

Becoming A P.E.O.

Part 1 - General Improvement

Since our program theme this year is based on our "Objects and Aims", I thought we should begin with the origin of this inspired statement of purpose.

On the date of organization way back in January 1869, Alice Bird was chosen to prepare a constitution to be voted upon at the society's first meeting, two days later!! She probably received many suggestions from the other six young women, but it was Alice, alone who wrote, in the classic language of another century, the ideals that outline the basic principles of P.E.O., AND our "Objects and Aims" are contained in this original constitution. Listen carefully as I read Articles II and III.

Article II

Section 1. The object of this society shall be general improvement, which shall comprehend more especially.

1st - Improvement in our charity toward and interest in each other as P.E.O.s.

2nd - Improvement in our charity toward and interest in all with whom we associate.

3rd - Improvement in our manners at home and in society.

4th - Improvement in our minds by the pursuing of such books and pamphlets in and out of society as shall be proper for P.E.O.s.

Article III

Section 1. One of the principle objects of the society is a proper respect for the full import of P.E.O. This will comprehend:

1st - A watchful eye as to each other's rise or fall in the opinion of the community.

2nd - A careful consideration of feeling when speaking.

3rd - A determination to do all we can and at all times, under all circumstances, to care for each other in trouble, to sympathize in affliction, and to console in grief.

Can you believe that there have been so few changes in these past 130 years? And didn't those seven young women define the essence of our sisterhood beautifully? Incidentally, Articles I and II gave our society the name P.E.O. and the golden star as our emblem.

Our "Objects and Aims" have been variously described as a perfect pattern for our lives, a design for living, a mission statement, an inspiring covenant, the essence of P.E.O., a cause beyond ourselves, a description of positive living, and my favorite, an adventure in General Improvement.

As you can see, from the very beginning the first 'Object and Aim' of P.E.O. has been General Improvement for self, for others, and for society. This search for excellence in all aspects of our lives includes adherence to ethical conduct, high moral standards, personal integrity, and respect for all.

All of us have a feeling deep inside that we should be better persons than we are, the challenge to improve is a constant one. Instinctively, we know that we are not living up to our fullest potential, that we are not so kind, loving, or compassionate, as we would like to be. But innate in every P.E.O. is the inborn desire to keep striving for General Improvement.

This striving gives life fuller meaning through broadening our horizons, embracing beauty, accomplishments, enriched relationships, deeper understanding, and learning.

Let us look about us for ways to enhance our experiences, we don't have to take a new road or a different course of action, but we might discover a possibility from something in which we are already involved. Or we can find a new cause to embrace another person to love, a challenging commitment to make, or a different creativity to express.

To quote from George Washington Carver:

"Oh, sit not down, nor idly stand,
There's plenty to do on every hand.
If you cannot prosper in work, like some,
You've at least one talent, improve that one!"

Or as Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians:

"I don't mean to say I am perfect. I haven't learned all I should even yet, but I am working toward that day when I shall be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be."

So, during the coming year, let us reverberate our ideals, revitalize our lives, and pledge our wonderful chapter and ourselves to an adventure in General Improvement.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 2 : Growth In Charity

When I looked in my yearbook, I read I was to do a program on 'Expressing a Loving Concern' in May. So I had lots of time to think about it. However, one of my sisters asked me to switch dates with her, and here I am presenting the program on Growth in Charity!

First of all, when I do something new, I like to get the words defined so I thought first of my friend, Mr. Webster. I went to the College Dictionary to see what he had to say about charity. He said,

'Donations or generous actions to aid poor and helpless; benevolent feelings especially toward those in need; leniency in judging others; forbearance; aims; Christian love.'

In regard to donations and generous actions, P.E.O. has helped so many women with scholarships. I have seen this activity grow since I became a member. In regard to benevolent feelings, we see in the news how organizations, churches and individuals respond to those in need, especially when a disaster occurs.

In regard to Christian love, one of the things I noticed about P.E.O.s is the help and encouragement given to our sisters when there is an illness, a death, a lack of any kind, or any other problem. We are there to help by calling, sending cards, taking food, or responding in anyway needed. I have seen my sisters grow in charity, and we know that is the best and highest gift.

