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Books As A Life Saver

By Ellen M. DuBois

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I cannot take credit for writing this, for I am only sharing with you something I found today. It is a very old page, worn and yellowed, from "The New Republic" dated December 8, 1917. What struck me about this article are two things: 1. The letter from the gentleman, and 2. The extreme importance of books to soldiers overseas. The article states that the two most important things soldiers desired were "tobacco and BOOKS". It seems that then, just as now, reading helped folks get through the most adverse, frightening and challenging situations by giving the mind something other than their fear or pain to focus on. I cannot even imagine the terror experienced in battle and how these soldiers kept their sanity about them. I do know that reading played a significant role in the matter.

I will now share with you this newspaper story. It is a chunk of history; a piece of time captured on brittle paper that I was fortunate enough to find within the pages of, yes, you guessed it, a very old book.

December 8, 1917 THE NEW REPUBLIC V

"Who Thought of It- a Soldier?"

A LETTER FROM A CIVIL WAR VETERAN

"...I should like to meet some of the gentlemen in our company, to thank them personally for what they have done for my grandson who is in France. I cannot help thinking that it must have been a soldier, a man who has been through the fighting mill as I have, who initiated the idea of providing such good books, in so convenient

a Veteran. I fought from '62 to '65. I remember well the craving I used to have for something good to read, something to offset the loneliness and homesickness which was harder to bear than all our physical hardships. It was so keen that we used to pounce on scraps of newspaper we found. I tell you there is nothing that will so well keep up the morale of fighting men as good reading matter. They need it to keep their minds off themselves. I know what our boys will go through; the mental agonies are worse than anything else. Yet when my grandson at the opening of the war enlisted in the Canadian

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Army, I was glorified— that is the word!— to have him go. I sent with him the blessing of God. I knew it was not love of adventure that urged him on, but something of the same spirit with which we boys were filled long ago. It is a spirit as old as Christianity, the spirit of the Crusades. He longed to add his boy's strength to the might of the world to teach an everlasting lesson to those damned Potsdam animals, who were willing to drench the world in blood without mercy, to further such a thing as sordid commercial ambitions. He has fought at Ypres and Vimy. He has been wounded twice. I have seen him again, and he is not the same boy. He has seen, this child, more than I ever saw. War is hell to him, as it was to us; he hates it with all his soul, as I do. But he hates the Kaiser and his crew more, and he will be there to the end. This, gentlemen, is not what I wished to write to you. As you may appreciate, I feel this business keenly, and my feelings carries me away oftentimes. When I saw my grandson he asked me to write to you. Some time after he went away I sent him as many of your little books as I could buy. Before he received them, he and the men with him many a time crouched for

hours under heavy shelling— sometimes for days and nights, without relief— waiting, waiting for attacks. They had nothing to think of except what was going to happen to them. I believe only a soldier can appreciate the mental condition of men under such circumstances! The books I sent were a godsend to him and his comrades. They constituted a sort of company library, each man carrying several of the volumes in his pockets, and he told me there was hardly a man in the company who had not read every one of the books....I think it will be interesting, and heartening, for you to know how greatly you are helping to keep up the morale of the men who are enduring at the front mental suffering that is beyond, truly beyond, the imagination of us who stay at home."

This is the paper's response to the letter above:

We print this letter here with hesitation. We do it because we believe it is a document which New Republic readers will care to have seen, for we believe it is representative of the spirit of American soldiers; we print it also because it brings home more forcibly than we could ever hope to, the vital need of good reading matter for our soldiers and sailors. Our troops had been abroad a short time when General Pershing cabled for books. The French Government, we have been told, in a list of articles men should supply themselves with, put down books as one of the first necessities. Soon we folks at home will hear the same call from the men themselves. "Send me tobacco— and books!" That will be the demand. If you have a boy in service—a brother— a son— a friend— send him books if you send him anything. Abroad, literally millions of pocket size volumes have been sent to men in the trenches by the people of our allies. Put yourself in the place of these men. They must sit still very often, while undergoing the most frightful bombardment, waiting to attack or to be attacked. Many men go mad because of this terrible mental strain. What they need, above all else, is to keep their minds normal. And when they go back into billets, after service at the front, they demand books all the more. They have gone through such frightful experiences that they require something to put them in touch again with a sane world.

REAL POCKET—SIZE VOLUMES NEEDED

Remember this, when you send books. Your soldier boy cannot carry an ordinary size book with him to the trenches. What he needs are real pocket size volumes, so that he can carry several in his pockets

without inconvenience. Little Leather Library volumes fill this need perfectly. They are 3 1/4" X 4 1/4" in size, and are bound in genuine leather so that they will stand the hardest wear. Over a million of them were sold before the war to people who wished to read good books while travelling. Since we entered the war, over two hundred thousand of these volumes have been bought for soldiers and sailors as gifts.

If you have a boy or a friend in the service, make your choice of the titles listed below. If they do not prove to be what you expect, your money will be cheerfully refunded.

(Just a note. The Little Leather Library Books sold for thirty cents, postage prepaid.)

I hope you have enjoyed this piece of history, and have seen as I have, the inherent value that reading has in our lives. It is not merely entertainment. It is therapy, it is soothing, and under the worst of circumstances, it can give us the strength and the grounding that we need to pull through.

Ellen M. DuBois, MA – Ms. DuBois is engaged and has a dog who loves to critique her work. She is

published in vol.2 of God Allows U–Turns with her piece, "The Angel in the Dumpster". She writes to touch the hearts of others. Please visit Writings of the Heart, her award winning writer's resource site–<http://writingsoftheheart.homestead.com/index.html>

Evening Full Of Fun And Laugh

By Rehan Husain

Lively music is one of the most important instruments for a successful party. A Teen– Age loves listening to music. It is also an effective instrument to turn on a shy kid. Let us have a look on how music can make an evening full of fun and laughter.

Boys enjoy this next game because it not only gives them plenty of action but also calls for noises with their vocal chords. The lads were arranged in little circles of three all about the room. A chosen leader gave directions such as "traffic to the right," at which call the little circles turned to the right and kept turning until the leader said, "traffic to the left," when they quickly shifted and started turning to the left.

When the leader called, "beep beep," all the players quickly formed a new circle with two other people. As they did this they all blew their "vocal" horns. While the circles were being changed, the leader stepped in and the boy left over became the new leader. The interest in this game is increased if there is some lively music being played at the same time.

Next the boys played a "Life–Saver Relay." Each player was given a toothpick which he gripped firmly between his front teeth. The group was then divided into two lines. The first player of each team was given a Life Saver which he hung on the toothpick in his mouth. At the word "Go" he transferred the Life Saver to the toothpick of the second line without the use of hands. Of course, the team finishing first was declared the winner.

We had planned the approximate time required for each game so the entire evening would be filled. No time was allowed to drag between games. For refreshments we served the boys' standby ice cream and cake. After refreshments the man of the house took all the guests home.

If your boy is at this difficult age don't hesitate to let him have a party. Plan a full evening of "boisterous" games like those mentioned above and I'm sure that both you and the boys will thoroughly enjoy the party. There was no damage to the house that a vacuum cleaner couldn't repair the next day.

Mitch Johnson is a regular writer for <http://www.naturalpause.com>

. His articles have also

appeared on

and



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