

P.E.O. Founder's Day Program

Props Needed: apron, gold star brooch, copy of P.E.O. Constitution and Bylaws, daisies, butterfly, copy of P.E.O. Record, brochures of P.E.O. projects, old Bible

(Enter room, dressed in post civil war costume, carrying old suitcase and hanky)

Hello! Hello! Hello! How wonderful it is to be here today! It's been quite a journey to get here! Hello *(name someone in room)* And look who's here ...it's *(name someone else in room)*!! You know, you ladies have devoted so much of your lives to helping other women in the name of P.E.O., and for that I'm most grateful!! And gratitude is why I wanted to visit with you today!! How appropriate it is to be so close to Valentine's Day when we can express to those we love just how grateful we are for them.

Oh, *(name hostess)*, you do know how to throw a grand party!! You know, that's one of the things I'm remembered for!! Well, I guess I need to introduce myself before I start reminiscing!! My name is Mary Allen Stafford. I like to be called Mary Jane and my college chums fondly called me "Mame." I'm one of your founding sisters! Now you have to promise me you'll be patient with me! Every once in a while my mind slips a bit. What else would you expect from a mature woman of 152 years!

Speaking of slippingI'm old enough now to enjoy dressing without a bustier, you know, a brassiere. Ok, you young whipper snappers, I think you call it a bra. When I go without mine, I find it pulls all of the wrinkles out of my face!! *(giggles)* Oh goodness!! That's another thing I was quite known for was my sense of humor!! But gracious, Miss Scarlet!! I would never tell that in mixed company!! It just wouldn't be proper!!

Well, I guess I had better get on with my, excuse me, your story. As I said, I have been on quite a journey and along the way have collected some treasures I want to share with you todaythings that will help you remember our other six founding sisters.*(place suitcase down and open it)*

Let me see. Where do I begin? Well, silly, I guess I'll start at the beginning.....It all began right after the terrible, heart breaking War Between the States. It was

becoming rather fashionable for women to study at the University level instead of staying at home to tend to things there.

The seven of us met at Iowa Wesleyan College in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and we became fast kindred spirits. You might say we were inseparable!! There was a new society (I believe you call them fraternities or sororities) called IC Sorosis (it always sounded like a dread disease to me) ...*(giggle)*...Anyway, it was being organized on campus. Some of our little intimate group were invited to join, but not all of us. "All or none" was the vow of our togetherness. (Now that does sound familiar, doesn't it ... "One for all and all for one.")

Anyway, this situation was what prompted Harriet Briggs to suggest that we organize our own society! Let me tell you a little bit about dear Hattie ...that's what she liked to be called. She had the quality of making everyone feel comfortable. She had the capacity of always being ready to heal where others might wound. She was very loving and wonderfully loved by us all. It was said of her that she was the best, big-hearted girl that ever lived. Her father was a minister and her home was near the college, so their door was always open to her college friends. After college in 1871, she married Henry Bousquet who was a cashier at the Pella National Bank. They had 2 precious sons. It saddens me to tell you that only 8 years after she wore her first P.E.O. star, she passed from us at the very early age of 27. *(remove daisies from suitcase)* I guess that is why these marguerites remind me of her. They are our flower, symbols of purity and lightso much like our dear Hattie.

Well, let me back up just a bit. When we began to organize, we wanted to make an impressive entrance into chapel to announce our new secret society. Francis Elizabeth Roads, we called her Franc, suggested we all wear identical aprons. *(remove apron from suitcase and drape over the side of the table)*

I'll tell you more about Franc in a moment. It was at this point that Alice Virginia Coffin built on the idea and suggested that our symbol could be a star and that we could pin this star to those beautiful aprons!! *(remove large star from suitcase)* What an illuminating idea!! We had our stars created by Crane's Jewelry Store right there in Mount Pleasant. They were big flat stars of yellow gold!! My, my, how the stars have changed!! *(remove smaller star from the suitcase)* Your P.E.O. star is so beautiful, but I can hardly see that tiny thing!! Well, what do you expect from eyes that are as old as mine?

Alice wanted our star to be symbolic of the star of Bethlehem, a guide for our sisterhood to holier, purer and better lives. In accepting our star we pledged to radiate all light possible and to grow in the virtues represented by the five points of the star: faith, love, purity, justice and truth.

How thrilling it was to wear our star and how exciting when we would by chance meet a stranger who also wore the star. Immediately, the bond of sisterhood became alive. And that kindred bond is still alive today ...in this very room.