Usually the first thing I think about when I think about charity is the 13th chapter of First Corinthians. We have all heard this so many times, but I will read verses 1-4 again.

'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.'

There are many random acts of kindness we can do to add to our growth in charity. Here are some suggestions:

1. Compliment three people every day.
2. Never waste an opportunity to tell someone you love them.
3. Make it a point to introduce yourself to one person each week.
4. Leave everything a little better than you found it.
5. Become the most and enthusiastic person you know.

I would like for us to hear how charity is expressed in poetry. I have a friend who writes poetry, so I twisted her arm to get her to write one about charity.

Agape, Charity, Love

*Three words, same meaning, pour down from heaven above!
St. Matthew said, so long ago, love among many will have grown cold.
Ecclesiastes tells us: There is a time to love and a time to hate.
Are we fulfilling these good words?
Do we surmise it is too late?
NBC, CBS, ABC & CNN spew forth the daily news,*

*Religious stations talk to the vast network audience,
Are they just talking to the pews?
What must we do to turn this spinning top around?
The Good Book says that perfect love indeed casts out fear.
But, as we digest all these words, we think they must mean
Someplace else; surely not here.
TV situation comedies seem not so funny to us these days
Exploitation, mayhem, four letter words, ugliness.
Yes, the name of the game is MONEY!
What, we wonder, has happened to funny situations?
Slapstick, clowns, comedians who told funny jokes, truly funny.
Shakespeare made a little inroad recently on the screen.
Can we but hope to expect some other classics will make the scene?
Like long gone Emily, we must show delight in kindness with our words.
Encourage symphonies, orchestration, choristers, sweet notes of music be heard.
Sit quietly in the morning breeze and listen to the songs of birds.
Environmental saving we should mention too,
It really needs support from me and you, and you.
From all of us. that means every one of you.
Don't judge the man who seems to have an alcoholic bent,
A kind word to him on his down days,
Will seem to him perhaps words heaven sent.
When you hear of someone's illness or sad plight,
Let words of encouragement from your heart take flight.
That single mother burdened underneath with cares
Remind her please, there is hope, if she'll just have faith,
And offer up for her to the Lord a silent prayer.
That little child who finds it difficult to read
Perhaps you can some morning offer to that school
To volunteer to help their need.
Ascending that Golden Stairway begins with just one step you see
Let us all hold hands, have faith and pray
And thus surely encourage CHARITY!*

By Pat Fruecht, Mableton, GA, September 1999

Many famous people have made statements about charity. Let me read some to you, see if you recognize the speaker.

'With malice towards none, charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.' (Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address)

'Every charitable act is a stepping stone towards heaven.' (Henry Ward Beecher)

'The highest exercise of charity is charity towards the uncharitable.' (J.S. Buckminster)

'If you haven't got any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble.' (Bob Hope)

'A bone to the dog is not charity. Charity is the bone shared with the dog, when you are just as hungry as the dog.' (Jack London)

'Charity sees the need, not the cause.' (German proverb)

I hope this has given you something to think about pertaining to charity and how it grows. We all have many opportunities to be charitable and loving.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 3 : Qualities Of Womanhood

So far we have heard the lessons about general improvement and charity. Now we will hear about the Qualities of Womanhood.

Our Objects and Aims tell us to seek a just comprehension of and adherence to the qualities of **faith, love, purity, justice, and truth**. This statement implies an active search to understand, and a resolution to live by these qualities.

I wonder what prompted our seven Founders to choose these particular qualities from among the many virtues. From our laws and procedures, to our ceremony of initiation, it is obvious that these seven women, the first sisters of P.E.O., used the Bible to build the foundation of all that followed. So, let us begin there to understand what we are all about.

FAITH

The familiar verse in Hebrews tells us what faith is : 'The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'

Eugene Peterson has written a translation of the Bible entitled, The Message. His version of verses 1&2 in Hebrews 11 goes like this-

'The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.'

Several things struck me in this translation, and shed some light on our seven Founders:

- The foundation of those who trust in God is faith.
- It is this firm foundation under girding everything that makes life worth living.
- Acts of faith distinguished our ancestors from the crowd.

