

Little Girls As Women

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DO ADOLESCENTS grow up faster in wartime? During the depression years of the thirties we were concerned about the lack of opportunity for youths to achieve economic independence and establish homes when they were biologically, mentally, and socially ready for these adult adjustments. Today, in the forties, the situation is reversed. Many youths in their teens are facing the opportunity for a variety of adult experiences ranging from voluntary war services and work through all degrees of personal sacrifice to that of life itself in serving their country.

There is much evidence that circumstances today are shortening the youth span in many ways. This is no time for regretting the possible losses to civilization that may result from shortening this period. Destruction and loss are inevitable concomitants of war. But the war clouds may have even a golden lining. Our philosophy of education as

life, not merely as preparation for some dim, uncertain future, is being tested as never before in this crucible of war.

If education means helping young people to do better what they will do anyway, then one of our tasks as educators in wartime as always is that of providing the experiences that will help them to choose and plan their activities wisely, engage in them effectively, and wrest all possible meaning from them.

One of our greatest assets in the present situation is the well-justified feeling of youths that they are essential in adult life today. No longer must we strive to create the semblance of junior citizens. What we must bring into the picture is a perspective on the past and the future which can give meaning to the ever-changing present without providing ready-made prescriptions for meeting the current demands.

To play their parts as citizens in a people's war, adolescents must see clearly the reasons why we are fighting; they must understand the strains upon our social and economic life and their best potentialities for helping to bear those strains. They must develop vision as to the aftermaths of war and so plan their training and service that they will be prepared to cope with the inevitable difficulties and to take advantage of the new opportunities of that period. Every subject and extracurricular activity in the school program can and should contribute to these ends. The guidance

Today many young girls are faced with making decisions which in peacetime they would not be asked to consider until many years later. A full knowledge of the problems of girls in wartime and the factors affecting their lives is essential if educators are to help these young Americans through a difficult period. In this article, Margaret E. Bennett, Director of Guidance, and Gertrude Laws, Director of Education for Women, both of the Pasadena (Calif.) City Schools, collaborate in a discussion of "Little Girls as Women."

service must contribute directly and significantly through helping adolescents to choose their activities and make their life plans in the light of realistic understanding.

Student activities—directed into channels that serve the war effort and give valuable experience in democratic planning and action¹—help to develop adult citizens. To illustrate, the Student War Council in one institution² adopted as one of its many projects the furnishing of recreation rooms at an air base which, because of its desert environment and lack of social facilities, was described as "the most God-forsaken camp in the United States." Student and faculty co-operation in difficult and discouraging problems made the project a success.

One of the young women who participated in this activity said, "We were so sophisticated before this happened that we didn't want anyone to know that we cared about anything; now we know what it means to be really interested in the welfare of others." Here is striking evidence of growth into truly mature womanhood through unselfish service. Proof of a more material nature is found in the year's record of "ten tons of scrap, approximately \$7,000 worth of furnishings, candy, cookies, etc., for the air base, thousands upon thousands of pounds of spinach picked and frozen, more than a quarter of a million dollars in stamps and bonds."

Young girls all over our land are experiencing the thrills of new adventure

and the pain of hard work as they take the places left vacant by our fighting forces. After a strenuous day of tomato-picking, one youngster exclaimed, "Now I know what my mother meant when she tried to explain what life would do to me!"

How May Girls Achieve Perspective

As the need for part-time work of school girls increases, our responsibility deepens to help them choose work wisely, prepare them for these new activities, no matter how simple they may seem, and guide their evaluation of the outcomes. This may mean profound changes in our school programs and is likely to entail equally profound changes in our own concepts of the nature of a truly functional education. Ours is the responsibility also to protect the health and welfare of minors and to help them envisage and prepare for their future work.

Many girls who may shortly enter full-time work will, like their older sisters, engage in types of work formerly open only to men. Their successes will open many new doors of vocational activities to women in the future. Will this trend lead to increased competition between men and women or to a deeper mutual understanding? Here, again, through guidance and education we can help girls to serve unselfishly now and to be prepared to adjust in the postwar period in ways that may bring them the fullest self-realization through a nice balancing of the values of satisfying work and other ideals of womanhood.

A small number of women who are working in a war industry met to discuss with two or three professional

¹Catherine J. Robbins: "Student Activities Make Democracy Live," *Junior College Journal*, April, 1943.