Let me tell you a little bit about the kind of woman who could aspire to such lofty ideals. Alice was blond (*now don't get me started on those "blond jokes"...*) and she was a bit aloof. Exceeding neatness was a distinguishing feature of her personality and in her mind, cleanliness was next to godliness. Her friends well remember the pleasing fragrance of Cashmere Bouquet that wafted in her wake. She has been described as the "first lady of the ballroom." She enjoyed a party and loved to dance. (*sheepishly*) In fact, that is the one reason she changed churches. Her former church did not approve of dancing!! Alice was cheerful, kind, and generous. We voted her as our very first Vice President of P.E.O.

Let's see ...what do we have here ...(*reach into suitcase and remove worn Bible*) This Bible reminds me of another sister, Ella Stewart. Ella was Irish with beautiful auburn hair and blue eyes. Even though she was small in stature, she was mighty in her Christian spirit! She was the only one of us who was unable to finish her college degree. Because of her father's death, she quit school to help her mother run a boarding house for students.

Ella, however, remained active in all social and group entertainments, and she audited some classes. She taught piano lessons for 25 cents a lesson!! Ella and Alice Bird were best of friends through grade school, high school and college. It was Ella who calmed Alice's ruffled spirits on many occasions. And my goodness, could that girl get ruffled! Theirs was a friendship that was solidified by their P.E.O. affiliation. Ella was a high school teacher for 10 years. She was our first secretary of P.E.O. Full of energy, she would spur us on by saying, "Girls, we must go to work and not sit here loafing." Later, she was a great help in forming Grand Chapter and Supreme Chapter and untangling the early records. She has been described as "one of the most intensely earnest Christians ever known." Scripture says, "Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue, think on these things." Ella radiated purity in her every word and act, and she gave us strength to try more fervently to grow in this virtue. Only by growing and aiming at perfection can we find joy in living.

And now, let me tell you about Suela. *(remove butterfly from suitcase)* Now, this butterfly has very little to do with P.E.O., but it is the perfect description of Suela Pearson. She was the butterfly of our group and the most beautiful! She was a brunette with piercing brown eyes, rosy cheeks and a pearly complexion. Her contribution to P.E.O. was her beauty, her vivaciousness and the joy she gave to others. After she graduated from Iowa Wesleyan, her family moved to Washington D.C. where no P.E.O. chapters existed and she was not able to carry on active membership.

Suela married a certain Frank Harold Penfield and lived in Cleveland, Ohio. They had 2 children, but all did not go well for poor Suela. One of her children, a son, died while he was a student at Yale. Her husband, well, let's just say he wasn't the best of businessmen, and he went bankrupt and lost everything, including Suela, who divorced him in 1901She was a dear, and we loved her, poor, poor Suela!!

Now I want to tell you a little about our very first President of P.E.O. Her name was Alice Bird. She preferred to be called "Allie." Allie was only 15 when she started college! What a brain!! As a matter of fact, *(remove Constitution and Bylaws from suitcase)* Allie wrote the original oath and the original constitution for P.E.O. She wrote of this later, "I recall the hour as yesterday when the wording of the oath occurred to me. I sat in the summer house, wintry day though it was, near our 'Crooked Tree' croquet ground. I was so full of great thoughts that the confusion of the children annoyed me, so I wrapped myself in a shawl and went there to compose that oath. We met in the afternoon ...and as I wrote it, it was suggested that I take the first oath - the one I wrote in the summer house... Ella Stewart read the oath to me, then I to the other six. That was our initiation."

On the writing of the first constitution she said, "I remember the window at which I sat, the bleak January landscape outside, and how proud I felt when it was finished. It was only one page long, but full of such momentous designs. Proud I am that today the oath is identically the same as it was then, and that P.E.O. has not changed in thought and purpose" And thus, P.E.O. was born, founded and launched on that wintry afternoon of January 21, 1869. While Allie attended Iowa Wesleyan, she taught Latin, Greek, and elocution. She married Washington Irving Babb, an attorney who also taught law at the College. They had 4 children.

Allie was a public speaker and she was totally devoted to P.E.O. causes throughout her lifetime. *(remove P.E.O. Record from the suitcase)* She was the associate editor of the P.E.O. Record during the first 3-4 years of its existence. It was she who said, "We built better than we knew." Even then, she spoke prophetically of the future of

our sisterhood. As a mature person, she was described as "a slight, wiry little woman with a keen and alert mind." She had a wry sense of humor and could make jokes about herself. One report in a paper described her as one who "had a smile that adds a transient beauty to a face that is perhaps a little sad." Of this, Allie remarked, "Shades of P.E.O. hang on that word `transient'. Even a transient beauty is better than none! Those P. E. O.s who say I am no beauty, remember it is there, but transient." Maybe though lacking in some physical beauty, she made up for it in the beauty of her spirit. To her insight, we owe much gratitude!