Our ancestors started with faith; it's the first quality mentioned, the firm foundation upon which they built the rest. They knew that faith was necessary in life to handle all the unforeseen

troubles life brings. Their faith set them apart from all the other organizations of their time and ours too. I believe it is one reason that P.E.O. is as successful as it is. After all, Hebrews 11 also says that without faith it is impossible to please God.

PURITY

As I read through many of the verses about purity, I noticed two things:

1. Purity is related to the holiness of God, and
2. Purity separates a person from the ways of the world to the ways of God.

If you study the Old Testament, you see what happens when people turn from God's standards to the world's standards : they perish.

As often as not, the women and their purity or lack of it, set the course for the nation. The effect of a pure woman on a man or on society is immeasurable. No wonder our Founders chose purity as a quality of womanhood. As Philippians 4:8 says,

'Finally, [sister], whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praise worthy, think about such things.'
Pure thoughts are pleasing to God.

JUSTICE

I had to look this one up in the dictionary to be sure I understood. The definition given said,

'The quality of being righteous; honesty; impartiality; fair representation of facts; merited reward or punishment.'

Where were our seven Founders headed with justice?

Proverbs 29:4 says, 'By justice a king gives a country stability.' If we use the definition of justice and combine it with this proverb, we can say,

'Those who are honest and do the right thing without partiality, bring stability to an organization.'
P.E.O. is a stable organization whose goal is to do the right thing impartially, to serve women in need.

TRUTH

The word truth brings two things to my mind immediately,

1. Honest Abe, and
2. George Washington and the cherry tree : 'I cannot tell a lie.'

Why did I remember trivia like that about these two great presidents? An honest person, that is one who speaks the truth, inspires trust. They are reliable, solid and grounded. They also generate respect , for themselves as well as for others by speaking the truth.

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him. One of those is a lying tongue. Lies are often the basis of failed relationships. Lies hurt and destroy. Whatever is built upon a lie cannot survive.

Truth acknowledges that there is a difference between right and wrong. Every one of the qualities depends on truth. You can't have justice unless truth is made evident. Purity speaks of a likeness to God and separation from evil. Faith is not based on a lie, and love dies in the face on one.

Truth spoken in love says, 'I care about you.' Which brings me to the last quality of womanhood :

LOVE

First Corinthians 13 tells us what love is and what it is not. I will finish this long narrative by reading it, beginning with verse 12:31.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 4 : To Seek Growth in Knowledge and in Culture And to Obtain All Possible Wisdom from Nature, Art, Books, Study and Society

I think our P.E.O. Founders wanted us to realize that as women, it was important to expand our minds and to be mindful of the world around us. Our Founders were truly amazing women , far wiser than their age would indicate. For them to have written our opening ode and initiation ceremony so many years ago, and have them so meaningful today is truly remarkable.

Our Founders wanted their organization to be comprised of women who were knowledgeable, but who were not content with the knowledge they already had. They thought it important to seek growth, to look for ways to grow in knowledge and in culture, to be curious, to ask why, to challenge ourselves.

Our organization supports scholarships, grants and loans to women from all over the world who are seeking growth in knowledge. What a wonderful way to carry out our Founders' purpose.

Our P.E.O. meetings are a welcome break from the hustle and bustle of our week. Our meetings are orderly and oh, so familiar; very few surprises! Our programs expand our knowledge and our social time nourishes our friendships and brings us closer together.

All the offices and duties associated with P.E.O. provide opportunities for growth as individuals - whether it is leading a committee, presenting a program or compiling the yearbook. Memorizing the initiation ceremony is dreaded by most of us. However, when the task is done and the initiation is complete, there is a wonderful sense of accomplishment and a job well done! With every office held, our knowledge of the organization and work of P.E.O. grows, and with it our confidence increases.

It is widely accepted that P.E.O.s don't say no. There is a very good reason for this. We all have a tendency to say no to things with which we are not familiar or comfortable. How else can we gain confidence to tackle the unknown if not by successfully doing a job that we didn't think we could do? We don't know what surprises our lives will bring. Being able to face unfamiliar situations with confidence is of great benefit to each of us.

The confidence P.E.O. gives its members is remarkable and truly a gift.

