

"Sunshine Annie"

Her Business is to Brighten the Lives of Oregon's Unfortunate Girls

The Cedars

An Isolation Cottage

Making Play of their Work

Photos
by
Roy
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*Miss
Lena
Goodin*

Miss Anna Murphy

By Earl C. Brownlee
"SUNSHINE ANNIE" is an Irish lass, with the lil of Erin in her voice and the gold of old Ireland in her smile.

Her business is to probe the souls of girls for the responsive chord in every breast and then attune it to the bounties and the beauties that abound along the straight and narrow path.

Her heart is happy and her hand is helpful. "Together these are doing a bit of character building that, while delicate, is producing a solid human structure where before there was but a frail, unfortunate foundation.

"Sunshine Annie" deals in the souls of girls.

She takes hold when they are down and hauls them upward by the very strength of her own convictions and love. She is "mother" to a whole string of erring children and big sister to a lot of misguided women.

Between times, when the last girl has a fresh, new dress to wear to her new-found work, she attends the little dooryard garden plot, where once were weeds—now it is a tempting array of delectable vegetables. The dooryard garden and the garden of human life are strangely akin to this young woman.

"Sunshine Annie" is Miss Anna Murphy, rehabilitation officer for the state board of health.

Her appellation is an endearing conception of the girls she has helped, and by it she is known to the dignitaries of the highest courts

of law, as she is to the habitues of society's lowest order. Yet it is uttered with utmost respect in any circle.

Upon Miss Murphy devolves the task of finding proper homes and employment for the girls and women discharged from The Cedars, Portland's hospital-home for those who suffer social diseases.

To realize what that job means, one need only imagine himself in Miss Murphy's place, seeking the proper environment for the girls who have trod the thorny byways.

Neither city nor state maintains an institution for the care of women released from The Cedars, and, with cures effected, they cannot remain there. Some few of them have homes to return to and work to occupy their minds.

The majority, however, is a class of youngsters denied the childhood benefits of a loving mother's care and the shelter of a happy home. The divorce court has disrupted many of these blessings that are the right of every girl. Miss Murphy will tell you.

In fact, given more stringent marriage laws and less laxity in the divorce court, there would be precious little need for The Cedars or for a rehabilitation officer.

At The Cedars, where an average of 35 girls or women are continually receiving treatment at the expense of the city, meanwhile enjoying all the benefits of a clean, busy home, Miss Murphy's work starts.

To that institution frail humans are taken to rest and recover. An

attic rack laden with fragile, high-heeled shoes, all sadly worn, attests the common sense that has provided comfortable shoes for the girls who come to the home. In the same room are hung the shoddy, soiled dresses, remnants of a sometimes sensational pattern, that were discarded for modest, sturdy uniforms. This discard of itself tells a big part of the story of The Cedars.

To its testimony may be added that of pleasant, capable Miss Lena Goodin, superintendent at The Cedars, possessor of the confidence of every girl in her care and friendly counsellor to each. Miss Goodin says:

"It is a sad fact that the type of girl that comes to The Cedars spends what little money she has for garments to ornament rather than to clothe her. Her shoes are for show, not for service."

Somewhere on the 31-acre tract or in the big home and little cottages that adorn the farm may be found the human element in the story. Weary little girls to whose cheeks is returning the flame of youth, fostered by Miss Goodin's care and kindness, are everywhere about. Their bobbed hair may be seen at the tip of a great cedar tree near the barn, where the girls keep four fine cows, or it may be found in the cool, well-filled fruit-room. A bobbed-haired girl may be feeding the 150 fancy white chickens that help the farm to combat the high cost of living.

Here a girl is hoeing a row of potatoes; there another is resting on

the gallery of a pretty cottage, designing some needle work pattern. One may be attending chores in the spotless, sanitary and modern milk-house, while another one or two are in the modern, electrically equipped laundry, doing up their own linen to occupy their time with worthy tasks.

The girls, with the aid of one experienced man, do all the work of maintaining the farm, and, in addition, they make their own raiment, as far as possible. The whole institution is a cleanly, happy home for homeless girls whose greatest crime is in being homeless.

It is from such a source that the human problems solved by "Sunshine Annie" come—cleansed of body, with healthful minds and a new vision.