Now I suppose I have saved the most eloquent and far-sighted sister for the last. Her name is Francis Elizabeth Roads. Remember, I mentioned Franc earlier. She was the one who suggested and designed our aprons! But her enthusiasm was far more compelling than the design of our costumes! Franc was only 14 years old when she started at Iowa Wesleyan. That's right ...another brain-child!! She was a firm believer in punctuality and she finished 4 years of college in 3! That's no surprise, is it? She developed an interest in art and taught private classes in painting and drawing most of her life. Franc was the serious one of our chums. She was deeply concerned with social conditions, especially the advancement of women.

Franc married Simon Charles Elliot and they had a son and a daughter, both distinguished in their fields of medicine and education. Franc taught school with Alice Bird as she continued to help set goals for the future of P.E.O. In 1920, she said, "The day for P. E. O. expansion is before us and there is a great need for going ahead on the part of all women now to a much greater degree than ever before." Her last message in the P.E.O. Record in 1924 read, "Let us not be too afraid to help push along the great world movements, especially those of peace, and national educational problems, because vital interests of the country depend upon the help of all women as never before. The women of P.E.O. should assume their full responsibility. The test of your patriotism depends upon the interest we take in those matters." She worked hard for the Educational Fund until her dying day believing it was the most important work of the Sisterhood.

From her vision, P.E.O. now supports the Educational Loan Fund, the International Peace Scholarship Program, the Scholar Awards, and the P.E.O. Program for Continuing Education. *(remove from suitcase pamphlets of projects)* Of all the founders, Franc Roads Elliot had the greatest vision. She once said, "I wonder if we realize the potential power which is possessed by an organization of 35,000 women. Such tremendous power, if properly directed and properly supported by the members, would accomplish things of which we do not dream today. Are we

making the best use of this power? If not, let us carefully consider how we may develop this latent energy and expend it in the direction which will reflect credit upon our organization."

Franc died at the age of 72. Dr. Garrison, who spoke at her funeral, summed up her life when he said, "She was a representative of that type of woman which puts the spirit of the home into the nation; the spirit of Christ into politics and brings culture and beauty into the lives of the common people" - a worthy goal for all of her P.E.O. sisters, present and future!!

Along my P.E.O. journey, I was given a book which has come to mean a great deal to me. It's a small book, but filled with a great deal of thought provoking values. The title of the book is Simple Words of Wisdom by Penelope J. Stokes. (*remove book from suitcase*) In it, she writes of gratitude. "What does it mean to cultivate a heart of gratitude? It means opening our eyes, looking around at the multitude of gifts and blessings that fill our lives. It means recognizing our family, friends, and loved ones, as aqueducts through which God's great love flows out to us. It means rejoicing in all we've been given But gratitude doesn't end with our private thanks to God. We need to show gratitude as well to those who touch our lives, who love us, minister to us, and make the world we live in a warmer, safer, kinder place. The miracle of gratitude works both inside and out, backwards and forwards. As we express our gratefulness to the people who have given themselves to us, we minister to them and honor them for their faithfulness to God. But we also minister to ourselves. Gratitude tenderizes our hearts and makes us quicker to see and appreciate the daily gifts that come our way. It's easy to take the gifts of life for granted, to accept them casually, as if we deserve God's generosity. But when we get a glimpse, just the tiniest glimmer of the blessings that have been bestowed upon us, our hearts will overflow with gratitude, and our joy and contentment will spill over to those around us."

Could we, your founding sisters, have known the enduring value of our creation? Could we have envisioned the far reaching spread of our dream? Could we have foreseen that thousands upon thousands of women would wear the lovely star symbol of our sisterhood?

We are thankful for the gifts of P.E.O. We, your founding sisters, are grateful for your endearment to our lofty dreams and for your persistence in growing a worthy society in which women have been given the opportunity to attain their goals in order to benefit others. From our minds came a significant contribution to women. P.E.O.'s lofty ideas were born out of great wisdom and a deep sense of

commitment to women of all ages and experience. Our beautiful ritual and vows provide a core of values, timeless in quality and undisputed in worth. These virtues still have enduring appeal in our changing society. To have accomplished this is nothing short of miraculous. Little did we realize that our gift of love would in time become a legacy. Our hope was that we could and should make ourselves better. It is the strength of our P.E.O. Sisterhood, its faith and its determination, which is our heritage ...P.E.O., a legacy of love, may we ever protect its values for our daughters and our friendsand the generations to come. Thank you very much.

Written by Sally Eaves, Chapter BL, Plainview, Texas, February 2000