The dictionary defines wisdom as 'the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships; good sense'.

Wisdom comes with age and most of us know about age! But not all old people have wisdom. Wisdom comes from an ability to see the world around us, digest it slowly and make good sense of it. Our world consists of nature, art, books, study, and society.

Our goal is to see our world with open eyes, listen to what is being said, taste the fruit and smell the roses. Our judgments should be impartial, loving, forgiving, helpful, and most of all, wise; made with good sense.

To be remembered as a woman of wisdom is a goal for which we all should strive.

In conclusion, it seems that the future of the P.E.O. sisterhood depends on our commitment to live up to the opening ode that we say at the beginning of each meeting. In order for our organization to be viable in our busy world, and to attract the women we want, we must live up to our full potential. That includes seeking growth in knowledge and in culture, and obtaining all possible wisdom from nature, art, books, study and society. That is a challenge for each of us to be the best we can be. It is our responsibility and privilege as members of P.E.O. to do so.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Reviewed: January 2006

Please note: The next program should be 'Radiating All Light Possible'. When Chapter G did this series of programs, Radiating All Light Possible was done as the Christmas Program. Your chapter is invited to do its own Christmas program and radiate all light possible!

Part 6 - Self-Control and Equipose

In our objects and aims there is a phrase, which says:

'To aim at self-control, equipose and symmetry of character'.

This is one of our aims as P.E.O.s; to develop these qualities and become better sisters.

The definitions of these qualities, taken from the American Heritage Dictionary, are as follows:

- Self-control: control of one's emotions, desires or actions by one's own will.
- Equipose: equality in distribution, as of weight, relationship or emotional forces, equilibrium.
- Symmetry of character: beauty as a result of balance or harmonious arrangement of moral or ethical structure of a person or group.

These qualities imply balance, harmony (as a result of balance), control and beauty, not only of the individual P.E.O., but also of the entire sisterhood as long as each is willing to do her part to achieve these aims.

How would a sister who exemplifies these qualities, respond in the following situations?

- An amendment is presented at a meeting, which is not in alignment with the goals or the

structure of P.E.O.

- A new member wears her pin on the collar of her suit.
- A visitor comes to the meeting while business is being conducted.
- At lunch, a heated political debate ensues between two sisters.

One of the special qualities about our sisterhood is that we have strong traditions, and a very well structured manner of conducting business. These two aspects of P.E.O. encourage the process of our growth toward and achievement of our Objects and Aims. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Our Founders, who were in their late teens or early twenties when they wrote the Objects and Aims, established an organization whose very nature guides us toward self-control, equipoise and symmetry of character. Can you name some ways you have found this to be so?

Our constitution leaves little to the imagination of its members for conducting the business of P.E.O., and our bylaws, both state and local, are to be in agreement with our constitution. There is good reason for this solid foundation of law. Our size and our purposes require that we have an ordered way to do what needs to be done. Our results speak to the efficiency and order of our organization. Our laws and method of conducting business provide an atmosphere where self-control, equipoise and symmetry of character can thrive.

Some would have us get rid of the sometimes unwieldy structure and process of P.E.O., but we would be wise to exercise self-control before we revise or excise too many of our established methods. There are benefits to change and benefits to retain the 'establishment'.

As you aim towards self-control, equipoise and symmetry of character, think of the beauty and the harmony that will be produced in you and your sisterhood.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 7 - Temperance in Opinions, Speech and Habits

What is temperance? The encyclopedia says that temperance is a term for the principle of moderation. It refers to moderation in eating and drinking, in work and play, and in all other pleasures and activities of life. The thesaurus says it is an avoidance of extremes (as in action, thought and feeling), reasonableness, constraint, restraint, happy medium. The dictionary describes temperance as moderation, sobriety, self-restraint, moderation in drinking alcoholic liquors.

It was in 1881 that the P.E.O.s chose to revise their Constitution and include the 4th object: 'to aim at moral culture, self-control, equipoise and symmetry of character and temperance in opinions, speech and habits.'

