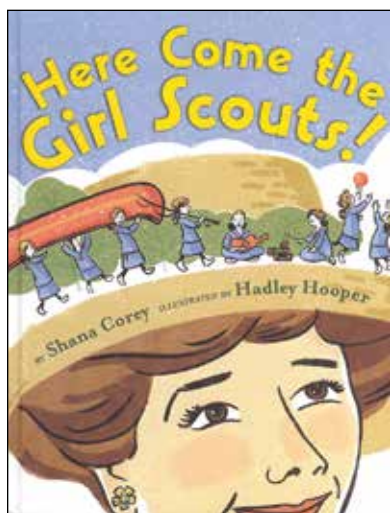


Scouting Out a Progressive Role Model: *Here Come the Girl Scouts!*

Mary Cushman



Juliette Low. The name still rang a bell, even though forty years had passed since I last wore my Scout uniform with its sash of badges. But it wasn't until I read Shana Corey's picture book, *Here Come the Girl Scouts!*¹ that I discovered what an interesting, unusual woman "Daisy" Low was and became inspired to learn more about this founder of the Girl Scouts. This 2013

NCSS Notable Trade Book is probably best for kindergarten through second graders, but Juliette Gordon Low is a woman who merits attention from older children as well.² She holds a unique position in women's history as someone who influenced girls worldwide, not simply by being a role model for them, but by actually expanding their horizons while they were still girls.

The subtitle of Corey's book on Girl Scouts, *The Amazing All-True Story of Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low and Her Great Adventure*, describes Low's life as one of excitement, boldness, and fun. These qualities appeal to young children and reflect the parts of Low's life that influenced her quest to start the Girl Scouts. Low's childhood nickname, Daisy, stuck with her throughout her life. In 1984, when the Girl Scouts of America started a new scouting level for kindergarten and first graders, it seems a natural choice to have called it Daisies.

The illustrations, by Hadley Cooper, support Corey's description of Daisy Low as a "girl with gumption." The first illustration shows Daisy outside holding a fishing rod, the second has her hanging upside-down from a tree, and the third finds her lying on the grass with her legs in the air, balancing a cat on her feet. In these, and in every other picture of Daisy in the book, she is smiling.

A more complete reckoning of Low's life would include a description of some of the suffering she endured. Born in 1860, Low lived comfortably in Savannah, Georgia; however, despite

her family's wealth, she became seriously ill from malnutrition when food supplies were scarce at the end of the Civil War.³ Shana Corey mentions Low's ear problems (she had periods of acute pain, and was nearly deaf much of her adult life⁴), but she downplays them by merely including a humorous excerpt from a postcard that Daisy sent to her mother: "Progress, Daisy's Hearing. February 1st, heard a fog horn. March 1st, hearing improved, heard a camel when it rose. April 1st, hearing decidedly improved. Heard ... grass growing" (8–9). It would be worth recalling for children that Daisy lived at a time when pain medications were few, and antibiotics (which can cure most inner ear infections) had not been discovered.

A Love of Travel

Corey tells of Low's exciting travels over the course of her life: "She rode elephants in India, visited the Great Pyramid in Egypt, went fishing during fancy dinner parties, and even flew in a monoplane" (10–11). In 1886, Low married a wealthy Englishman, and, while they took one "exotic" trip to Egypt together, most of her travel seems to have been an escape from her unhappy, childless marriage. Her husband died in 1905, leaving his estate to his mistress, but a year and a half later Low won a settlement that included the couple's home in Savannah.⁵

Though not having children of her own disappointed Low greatly, it also gave her independence and freedom. She was not content with travel and personal adventures, however. Corey recounts,

After many years, though, Daisy grew restless. Her family had settled towns and served in wars, written books and built railroads. Daisy wanted more than adventure. She wanted to be useful, to make a difference in the world. But what could SHE do? (12)⁶

The Idea for the Girl Scouts

Corey begins her answer to this question by speaking generally of Daisy's discovery of the Boy Scouts in England. At a luncheon in the spring of 1911, Daisy sat next to a famous and highly decorated officer, General Sir Robert Baden-Powell. This meeting changed Daisy's life. She was fascinated to hear about Baden-Powell's Boy Scout organization, founded three years earlier, in which boys learned outdoor skills, strengthened

their characters, and became more responsible citizens, all while also having some fun. Baden-Powell's sister led the Girl Guides, which was created the following year due to popular demand.⁷ Daisy's friendship with both brother and sister developed rapidly, as did her enthusiasm for Scouting. Here might be a way for her to serve that would suit her.