Some of them see the light of life's successes, with Miss Murphy's help, and aim their courses toward it. Others, wilfully or through the quality of human frailty that doctored them in the first place, stay down, despite the sympathetic effort of their well-wishers.

There are many hands to hold them down, but few to help them up. But always, as they go their ways, they find "Sunshine Annie's" hand and heart at their service—and her meager funds as well.

Disregarding the instructive figures of many months of work, it is apparent from Miss Murphy's report on her activities since September 1, 1919, that she has done a real job in bringing back to the level of respectability many unfortunate girls.

Through it all she is uncomplaining, yet her little salary is all she has to work on. The state has provided no fund for the care of girls released from The Cedars. Still they must have suitable clothing, a home and friends, else the work done at The Cedars has gone for naught.

Miss Murphy buys from month to month to clothe her charges, paroled to her keeping unprepared. She buys food, pays cartage, selects homes, and, most important

of all, finds work to keep them on the upward grade. And, under present conditions, she is doing it with her own funds.

Miss Murphy faces a stern world when, with one of her girls in tow, she seeks a home that will carry on the rehabilitation work she has started. The wonder of the thing is not that in extraordinary cases she makes a mistake in the selection of a home, but that she finds a home at all is remarkable.

Through the cooperation of large-scale employers, Miss Murphy's burden in finding work for her girls has been lightened. Some merchants sell at wholesale a few of the things her girls must have. And you may be sure that what she buys with her own money for these public charges is not the flimsy, shoddy article that the girl would choose for herself.

Considering the human material with which she works, the fact that approximately one third of all the girls she has had under parole "go straight" with the aid of her friendly services, is a remarkable tribute to her success.

Unassumingly discussing her work, Miss Murphy declared:

"In most all cases I find it necessary to place these girls a number of times before they are permanently located. They are dissatisfied, or those who provide a home for them are not suited; and both must be pleased.

"I am praying continually that the city, the state, or the public may provide a public home for these girls, that we may not be required to seek the proper roofs for them in private homes. It is an obligation we owe the girls—it is a debt the people should bear.

"The Federated Churches have undertaken to raise a fund of at least \$150 a month, so that we may rent and manage such a place; a place where our girls can enjoy a healthful, orderly, carefree home at a minimum cost to them. The project needs much help. Oh, I hope some such thing may be done. "We need money in the work at

once, but we most need a home for the girls.

"After all, we cannot buy a home for them, and that is what they most need. The home I would have these girls in would be strictly non-sectarian, non-religious—a home where, given propriety, the girls might be as free as they choose."

In the meantime, without financial support, Miss Murphy is doing her utmost personally to set her girls on the right path, properly clothed, profitably employed, comfortably housed in pleasant private homes. These things drain her own purse severely, yet in all the time of her need only one Portland woman has contributed to the financial demands of the work.

An army of women, and men too, however, try to tell, Miss Murphy not only what to do, but how to do it—but they don't help.

Of the girls Miss Murphy has cared for since September 1, 22 have returned to relatives and friends; 25 have been cared for in conjunction with the court of domestic relations and the state board of health; 23 have been placed as household assistants; 40 have been placed in other employment, with homes in private families provided below the usual prices, and work has been found for 51 in hospitals, offices, stores and factories.

That might present an idea of the scope of Miss Murphy's work if it were not for the fact that, aside from these more official phases, she solves a multitude of problems that would tax the abilities of sturdy men.

She is called upon not alone to clothe and feed her charges from her own purse, oftentimes at a great financial loss to herself through the failure of her girls to appreciate her beneficence, but she is required more frequently than she will admit to delve into their family trials, to straighten out the little personal kinks that beset and make troublesome their lives.

Miss Murphy receives the girls from The Cedars (sometimes they are hopelessly hardened beings), under parole for one year. In that time they are constrained to accept her kindly counsel. In that year it is up to "Sunshine Annie" to restore to them the sunshine of life or to watch them again fall by the wayside.

There is no despair in the making of Miss Anna Murphy. She works on, confidently, meriting, day by day, her respectful alias—"Sunshine Annie"—hoping always for a solution of these big social problems and achieving the very solution she hopes for by dint of energies unsparringly expended.