It is interesting to note that prior to that time, the Women's Temperance Movement was underway in the United States. Women were exasperated with the slow pace of male leadership to enact legalized temperance legislation. In 1874, five years after the first statement of purpose

of P.E.O. and seven years before the revision of the constitution, a group of crusaders at a Sunday School Assembly in Chautauqua, NY, met to discuss temperance. They were concerned about the tensions and strains between men and women in the middle class families and the alcoholic men who failed to fulfill their family responsibilities. They issued the call that resulted in the organization of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union (the W.C.T.U.) in Cleveland, OH. Their adopted motto was 'For God, Home and Native Land.'

The temperance movement may have influenced P.E.O. However, it should be noted that our Founders first cited manners in their statement of purpose. The document that became the Objects and Aims stated the purpose: 'improvement in our manners at home and in society'. The young Founders were very wise to recognize what type of woman they wanted in their elite group. Their first goal must have been congeniality. They wanted women with strong character, integrity, and humility, women who were confident enough with themselves to put others first. They knew that women like that would allow the group to function most successfully. Basic good manners were a requirement from the very beginning with the Rules of Order stating, 'No sister shall be allowed to speak more than twice on the same subject unless by permission of the president.'

As funny as that sounds now, and in spite of the fact that we don't have that rule anymore, our meetings today must demonstrate an effort on each sister's part not to dominate the conversation. We must have a sense of what is right, proper and courteous. Our sisters must be conscious of how to listen, and respond in ways that encourage others to take part. Do you know that most people do not listen with the intent to understand? They listen with the intent to reply! If we would encourage each other and demonstrate temperance in opinions, speech and habits, we would do well to learn to listen with the intent of understanding.

Our character is basically a composite of our habits. Habits are consistent, often unconscious patterns, that constantly express our character and produce our effectiveness or lack. Our character depends on our ability to choose how we respond to what happens to us. We can be proactive and choose our behavior based on our values, or we can react to our circumstances. Sometimes, when we react, we don't demonstrate temperance, just temper!

Being proactive means taking initiative, and recognizing our responsibility to make things happen. The key to influencing others is by example, which flows out of our character.

Lastly, there is a little book entitled I Dare You, by William H. Danforth, the founder of the Ralston Purina Co. in St. Louis, which he wrote when he was the Chairman of the Board in 1931. The book is a compilation of the author's inspirational messages to his business family and personal friends. Danforth stressed to individuals, organizations, and businesses the importance of balancing the four-fold way of life: mentally, spiritually, physically, and socially. Change and improvement is possible, but as we say in P.E.O., we must aim at [it]. Habits are hard to change, but it can be done. Danforth's little book urges its reader to adopt this motto: 'Be your own self, at your very best, all the time.' Such a motto will require temperance in opinions, speech and habits. And so now?

I dare you!

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 8 - The Full Import of P.E.O.

The chief duty: For just a minute, consider thoughtfully the full import of P.E.O. Among the definitions for import is 'to bring in from an outside source, matters of significance or importance'.

Fern Stevens, PSP and member of Chapter G, found this article in the New York Times (dated sometime in 1977). It is entitled, 'Old Girls' Network Thriving'. Here is a quote from the article:

'Everybody knows about old boys' networks. But not infrequently in these days of intense focus on the forces that determine the destinies of women, the complaint can be heard that there is no female counterpart to these groups of men who 'sharing some common background of school or war' help one another through life. Yet there is such an organization, an organization created not in response to the resurgent feminism of the 1960s but in response to the ideals of seven young women of the 1860s.

Today, 110 years after it started, this old girls' network spreads across international boundaries and numbers 250,951 women, in every state, in the six provinces of Canada and abroad.

Its assistance to women is measured monetarily in the millions of dollars. Its impact on lives is immeasurable.

When a woman is invited to become a P.E.O. (and a part of the Old Girls' Network), she is told in pre-initiation counseling about the differences between our organization and others in the community. However, it is difficult to teach someone the 'full import of P.E.O.' in a short time. Women in America today have so many choices. Anne Morrow Lindbergh in her book 'Gift from the Sea' describes our privilege:

'Woman in large parts of the civilized world has been forced back by war, by poverty, by collapse, by the sheer struggle to survive, into a smaller circle of immediate time and space, immediate family life, immediate problems of existence. The American woman is still relatively free to choose the wider life. Plotinus was preaching the dangers of multiplicity of the world back in the third century. Yet the problem is particularly and essentially woman's. Distraction is, always will be, inherent in a woman's life.

