

American Heritage Girls marks 25th anniversary

By [Diana Chandler](#), posted [September 18, 2020](#) in [Culture](#)



Patti Garibay (center) started American Heritage Girls 25 years ago after becoming disillusioned with Girl Scouts USA.

CINCINNATI (BP) – Ashley, one of hundreds at an American Heritage Girls’ Meet the Founder event, stood quietly in line to meet Patti Garibay.



“What is it that you love about American Heritage Girls?” Garibay asked the teenager. “And she looked at me with those beautiful brown eyes and said to me, ‘It saved my life.’ I got chills, my heart started to race and I said, ‘Tell me more.’”

Ashley’s self-esteem had been tied to Instagram and TikTok. One “thumbs down” emoji could wreck her. She was “all gobbled up by the culture,” Garibay said, “and very depressed.”

“She said, ‘I wanted to kill myself, and my friend invited me to an American Heritage Girls meeting and I realized that I am lovable, that adults do care about me, that I could set goals, that I could achieve goals, that I could serve others and have a meaning to my life.’”

Ashley’s story has a common denominator with many girls who have found their godly worth, spiritual calling and success through AHG.

“It seems like the girls always have the same story and maybe a little bit different circumstance,” said Garibay, AHG’s founder and executive director. “They need fresh truth, they need inspiration, they need hope, and American Heritage Girls provides that hope for them.”

Garibay founded [American Heritage Girls](#) in 1995 as a Christ-centered leadership development program for girls. AHG is celebrating its 25th anniversary this week with a weeklong virtual birthday bash, culminating Saturday (Sept. 19) with a National Day of Service. Garibay expects about 90 percent of troops to participate in the day of service, incorporating virtual and socially-distanced events to help populations in need.

In the early 1990s, Garibay became disillusioned with Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA). Her oldest three daughters had been Scouts and Garibay had volunteered 12 years as a Scout leader. But as GSUSA began to stray from its Christian foundation and [incorporated other religions](#), Garibay and other mothers sought an alternative. Their answer was to found Caring Responsibly for Our Youth, CRY, in 1993. Detractors called them CRYbabies, and as the challenges of daily life continued, many mothers were distracted from the group.

Garibay persevered, and CRY morphed into AHG. She began with Troop Ohio 0895, composed of 12 girls and three leaders.

“The reason [we use] that number is because we were incorporated in the state of Ohio in August of ’95. That’s the very first troop,” Garibay said. “Before long, there were 100 girls and 10 troops in Cincinnati, and today we have over 56,000 members in all 50 states and six international countries. Now that’s a work of God, not of Patti Garibay.”

Troops include girls of various ethnicities, including whites, Hispanics, African Americans and Asians, and also girls with special needs. Girls learn about Christian faith, leadership, social and emotional health, citizenship, patriotism, life skills, and the importance and enjoyment of the outdoors. Garibay said girls learn their spiritual calling and future vocation and how that integrates with their faith.

“The important thing for us is that they know their identity in Christ, they know who they and whose they are,” Garibay said.

Scripture is woven into the program at every juncture, although troop meetings are not Bible studies. Each troop is church-based and led by Christian women. AHG has become a discipleship ministry to its 16,000 adult volunteers.

“Their spiritual walk has grown through their involvement,” she said of the volunteers. “They now become better church participants. They become better leaders and they’re able to influence their congregations in a very positive way because they have that confidence. They don’t feel like I did – the jack of all trades, master of none.”

Garibay tells her story of founding AHG in her newly released book, “Why Curse the Darkness When You Can Light a Candle?” Garibay tells of a painful childhood, including her mother who developed alcoholism while caring for four children and Garibay’s father, an engineer who suffered from multiple sclerosis. Garibay met her husband Pat in grade school in Cincinnati and became pregnant out of wedlock at 19. The two have been married 40 years and have four daughters.

“Pat was the only candle God sent to drive back the darkness in my life, as I’ve sometimes been his,” Garibay wrote early in the book. “And I’ve only begun to share the miraculous ways our Father has taken care of us.”

She formed AHG to provide a Christian outlet for her youngest daughter Katy, who was a member of the first troop and is now a vice president at a human resources management company. The group grew, and troop members have maintained friendships into adulthood.

Emily Rosen joined AHG in the late 1990s in Cincinnati, and Garibay was one of her troop leaders. AHG helped Rosen explore her spiritual gifts and develop leadership skills she uses today as a wife, mother of four and high school science teacher. Rosen has enrolled her daughters in AHG, she said in a 25th anniversary video that included her daughter Olivia, who is enrolled in a troop in northern Cincinnati.

“We are among the first in the second-generation crew,” Rosen said. A friend Rosen met in the first troop also has a daughter enrolled alongside Olivia. Rosen cherishes the decision-making skills she learned as a troop member.

“From the very beginning they had girls, and they were empowering those girls to be part of the decision-making and the structure that they built for the girls, and I continue to see that today with Olivia’s troop,” Rosen said. “We’re just so excited that she and her sister can be part of that.”