²Under the leadership of Ida E. Hawes, Dean of Guidance, Pasadena Junior College, grades eleven to fourteen.

women the problems involved in the care of their children. There could be no doubt as to the sincere concern they felt for their children. Their questions and comments were intelligent and searching. All of them were dressed in the customary slacks and shirts that are worn in industry. Several of them had their feet on the backs of the chairs in front of them as they talked. The two or three members of the group who kept their feet on the floor and had their chins up seemed to have more insight and more vision than the ones who had adopted the mannerisms of men.

Can Women Keep Feet on the Ground and Heads in the Air?

It seems apparent that one of the things that very young women might consider with profit is the significance of keeping their feet on the ground and their heads in the air. The literature of our country contains many references to the meaning of having one's feet on the ground. Always it signifies a practical, sensible, dependable person.

The kinds of experiences the young men at war are having—young men who would be considered little boys in times of peace—will cause them to need practical, sensible, and dependable women when they return. Some of those men will be broken in body and mind. They will want to depend upon stable women who will love them and understand them. Others will mature in full strength of body and mind determined to carry out high resolutions that were made when they were far from the relative peace and security that young women are having. They, too, will want to find women sufficiently practical, sensible, and dependable to

join them in translating their high purposes into action. Literally and figuratively young women must keep their feet on the ground.

But that is not enough. Their heads must be high in the air to see over and beyond some of the persistent petty details of life. Each must be able to "see" beyond the immediate present satisfactions and recognize the possible achievements of a free people in a free world, a people free from ignorance, suspicion, distrust, fear, poverty, illness, and disease. Every woman should stand tall enough to see that such a free people must continuously struggle to preserve and develop freedom and that the actual present sympathy of each one shall include generations yet unborn.

How May Girls Be Brought to See Their Responsibilities?

Probably every public school in our country has done much work with girls in Red Cross services; preparation of useful entertainment for men in the armed forces; assisting in the care of people who are helpless because of age or illness; keeping necessary civilian business going; production and conservation of food; and other activities. Yet some colleges and universities as well as high schools report that many of the women students have little or no real interest in the work they have been asked to do but have an excited determination to have all of the fun they can and to find adventure, with men in uniform absorbing the major portion of their time and energies. While no one would wish to diminish the fun or adventure for little girls, there seems reason to increase the appeal of other activities as well.

Perhaps the efforts of one typical community might be suggestive. This community has the usual number and variety of churches, social agencies, schools, parks and playgrounds, service clubs, and women's clubs. One large military camp is within five miles of the center of the city. Thousands of its citizens (many of them parents) go to the adjacent war industries for work. The schools have been widely used for training of war-workers. In general, the environment is stimulating to girls and women, particularly girls who are too big to play with dolls but not old enough to get jobs.

Just before schools closed in June, a concerted effort was made in all of the junior high schools through girls' physical education classes and life science classes to interpret the importance of the right kind of behavior on the part of girls and women in time of war. A letter was sent by the principal of each school to the parents of every girl, calling attention to the necessity for guidance of girls by parents as well as the schools. Attention of parents was called to the importance of having responsible adult care for their young sons and daughters who consider themselves abundantly able to look out for themselves; to curfew laws; to child-labor laws; to opportunities offered by the Y.W.C.A., the churches, the Recreation Department, the Camp Fire Girls, the Girl Scouts; and, finally, to the importance of reasonable agreement among adults as to conditions best suited to the needs of young girls in wartime.

Early in July, soon after the close of the school year, a representative group of girls from the junior high schools and the Junior College cooperated with

a small committee called together by the chairman of women's activities of the Defense Council in planning a mass meeting on "Women in Wartime" to be held in the Civic Auditorium. Many organizations cooperated in the preparations for an impressive and inspiring program of stirring music and stimulating talks. One speaker, chairman of the State Defense Council, described what he thought fighting men would expect of women when they came home, stressing the importance of the kind of thinking and conduct that would make men feel that all they had endured had been worthwhile.

The main presentation of the evening was a talk by Rosalind Russell. An outstanding student introduced Miss Russell as representative of the best qualities in American womanhood, better known as a screen star, but honored by girls also as a successful wife and devoted mother. Miss Russell spoke convincingly of the needs, the obligations, and the opportunities of women in wartime.

There can be little doubt that imaginations were lighted by that evening's program, and that it served as an impetus to sustained effort by the girls and the community committee of women. In considering their opportunities for service and leadership, American women would do well to remember the heroic efforts of those persons who pioneered for woman's freedom, a goal for which the women of many countries are still struggling. It is up to us to arouse ourselves to devoted effort in behalf of the generations that will come after us so that the heritage we have received shall be passed on to them, not only intact, but growing.

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