For to be a woman is to have interests and duties, raying out in all directions from the central mother-core, like spokes from the hub of a wheel. The pattern of our lives is essentially circular. We must be open to all points of the compass; husband, children, career (sic), friends, home, community; stretched out, exposed, sensitive like a spider's web to each breeze that blows, to each call that comes. How difficult for us, then, to achieve a balance in the midst of these contradictory tensions, and

yet how necessary for the proper functioning of our lives. How much we need, and how arduous of attainment is that steadiness preached in all rules for holy living.'

Rock Story: Several years ago a professor was teaching a class about time management. He used a jar to illustrate the point. He placed some large stones in it, and then asked if the jar was full. After several in the class said yes, he pulled out some smaller pebbles and added them to the spaces in the jar. Again he asked the class if it was full. When the students answered yes, he pulled out some sand and poured it into the jar until it was full. He then asked the class again whether the jar was full. Again they answered yes. Then the professor reached down for a pitcher of water and filled the remaining space to the brim. He then asked the class what the point was. Immediately a student answered, 'You can always put more in.' The professor answered, 'No, that's not right. The point is you need to put the big stones in first.'

What determines what is significant or important? Our desire for personal growth, and adherence to the qualities of faith, love, purity, justice and truth aid us in meeting the challenges in the busyness of today's world. To quote Stephen Covey from his book, 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People':

'Self-centeredness is the opposite of paying attention to the development of self in the greater perspective of improving one's ability to serve, to produce, to contribute in meaningful ways. Building a character of total integrity and living the life of love and service that creates such unity isn't easy. It isn't a quick fix. But it's possible. By centering our lives on correct principles and creating a balanced focus between doing and increasing our ability to do, we become empowered in the task of creating effective, useful, and peaceful lives'for ourselves, and for our posterity.'

Sharing time with sisters can enrich this experience and allow us to savor the essence of good relationships. Goethe said,

'To know someone here or there with whom you can feel there is understanding in spite of distances or thoughts unexpressed, makes of this earth a garden.'

Learning from enlightened conversation with others can also challenge us and give us information to act upon. To quote Edmund Burke, an 18th century English statesman:

'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.'

What is significant about the P.E.O. network is that it is a network fostered by love. P.E.O. responds with five projects inspiring the personal growth of women. From a humble beginning millions of dollars have been invested in women's education and training. Mother Teresa said, 'We can do no great things, only small things with great love.' And William Henry Drummond, a 19th century Canadian physician and poet wrote, 'You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments you have really lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.'

The organization of P.E.O. with its structure, procedures and expectations expedites our business and encourages our relationships. Like a tent with many supporting poles, members assume responsibility and share in the camaraderie to create a unified organization. 'Life gives a secret garden of all that's rare and beautiful inside ourselves. We must only find a way to open the door and discover it.' (From 'The Secret Garden')

Sisters,

Consider thoughtfully 'the full import' of P.E.O.

Chapter G, GA, 2000

Part 9 : Our Influence in the Community

What is influence? Mr. Webster provides six definitions:

- An ethereal fluid thought to flow from the stars and to affect the action of men: later, a supposed emanation of occult power from stars.
- Emanation or effusion of a spiritual or moral force.
- The act or the power of producing an effect without apparent force or direct authority: as influence by suggestion.
- Power arising from station, character, wealth, etc.
- A person or thing that exerts influence, esp., considerable influence.
- Synonyms for influence: authority, prestige, weight, credit; all meaning power exerted over the minds or acts of others.

The subject of this program is a challenge. What did our seven Founders mean when they said,

'It shall be the chief duty of each member to consider thoughtfully the full import of P.E.O. This will include a sincere regard for our influence in the community, a careful consideration of feeling when speaking, and a determination to do all we can, at all times and under all circumstances to express a loving concern for each sister.'

The implications of these words are many. The levels at which you can apply this directive are many. We are sisters, children, mothers, grandmothers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, and chiefs. We are politically, spiritually, philanthropically, educationally active in our world. So how do we interpret these words to apply them to our private life, our P.E.O life, and our community life?

It is my task to tell you how. Here is an interpretation of 'sincere regard for our influence in the community'.

Influence in the community
Ain't that a ditty?

Workin' and playin' and
Livin' in the city.

Lookin' over our P.E.O. family tree,
Here's a poetic view of what I see.
There's a special ticker inside of you and me;
How it is placed there is a mystery.

It's a passion, a directive,
A commitment to things. We care!
A need to know, a want to grow,
And so we ask the questions:

Did it drop from the heavens?
Designed from above?
Of did it come from a brainstorm
Dreamed by your mother with love?

This special ticking of the ticker,
It's a mystery, a fable.
Annette-ized*, I'd call it.
Touched by an angel.

There are some questions to ask,
And the answers are few.
'Influence' -- 'Influenza'
Is it a form of the flu?

When you catch it, you're infected.
There is nothing you can do.
But pedal your influence
Wearing that P.E.O. shoe.

It drives you to do things,
To stand up in front.
Soon you're on the lead pony.
You're in charge of the hunt.

Your attitude is affected.
It rules your mind.
Choosing to march
In that stewardship line.

It's those choices you make,
When there's ringing in your ears,

From the words and the music
That accumulate through the years.

It's no wonder you volunteer
And overdo with the choices.
It's that 'five points' exposure,
Gad, there's no closure!

For the work that you do
Because of this flu,
Causes others to gasp,
They haven't a clue.

Where does it come from, where is it born?
It holds us up like those golden ears of corn,
That wave in the wind and reach for the sky,
It nourishes us like manna from God on high.

Look at yourself,
At the trouble you're in,
You're running a college,
And shepherding your kin.

You're baking like crazy,
Feeding the masses,
Visiting the sick,
And taking some classes.

Oh, and it's not just the service
And study you prefer.
I see bridge, tennis, singing, golf swinging,
It's a blur!

So step back and think
About your participation.
The community is watching
And assessing the situation.

They are confused about the source
Of your mission force.
But I know what it is:
It's that P.E.O. biz!

The business of caring and daring
To try something new.

To be confident and willing
To wear a bigger shoe.

What is the reason, ladies,
You're all buzzing about?
I'd hazard a guess,
Why you have such clout.

It's those words and music
Written by the Seven.
And a profound belief
In our God in heaven.

Ponder the chicken/ egg question.
That is tiresome to consider.
Like what makes you a runner?
Or what makes you a sitter?

You don't have to have an answer,
For the questioning is a waste of the mind.
Just think what you could be doing,
Where you could be investing your time.

There's work to be done!
People to see!
Happy times ahead,
We're growing that tree!

Where the women come for shade.
Where they share their gifts.
Where energy is renewed,
And where spirits always lift.

Our work is our joy!
Done quietly behind the stages.
And the world is a better place.
For this flu is contagious.

Who cares about the influence?
It's a by-product of the good.
Just sort of happens
When you're doing what you should.

It's one of those paradoxes
That will blow out your brain.

Don't try to figure it out,
It'll drive you insane.

Have faith in the future,
Learn from the past,
Love your sisters,
And have a blast!

Chapter G, GA, 2000

*The author's mother's name was Annette. She was a true P.E.O. in every sense of the name!

Part 10 : Expressing a Loving Concern

The theme for this year's programs has directed us to take an in-depth look at our 'Objects and Aims'. We began the year with the background of our statement of purpose, composed by Alice Bird in 1869. It was amazing that so few changes have been made since then. Our objects and aims have been variously described as 'a perfect pattern for our lives', 'a design for living', 'a mission statement', 'an inspiring covenant', 'the essence of P.E.O.', 'a cause beyond ourselves', and 'a description of positive living'.

While the P.E.O. statement of purpose has changed little over the years, the role of women has changed dramatically. Just consider the diversity of roles the sisters in our chapters have. One could safely say that the women in this century live enormously pressure-filled, power-packed lives. In the vernacular of the day, 'our plates are full'!

We must be discriminating in the activities and associations we choose for ourselves, for our personal enjoyment and enrichment. We are truly beleaguered with opportunities for general improvement! Members of many organizations are falling victim to the full plate syndrome, which can cause the organization to struggle and fade for lack of participation or declining membership. Why then, in each issue of THE P.E.O. RECORD, do we see photographs of new chapters organized?

The answer may be that we are not just another organization, but a sisterhood! And Alice Bird challenges us today, just as in the beginning days of P.E.O., to be more than nominal sisters. We are called to express a loving concern for each sister. This is a powerful challenge; we could say that it is a Christian principle applied to everyday living.

Polls have become part and parcel of our lives, so I decided to poll my sisters in order to determine the extent of our adherence to Alice Bird's challenge. The responses were overwhelming. Here are some of them:

We always hug, as if we had not seen each other for a year. I need that!

I never had a sister growing up. I relish my relationships with my P.E.O. sisters with whom I can share good times and bad.

I call it 'P.E.O. Magic'. When my mother died, God and my sisters helped me breathe again. Now P.E.O. has touched my children and the children of my sisters too. What a blessing we enjoy and have the privilege to pass on.

One of my sisters saved me when I discovered that I was being installed at the same meeting where I was serving as hostess!

My sweet sister provided all the food for the dedication service of my practice. When I asked her what I owed, she replied, 'This is my gift to you.'

I've had much loving concern expressed for me in my years in P.E.O., but never more than when I was 'laid up' with a broken leg.

Loving concern is an on-going expression in our chapter: phone calls, cards, kind words, hugs, a pat on the shoulder.

Every time a loved one died, I experienced the ultimate in loving concern from every chapter member. I was 'lifted up'.

All I'm saying is that if you are a P.E.O., and you are in need, you have 'real' sisters who will gather around you, and listen to you, and encourage you, and pray for you; what more could you ask?

One incident that comes my mind is when I became the chapter's treasurer (because P.E.O.s don't say no). I sat in my sister's kitchen, crying, as she patiently and kindly taught this 'grown woman' how to balance a checkbook.

When I was treasurer, my sister did everything without ever saying to me, 'You need to get it together!'

It's so nice that everyone understands that I can't come to all the meetings and seems genuinely glad to see me when I am able to come.

My sister let me stay at her home a few days each week while I was working in her town. During that time she was very interested in what I was doing, both at work and outside of work.

I have received so much loving concern over the years: food, phone calls, cards, chiefly sharing the delightful, never to be forgotten celebration of my 50 years 'in training'.

The one unforgettable memory that stands out is when a dear member of my family was terminally ill. The doctor had recommended hospice care. I agreed, but had to pray hard for the strength to meet this challenge. That is when my P.E.O. sisters became angels in disguise. For

seven long weeks there was food in the house, food for our physical strength, and food for our morale as well.

The most demonstrative example of loving concern was the group of Christmas carolers who serenaded me and my husband the year we both had serious health problems. They certainly brought us cheer in big smiles, songs, and hugs.

I especially remember the support given to me when my family was ill.

My first exposure to P.E.O. was after a personal tragedy in my family. P.E.O. became my support group for life.

The joy of being president was the support I received from my officers and the chapter. That was loving concern.

The first time I returned to the chapter after my surgery, I was met outside in the parking area with so many hugs and expressions of love. I can't tell you how much that meant to me. I'm sure it sped my healing along.

One of my sisters made a beautiful bouquet of spun sugar flowers for my daughter in law to carry at the wedding rehearsal. We carefully preserved the flowers and they have been on the top of all the babies' christening cakes.

Loving concern and care have transported me cross-country from one chapter to another.

I received a phone call everyday for several months after my husband passed away, words of cheer and comfort. If I was not there to answer, a loving message awaited me when I returned. I will never forget her caring for me in this special way until I could 'fly alone'.

In the words of Mother Teresa,

'When we all see God in each other, we will love one another as He loves us all. That is the fulfillment of the law, to love one another. This is all Jesus came to teach us, that God loves us, and that He wants us to love one another as He loves us.'
Alice Bird was an insightful young lady when she drafted our 'Objects and Aims'. 'To express a loving concern for each sister' is an integral part of 'General Improvement'. I believe it is the key ingredient!

Chapter G, GA, 2000