

***Manifesto of the Gifted Girl* by Joan Franklin Smutny**

**Discussed by Maurice D. Fisher**

Joan Smutny has been very concerned with the development of gifted girls for many years. She has helped to improve national awareness of the problems they have experienced in receiving the necessary educational opportunities to expand their talents and career choices. In addition, she has demonstrated her leadership by increasing educational and career opportunities for gifted girls and young women through her extensive writings (in both her books and articles), and by offering numerous educational enrichment programs in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Her latest writing on the need for improved educational and professional opportunities for gifted girls is contained in the inspirational and informative book, *Manifesto of the Gifted Girl* (2010) published by Royal Fireworks Press. This book is a very attractive discussion of three major areas concerned with academic, social and educational development. I should emphasize that the format, graphics and illustrations are excellent and clearly highlight the three major sections:

**I. Who I Am; II. What I Need; and III. What I Can Do: My Vision for the Future.**

Part I emphasizes that gifted girls should follow their own interests and motivations to decide upon their life goals and careers. This part reinforces the great American Dream expressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson to “Hitch your wagon to a star” and by Joseph Campbell to “Follow your bliss.” Ms. Smutny adds a new twist by showing that the idea of high achievement must be applied to gifted girls who have previously been left out of this aspect of the American Dream.

Part II discusses many of the characteristics that gifted girls must have to reach their highest academic and life goals. First, they need a support system of teachers, parents, mentors and peers who can encourage them to work diligently to achieve their personal goals. They will become more self-confident and motivated to “follow their bliss” by receiving strong and continuous encouragement from significant others in the home and school. Second, they must have the opportunity to read and study about women who have made great accomplishments in different fields such as art, music, science, mathematics, business, and communications media. Part II also covers many areas of learning that gifted girls need to master to reach their goals. Some of these are: development of leadership skills, practice in making decisions, studying with mentors who can help them develop special interests, keeping one’s dreams alive, and being independent and self-motivated.

Part III is the culmination of the two previous sections, since it concentrates upon how gifted girls can attain their life goals, and make important contributions to all endeavors by applying their knowledge and self-understanding with confidence. Ms. Smutny discusses how such inspirational leaders and “Heroines of Giftedness” as Jane Goodall, Rosa Parks, Maria Tallchief, Grace Hopper, and Eleanor Roosevelt can serve as role models for making outstanding accomplishments.

Both the author and publisher should be congratulated on the synergy that obviously occurred between them in producing this book. As the result of this synergy, the *Manifesto of the Gifted Girl* provides all girls who have the potential for outstanding accomplishments with the encouragement and resources to achieve their goals. I highly recommend this book for use in the gifted classroom, the homeschooling environment, and as a gift of confidence from parent to child.

**Related Books by Joan Smutny:**

*Gifted Girls*. (1998). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

*Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home*. (2000). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

## Giftedness as Intimations of Immortality

Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools

What though the radiance which was once so bright

Be now for ever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the hour

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;

We will grieve not, rather find

Strength in what remains behind;

In the primal sympathy

Which having been must ever be;

In the soothing thoughts that spring

Out of human suffering;

In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind.

From **ODE: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood** (1802-04) by William Wordsworth, lines 176-187.

Turner Classic Movies channel recently showed the film, *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). It had the above mentioned lines from William Wordsworth as the central theme. The time and place was rural Kansas just prior to the depression of 1929. The cast included Warren Beatty and Natalie Wood. The writer was the dramatist, William Inge (who also wrote the screen plays for **Bus Stop**, 1955 and **Picnic**, 1956) and the Director was Elia Kazan. I was so impressed that a classic of American cinema was influenced by an English Romantic poem written over two-hundred years ago that I re-read the collected poems of William Wordsworth (1770-1850). The process of reading and analyzing this particular poem would be an important cognitive and emotional experience for any gifted student.

Giftedness is a basis for Intimations of Immortality. Wordsworth uses the term “immortality,” not only in its religious sense but also philosophically and esthetically. The gifted have an understanding of intimations of creativity, beauty and value. In a similar sense to Wordsworth, a gifted person does not take nature for granted. For example, the rose is more than an object of beauty; it is also an insight into the wonders of creation – thus a confirmation of life.

This poem can help gifted students appreciate on a deeper and more profound level the importance of thought and creativity. In fact, one of the best ways for comprehending the sensibility of giftedness is by studying poetry that has “emotion recollected in tranquility” (Wordsworth, Preface to the Second Edition of **Lyrical Ballads**, 1800). Scientific creative minds such as Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein functioned with a similar sensibility.

Another English Romantic poet, John Keats (1795-1821), who was influenced by Wordsworth, continued this sensibility of Intimations of Immortality. In his poem, **Ode on a Grecian Urn** (1819), Keats wrote an immortal line that has continued to resonate with his readers. “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” - that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.' Instead of using a “tricky dog” format of creative skills games to teach the gifted, there are many exemplars of the creative sensibility that exist in such poets as Wordsworth and Keats. **Resource: Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth**. (2002). Mark Van Doren, Editor. New York: Modern Library.

Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher, Copyright © by Gifted Education Press, December 2010 - January 2011