

# A G.I.R.L. Journey



## The Woman Who Founded the Girl Scouts

She was an artist and a philanthropist. She was a skilled blacksmith who forged the elaborate iron gates that graced the entrance to her Georgia estate; she used her deafness to her advantage to pretend she didn't hear refusals from anyone who said no to helping her form her beloved Girl Scouts. She was a figure of enormous fortitude who weathered personal setbacks and found her calling in life at age 50.

While she never had children of her own, Juliette Gordon Low devoted her life to them.

She was a woman of fierce determination and she was light years ahead of her time in terms of providing equal access for all. In the early 1900s she was determined to provide girls the same opportunities boys had to develop self-reliance and resourcefulness. Juliette Gordon Low was a visionary. She believed that all girls should be given the opportunity to develop physically, mentally and spiritually. She encouraged girls to believe that they could be anyone they could imagine or do anything they could dream.

**“Right is right even if no one else does it.”**

Juliette admired Sir Robert Baden-Powell for his seeming success at instilling values of self-discipline and personal honor to boys. But it troubled her that he could not find a place for girls in his plan. So the woman who grew up in upper-class society took it upon herself, with her own wealth and on her own property, to create the Girl Scouts of the USA with the first troop of 18 girls in Savannah, Georgia on March 12, 1912.

She had the first 18 girls playing basketball in their bloomers in a cordoned off tennis court, instilling the virtues of physical fitness. She took them on long camping trips and taught them appreciation of nature and how to survive in the wild. Girls went on to earn badges like Electrician, (think battery connections and fusions and how to rescue and resuscitate someone who has been electrocuted); Signaler (send and receive a message using Semaphore and Morse code and be able to code more than 50 letters per minute) and Matron Housekeeper (use a vacuum cleaner or stain and polish hardwood floors).

**“We shall make [Girl] [S]couting so much a part of our life,” proclaimed Juliette Low, “that people will recognize the spirit and say, ‘Why, of course. She is a Girl Scout.’”**

Juliette designed a space for an intricate, multi layered experience for personal skill building, for giving back, for embracing differences in each other and for setting up girls for a lifetime of success.

World War I elevated the Girl Scouts in stature and lent a new respect for the organization. Juliette had girls helping in the war effort by assisting the Red Cross as messengers and helping overworked nurses; planting vegetables in their backyards in masse; and selling millions of Liberty Bonds.

Juliette remained an activist for the Girl Scouts until her death in 1927 at the age of 66. There were 167,000 Girl Scouts in the United States. Her vision of Girl Scouts being a place for every girl regardless of class, race, background or ability had been realized and expounded upon. She accomplished a major service not to just girls but to people of all classes and races and she made her indelible mark on the world.

**“This badge is not a reward for something you have done once or for an examination you have passed. Badges are not medals to wear on your sleeve to show what a smart girl you are. A badge is a symbol that you have done the thing it stands for often enough, thoroughly enough, and well enough to BE PREPARED to give service in it. You wear the badge to let people know that you are prepared and willing to be called on because you are a Girl Scout. And Girl Scouting is not just knowing...but doing...not just doing, but being.”** –Juliette Gordon Low

Pattie Hallberg CEO, Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts

