destiny. Each girl's own future with reference to having or not having a home is before her as this

question has not hitherto been before girls. They know that some of our great women leaders say that the day of the home is past, and yet, without any deep thought upon the reasons of it, the great bulk of girls and women know that whatever else there may be for them in life, they want as its foundation a personal, particular home, a place and people to belong to, with whom the deeper and more intimate joys and sorrows of life are to be shared.

5. Fifth and last. The desire which every generation of young people flaunts in the faces of their elders who have settled down in life, is the desire to have fun, adventure, a good time; and the middle-aged people as a whole never seem to realize that this desire for beauty and adventure is one of the greatest things in the world making for progress. Young people peculiarly hate monotony. This is not only natural but it is wholesome, for life itself is made of change, of progress—thinking is change. Adventure in its very essence consists of the soul's reaching out into and exploring the nature of the world in which it lives; and this "having a good time" is the satisfaction of the hungers of the soul. It is true that that which will satisfy the hungers of the souls of girls is not that which would satisfy adults, but it is true that to satisfy those needs is the most important thing for girlhood.

These, then, are the deep and general desires of American girls—those desires which explain their apparent frivolity, their giggling and simpering, their love of adventure and "having a good time."

What do these things mean with reference to achievements of the next generation? We must remember that these girls are the women of tomorrow and that they are

responding to the forces and spirit of today as we of middle age cannot, for we organized our ideas and ideals half a generation ago when conditions about the home and society were in many respects different from what they are now. Girls who are willing to stand on their own feet financially, will become women both able and willing to marry and make homes early if that is the best thing to do. They will help to remove financial considerations from being a factor in the intimate relations of life.

The greatest thing that is happening to Society today is the coming into it of women, and in the growth of friendship between girls we see the promise of communities of men and women held together by the bands of friendship and working for the common good.

The girls of today love beauty, adventure and romance, and this is going to make them work together with man toward the possibilities of human wholesomeness and happiness. The adventure of the future is to be more a social one and less a conflict with new lands, savage animals, or in war.

How can we help?

1. Promote the establishment of small permanently organized groups of girl friends who shall have incentive and opportunity to learn team work by doing the things that seem to them most important.
2. See that each girl has a chance to discover, train and use her best ability.
3. Give every girl a chance to earn, save, spend and keep account of, money.
4. Reveal the essential nature of romance, namely: that

it is something which is to be found in the daily human relationships of life rather than in its fenced off places.

5. Support the home idea and desire by giving status to domestic attainments, and put the power of team work and specialization back of home, just as it is back of business, schools, etc. At present girls can secure status by work in school, church, store or factory but not by home accomplishments. Let us give status to the home.

I am aware that what I am proposing involves an almost incredible amount of wisdom and faith on the part of our generation. No generation has ever trusted the following generation. But the experience of the last few years leads me to believe that our generation can and will trust and help the new generation, even though neither we nor they see how their problems are to be solved. For example: how can women be community workers and mothers at the same time? This is their problem, not ours. It is for us to encourage the love of home. It is also for us to show the importance of sincerity in work, of beauty in daily life, of training native ability, and, above all, to give social recognition to domestic attainments. With this kind of a start, the splendid new generation will make its journey as well as or better than we are making ours. Let us try to inspire them to reach out beyond us to new attainments, rather than tie them to a life based on conditions that are past.

