Abstract: I wrote this piece initially based on my experience and observations while attending the 100th anniversary of the Girl Scouts of America event with my daughter, in regards to the reactions I observed to favorite camp songs that were enjoyed by multiple generations of current and former Girl Scouts in attendance. This led me to think about how often Girl Scouts (as well as Boy Scouts, and other organizations) engage in song, and what greater roles and purposes this serves in the lives of children, and on into their adult lives. I spoke with two troop leaders, as well as two high school-aged Girl Scouts, who shared their views and experiences into how songs unite Girl Scouts, and lead them to success.
On March 12, 2012, I attended a local 100-year anniversary celebration of the Girl Scouts of America, at a location in the Southern United States, with my daughter. After such formalities such as the flag presentation, reciting of the Girl Scout Promise, and tributes to GSA founder Juliette Gordon Low, members of a Senior Girl Scout troop (high school) stepped up on stage, shared what years of being Girl Scouts meant to them, and led the attendees in favorite Girl Scout camp songs. Goosebumps arouse on my arms, and tears welled in my eyes, as I observed a near magical event unfold. …

As the afore-mentioned Senior Girl Scouts led their first song in a call and response style, I initially observed a shy Daisy Scout (Kindergarten – 1st grade) look at her mom, unsure of what to do, but with some encouragement, began to squeak out the words. I saw Brownies (2nd – 3rd grade) and Juniors (4th and 5th grade) singing along with gusto. The Cadets (6th-8th grade) and few other Seniors (9th-12th grade) in attendance acted as if they were a million miles away (too cool for this), but then shrugged their shoulders, and join in as well. Parents followed along the best we could, but then what really caused my emotions to come alive was when I looked behind me, and saw a small group of elderly women (former Girl Scouts) bopping their knees up and down, swinging their fists in the air, and shouting the lyrics louder than anyone else in the room. More songs followed, and Girl Scouts, young and old, were united in song. As local troop leader Linda explains, “I believe learning songs together unifies the Girl Scouts in a way that only music can. Songs can be sung anywhere at any time, and are fun! Setting words to music make it easy to remember them, and can be passed down generation to generation.”

After a moving to this same Southern town, a local girl, who was naturally shy, expressed an interest in joining Girl Scouts. She came home from her first summer camp giggling, and singing various silly songs. This led to the courage to join her elementary school choir, where her personality blossomed. She no longer felt that she was the “new kid.” She continued with Choir in middle and high school, where she gained the courage to compete in UIL Solo competitions in front of judges, and tried out for every solo and specialty choir. During these years, she also continued with Girl Scouts, which included leadership training. Part of her role was working with younger girls at camp and other Girl Scout events, including passing down the songs she loved so much. When asked what she loved so much about songs, and teaching them to younger Girl Scouts, she replied, “Because kids and people learn songs easily. They are fun, and can even be used to help teach facts, like the ABC’s, math, and science. At camp, songs help bring the girls together, and if there’s a girl with a bad attitude, joining with the others in song seems to improve it [attitude].”

Sharon, a long-time Girl Scout troop leader in the same Southern United States location, also shared that learning songs helps build solidarity among the girls, is an activity that “everyone can do. Not everyone is good at archery, but all can sing!” She said using the “call and response” method, especially with the younger girls, teaches them listening skills. Also, as many of the songs are learned by Girl Scouts all over the United States, she said it helps them build an identity, and feel like they belong to something special, like sorority women. Like at camp, Sharon’s troop also likes to say grace before any meals they have together. But they don’t say traditional prayers; instead, they opt to sing prayers, their favorite sung to the tune of a popular television show’s theme song. Sharon added that along with being a fun way to give thanks, this is another way to bring girls together, and break down barriers. “Not all girls belong to the same religion, or even attend church at all. Some don’t pray before meals at home, and don’t know how. Sung prayers, like the above, put everyone at ease.”

Finally, another way Sharon’s troop enjoys song is at their annual cookie booths. They sing to attract customers! One member of the troop explains how they do this at a large retailer. The troop is split into two groups, one at each entrance, each facing the same parking lot. They get into a loud singing/chanting match with each other: “We’ve got cookies, yes we do! We’ve got cookies, how ‘bout YOU!” The other group responds with the same, only louder, and so on. In this Girl Scout’s opinion, “this helps bring us more attention and business, from customers who might normally ignore us.” Sharon adds that this is a creative way for the girls to learn people, teamwork, business, and marketing skills, as is a primary goal of Girl Scout cookie sales.
In conclusion, Girl Scout songs are meant for more than pure fun. They shape skills, including learning, listening, social, self-confidence, and business. The Girl Scouts of America organization is commonly known for helping to create women leaders. These skills gained from various songs, most of them silly, are an ingenious, yet simple way to shape girls into becoming future leaders, or at least giving them some basic tools and a path to potential success in life. Though they will lead their own lives, Girl Scouts, and the lessons they’ve learned from singing within this organization, will always keep them united.