

# The Death of Girl Watching

by Don Sauers

Girl Watching, once described by Life Magazine as "man's favorite sport," is now officially dead, a politically incorrect cultural fossil. As author of "The Girl Watcher's Guide" (Harper, 1954) and founder of the American Society of Girl Watchers, I'm neither angry nor relieved, nor do I feel either guilt or shame. All I feel is a bewildered sadness that an occasional and usually spontaneous pastime I considered pleasurable and innocent has been declared uncouth and offensive, not just by card-carrying feminists but by a depressing number of ordinarily tolerant women.

At first I even felt some pride in having added a new phrase to the English language. Before publishing its 4-page picture story about Girl Watching (1/19/62) Life staffers had done some serious research. They found no evidence that anyone else had ever used those two words in that particular combination in a related context. Soon after my book appeared, the phrase was being used in hearty good humor, as it had been intended. The song, "Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by," from Frank Loesser's "Most Happy Fella" became a popular success. In that carefree time no feminist police came forward to demand that the lyrics be changed to "standing on the corner watching all the women go by.." Diet Pepsi advertised its product as being the one for "girls girl watcher's watch," and its lilting musical theme, "Music to watch girls by" was heard on radio stations from coast to coast.

My television appearances in the late '60s on The Tonight show and To Tell the Truth bolstered my confidence that girl watching was alive and well, but then came the '70s and '80s and the landslide victories of indignant feminists. The loss of the lovely word "girl" was a parallel casualty of the housecleaning.

Having had five sisters and four daughters I've been a staunch feminist myself, particularly in the department of women's sports. I believe the expansion and acceptance of opportunities for girls (there, I said it again) in sports has been the most laudable achievement of the feminist movement. But I'll always miss "girls."

I realize I'm a dinosaur, a creature who roamed the earth when men still sang, "I want a girl just like the girl who married dear old Dad," and "The girl of my dreams is the sweetest girl of all the girls I know." Should we have sung, "The woman of my dreams is the sweetest woman ...?"

The greatest irony to me is that the most furious attacks on girl watching have come during a period that has seen necklines plunge to their lowest levels since the real Victoria kept her secrets and skirts rise to heights that would make a Dallas cheerleader blush.

Members of the now disbanded Girl Watching Society were dedicated to the proposition that there is nothing in the world more beautiful than a beautiful girl. As we strolled along 5th Avenue on our way back to the office after lunch, we observed strict rules of behavior and always respected the rights of the watchee.

Girl Watching may be dead as an institution, but as a natural male response, it will live and be enjoyed with varying degrees of restraint as long as God and Cover Girl keep making girls (and women) so beautiful.

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