



FIND YOUR LIGHT AND SHINE

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Recently, I drove past the “Temple” in Alexandria, Virginia, a towering monument perched high above the city, known officially as the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, and it triggered a memory from my childhood about a song I learned in Sunday school.

When I was four-years old, I lived with my parents and younger sister in Temple Trailer Village, a trailer park within sight of the Temple for servicemen and their families, which had been built in the 1940s for returning World War II veterans. My family lived there because my father was stationed at Bethesda Naval Hospital from 1962-1965. On the particular morning that I remember so clearly, I was in Sunday school in a cold and drafty stone building that also housed a laundromat. But these details were unimportant at the time, because I had just learned a new song, “This Little Light of Mine,” and with the other members of the children’s choir was practicing to perform it for the congregation. Do you know this song? (If so, mention it in the chat.) If not, the chorus repeats, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine,” three times, and then finishes with, “Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.”

How do I remember these details? Well, when I left the choir and joined my family, my mother whispered to me, “You don’t need to sing so loud,” a comment I’ve never forgotten. I must admit it took a bit of the “shine” out of the occasion and tempered my enthusiasm, but only momentarily.

Best known as a gospel song, it is believed that “This Little Light of Mine,” was first written as a children’s song in the 1920s, during the Progressive Era. Though I didn’t find facts to confirm, it doesn’t require much imagination to question if the song might have been inspired by the images of the rising sun that were popular around that time, or stemmed from the effort lead by women, including GFWC members, to ensure child education and welfare, and reduce child labor.

In the 1950s and 60s, “This Little Light of Mine” became an anthem of the civil rights movement and was sung by black citizens as they tried to register to vote or were being detained for one reason or another. If you’ve heard the song, you know it has simple, repetitive lyrics that are perfect for improvising and bringing people together for a common cause.

What I loved about the song as a child, however, was that it made me believe there was something **special inside of me**—something that could propel me forward and that I could use on good days or bad days to lift myself up. And maybe to lift others up too.

Certainly, there have been many times lately when I have had to lift myself up. The challenges we face now, during the COVID-19 pandemic and this time of political discord and civil unrest, are difficult to transcend. Many people are sinking to the bottom through agitation and defiance, or depression and resignation, and are pointing fingers at others as they go down.

I don't pretend to have answers for many of the problems we face, but I know this: **WE CAN ALL CONTRIBUTE TO SOLUTIONS IF WE FIND OUR LIGHT AND SHINE.**

Recently, we celebrated the Centennial of the 19th Amendment and, for the first time, I realized it wasn't that long ago when women achieved political equality and began to open the door to social, civic, and economic parity. Or that the effort was so long-fought, stretching back more than 50 years and first gaining a toehold when Susan B. Anthony, who believed that the disfranchisement of half the people was a violation of the spirit and letter of our democracy, asked, "Is it a crime for a citizen of the United States to vote?"

Where would women be today without the illuminating words and actions of those like Anthony, or others, that later marched or stood like sentinels with signs that asked, "How long must women wait for liberty?"

And yet, the work of equality is not finished. Not by a long shot. Women comprise 70% of the world's poor and 65% of the world's illiterate. And today, the signs at the White House call for racial equality and say, "Black Lives Matter," and "Silence is Violence."

Elie Wiesel (**EL-E V-ZEL**), a **Romanian** Jew who was a slave laborer at Auschwitz and saw his father die from maltreatment shortly before the 1945 liberation by the US Army, spoke at the White House about the perils of indifference. "Indifference is not a beginning," he noted, "It is always an end." His message was simple but profound: Apathy and the failure to act are the allies of evil.

In our volunteer efforts, it is vital to put politics aside and focus simply on issues and solutions. This aim is facilitated by our Resolutions process, which brings public concerns—coupled with desirable actions and outcomes—for consideration to the GFWC membership at our Annual Convention, so we can debate and agree upon the work we undertake as an organization.

Do we care about vaccinations for children in countries we will never visit? Will we provide for the safety of battered women we may never know? Do we work to ensure clean air beyond our lifetimes? Will we extend ourselves to support veterans who serve far from home? Can we

honor cultural, physical, and mental differences by teaching and demonstrating respect and inclusivity, rather than turning a blind eye?

I believe GFWC clubwomen answer these questions and many more like them with “Yes we do! Yes we will! And, yes we can!” And I believe, and I hope you do too, that the United States of America is a nation where anything and everything is possible.

For GFWC, failure to engage and failure to act has never been an option. Founded on the belief that we, as women, could pull ourselves up, and then reaching out beyond ourselves to do the same for others—shows that our mission has always been about improving lives. And despite current troubles, we must continue our work.

Yes, times are hard. We all miss the companionship of family and friends and the personal freedom to go and do as we please. Some of us have lost more. Much more. Many have lost loved ones to the virus, and many have lost their jobs, their health insurance, and all sense of security.

Without question, however, hard times are also the best times to recalibrate, to grow, to make a difference. The great scientist Albert Eisenstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that got us here.” And this is how we, GFWC Clubwomen shine. For more

than 130 years we have driven change in our local communities, in our nation, and around the world. And change is what will save us now.

Whatever challenges have come your way, use this time to make yourself better. Dig deep to reach your potential—commit to learning new ways to communicate and connect, and embrace self-development and self-enrichment. Better doesn't happen on its own, it comes by stepping up and taking responsibility. Don't bemoan what you can't do, figure out what you can do. Visit museums online, realize an old dream—like learning another language or how to play the piano, adopt a healthier lifestyle, search YouTube for tutorials on gardening, painting, or other creative pursuits. Look for opportunities to stimulate your mind and body. To be better, your choices must be better. To be better, you must do better.

Use this time to make your community better. There is need everywhere. Reach out to the shelters and emergency services you typically work with and find new ways for your club to contribute. Write encouraging notes to those isolated in nursing homes, or better yet, give **them** the pleasure and empowerment of doing something for others by providing cards so they can write to active servicemen. Make sure the local food pantry is stocked and that those in need have warm coats for the winter. Honor first responders, health workers, teachers, and the many others that are carrying our heaviest burdens right now.

Use this time to make your world better. Work with one of our Affiliate Organizations—Shot@Life, St. Jude’s Research Hospital, Prevent Child Abuse America, Canine Companions for Independence, Heifer International, HOBY, March of Dimes, Operation Smile, and UNICEF, or our new endorsed fundraiser, the Starfish Project, to impact communities near and far. Create a pollinator-friendly garden, walk or use public transportation rather than driving, declutter your house and recycle or donate, learn about other countries and cultures, mentor or coach someone, give blood, remember the golden rule, and express gratitude.

And when you are done, or have done all that you can, sit back, take a deep breath, and reflect on what you and your club have accomplished.

But only for a minute. Because there are still a lot of other people who need you to find your light and shine. And when you do, never forget that there is something **special inside of you**—something that will propel you forward, lift you up, and will help you lift others too.