While on vacation in Scotland in the summer of 1911, she started a group of Girl Guides. As leader of this collection of poor rural girls, Low taught them domestic skills, which Daisy first taught herself, having grown up with servants usually doing such work. Girls and young women could use these skills to make money, thereby avoiding work in poorly run factories in cities. These skills included how to raise healthy chickens and how to card and spin wool. Upon returning to London that fall, Daisy started two new "patrols," one of which came from a poor and dangerous part of the city.⁸ In early January, Low and Baden-Powell sailed to America, where he looked forward to visiting existing Boy Scouts, and she hoped to start the country's first group of Girl Guides. Low reached out to her cousin, Nina Pape, an educator who advocated physical fitness training and nature walks for girls.⁹ With her characteristic enthusiasm, Low shared her plans with her cousin: "Come right over! I've got something for the girls of Savannah and all America and all the world and we're going to start it tonight!"¹⁰

"Girls Could Do Anything"

By March 12, 1912, only ten months after her initial meeting with Baden-Powell, Daisy Low held her first gathering of girls. Corey describes Daisy's "biggest adventure yet":

She invited eighteen girls to the first Girl Scout meeting. She told them about all the adventures they would have. They'd hike and camp and swim! They'd do good deeds. They'd learn to tie knots and survive in the wilderness and even save lives! The girls thought Daisy's idea was brilliant!"(16)

Corey goes on to tell of the activities of those first Girl Scouts and relates Low's successes as she traveled around the country and the world, spreading her mission of Girl Scouts and her belief that "girls could do anything" (35). Her organization was a model of inclusiveness from the start: "Daisy wanted the Girl

Scouts to be open to lots of different girls, so she organized troops in private schools and in orphanages, in churches and in synagogues, in factories and in shops" (20). Though Low was not connected to the leaders of the Progressive Era, she embraced progressive ideas; she fervently believed that girls from all backgrounds should learn practical and useful skills in order to be self-reliant.

Daisy's sense of civic duty most likely arose from other aspects of her upbringing that are, unfortunately, not mentioned in this book. When she was sixteen, both of her parents helped victims of yellow fever. While still a teen, Daisy herself started a club called Helpful Hands, with the goal of aiding others, although an unsuccessful attempt to sew clothing for some needy children soon earned the club the nickname, "Helpless Hands."¹¹

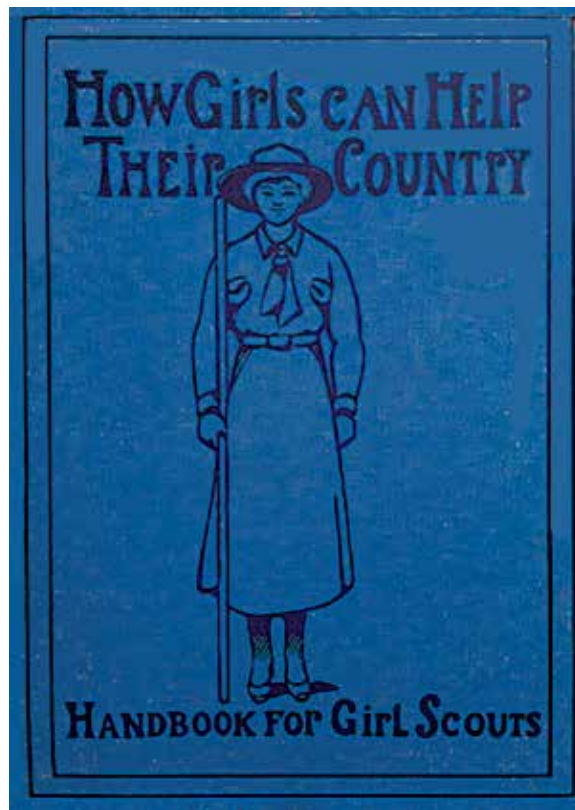
Learning AND Fun

Low agreed with Baden-Powell that, along with the learning and helping, Scouting needed to be fun and exciting. *Here Come the Girl Scouts!* describes a wonderful camping trip that Low organized: "The Girl Scouts ... took an oyster boat to an island near Savannah. They sang songs around the campfire. They feasted on fish and cornbread and turtle eggs. At night, they tiptoed out of their tents and slept under the stars" (27). Earlier in the

book Corey shows half a dozen skills described in the first edition of the Girl Scout handbook, including how to secure a burglar with eight inches of cord, how to cure a ham, and how to stop a runaway horse (22–23). Learning these particular skills was certainly not part of my Girl Scout experience, but I remember poring over my handbooks and having a great time camping with my friends and earning badges, including Outdoor Cook, Cyclist, and Toymaker. Corey names Cyclist as one of the original Girl Scout badges, and also includes illustrations of the Pioneer, Interpreter, and Flyer badges. Undoubtedly, Girl Scouts would not have remained popular for over a century without Daisy Low's legacy of making fun an integral part of the Scouting experience.

Using the Book in the Classroom

The "birthday" of Girl Scouts falls conveniently near the middle of Women's History Month, on March 12, so Corey's book is a good fit in a study of significant women. Of course, the book need not be used only during that month. Daisy



The first Girl Scout Handbook in the United States, 1913

Low's birthday is on Halloween, and children may remember her more vividly if they hear about her on one of their favorite holidays. Girl Scout troops usually begin meeting in the fall, which also makes that season an opportune time to introduce Low.

On each double-page spread of the biography, there is a quotation incorporated into an illustration. Nearly all of the quotations are taken from the first Girl Scout handbook, *How Girls Can Help Their Country*, published by Low in 1913. The handbook consisted of material adapted by Low from the British Girl Guide handbook, as well as material written by Walter J. Hoxie, a naturalist.¹² I found the layout of the quotations on the pages to be distracting, but otherwise appealing. Some of the sayings are short, with quaint advice: "Fresh air is your great friend," or "Every time you show your courage it grows." Others struck me as wonderfully strong messages for girls: "The work of to-day is the history of to-morrow, and we are its makers." Some of these quotations may be a little lofty for young children, but most are easy to understand and provide an excellent opportunity to engage in analysis of primary sources.

Ideally, teachers would read the story aloud (without the quotations) and then flip slowly through the pages again while reading only the quotations, which students can help locate on various pages. (The quotes are set apart from the narrative, and whimsically incorporated into the illustrations.) Afterward, the class can pick two or three of their favorite sayings from the book and start a "Quotation Wall" in the classroom. In the future, whenever students come across a quotation from a book that they think is good advice or inspiring, the teacher can add it to the wall. Such a list of positive sayings would be a welcome companion to the usual "Classroom Rules" list.

An activity for slightly older children could be to compare the original list of Girl Scout laws from 1913 with the laws used by Girl Scouts today. *Here Come the Girl Scouts!* has a simplified list as part of an illustration, but one can find the original ten laws elsewhere.¹³ In the end notes, Corey gives the text of the current Girl Scout Law, which is no longer a list of numbered sentences all starting with "A Girl Scout is," but one lengthy sentence combining the desired traits. I still have my Junior Girl Scout handbook, and that provides another list for comparison.¹⁴ Both lists contain "A Girl Scout obeys orders," as well as laws about being a friend to animals and being loyal, cheerful, and thrifty. The current law makes no mention of loyalty, cheerfulness, thriftiness, or obedience; instead, it refers to honesty, courage, strength, and respect. Rule #6 from the original list, "A Girl Scout Keeps herself Pure" later became Rule #10, "A Girl Scout is clean in thought, word, and deed," and has since disappeared. A lasting theme is one of helping others, and a phrase that has survived is to "be a sister to every Girl Scout." Class discussion could focus on why the changes were made, especially on those laws that were dropped. In addition, there is value in comparing past and present Girl Scout laws to past and present Boy Scout

laws. Were they more similar or different at their inception? Are they more similar or different in 2014?

Conclusion

Juliette Low might not typically come up in a social studies lesson for young children, but she is worthy of study for her special contributions to the lives of women and girls. Shana Corey has collaborated with several illustrators to make the stories of notable women¹⁵ accessible in books that are bright, humorous, and enlightening. Both girls and boys will want to be as confident and bold as the women Corey describes. The detailed author's notes are quite comprehensive, which is not surprising, given that Corey studied women's history at Smith College. Last, if you have any Girl Scouts in your class, lend them your copy of *Here Come the Girl Scouts!* to bring to their next Scout meeting. Their troop leaders will be glad that you did. 🌍

Notes

1. Shana Corey, *Here Come the Girl Scouts!* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2012).
2. A biography of Low for older readers is *First Girl Scout: The Life of Juliette Gordon Low* by Ginger Wadsworth (New York: Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin, 2012).
3. Stacy Cordery, *Juliette Gordon Low: The Remarkable Founder of the Girl Scouts* (New York: Viking, 2012), 21–22.
4. Cordery, 91–93, 103–104.
5. Wadsworth, 89.
6. Daisy's maternal grandparents helped settle Chicago, her father fought in the Civil War, her maternal grandmother published books about her family's wilderness adventures, and her paternal grandfather helped build the Central Railroad and Canal Company. (Wadsworth, 2–3)
7. Wadsworth, 99, 103–105.
8. Wadsworth, 108.
9. Cordery, 202.
10. Corey, 15; Cordery, 202; Wadsworth, 113.
11. Wadsworth, 43–45.
12. Cordery, 203–204.
13. Wadsworth, 128.
14. Girl Scouts of the United States of America, *Junior Girl Scout Handbook* (1963), 11–20.
15. Other books about women by Shana Corey include: *You Forgot Your Skirt, Amelia Bloomer!* (illustrated by Chesley McLaren); *Mermaid Queen: The Spectacular True Story of Annette Kellerman, Who Swam Her Way to Fame, Fortune, and Swimsuit History!* (illustrated by Edwin Fotheringham); and *Players in Pigtales* (illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon).

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