

NARRATOR:

P.E.O., born January 21, 1869
With the astrological sign
Of Aquarius -- which is said to signify
The unusual and to dignify
Progress in civilization.
An omen from the stars for P.E.O. just begun?
Progress has been earned
So much has been learned ---
But what of those irrepressible Founders of P.E.O. ---
Those seven women of long ago ---
If only I could hear them speak ---
See them, watch them seek
The great design of our Sisterhood
If only there were a way I could ---
The day was dreamy and still
My eyes felt heavy -- until --
I must have dozed off a bit
But then I roused and saw this scene -- to wit;
Iowa Wesleyan Campus where P.E.O. began --
A cold, bright day -- two women ran
Across the campus to the stile
There they stopped and sat awhile.
Their faces glowed, their laughter filled the air
Two happy women without a care.
But suddenly they grew serious
Their talk grew mysterious
They looked around for ones who might hear --
They whispered softly then gave a cheer
And once more laughing and gay
They ran back along the way.
The day grew colder, the wind still blew --
A light snow flurry began to blur my view
Above the ever-growing sound
I heard a voice and turned around --
A woman was standing there
Strong and lovely and fair
This is what she said:

HATTIE BRIGGS:

I am Hattie Briggs -- I sat upon that stile.
Franc and I talked girl talk for awhile.
What we'd wear to Church and what we'd do for fun
Then we grew quiet -- our talk seemed done --

Our mood dissolved
We thought of problems unresolved
And of agitation and frustration
Over a particular situation --
A stranger from Monmouth came
To organize a second group in her sorority name.
It seemed so wrong for someone
Outside to select a few -- but the deed was done.
Suddenly I heard myself say
"Let's do something today.
Let's show those Pi Beta Phis
That we, too, can organize.
Let's get Mary and the others, too --
Come on -- Let's quit talking -- let's do."
Franc looked shocked and then agreed
She had vision and was a witty, happy breed.
"Come on," said she, "let's run
It's time this deed was done."
So off we ran and formed our group
A happy, faithful, loving troop.
Seven of us in all setting the college on its ear --
Forming our group you still hold dear.
I only wore my star for seven years
But don't shed any tears.
It's the quality of life that counts
The quality, not the quantity that surmounts.
Any difficulties that may arise --
So in all you do remember that, and please be wise.
One other thought I'd like to leave is that
A woman must control her household thermostat
By controlling her own temper and mood
That way her family won't come unglued --
So remember, sisters down the line
When our smile blesses others it becomes divine.

FRANC ROADS:

Franc Roads is my name
Hattie and I weren't seeking fame
All that long time past --
Just something warm and true to last.
We Founders somehow seem to know
What goes on in P.E.O.
So I'm borrowing a phrase
From some of our latter days --

We hoped at least for a span of time
To help women "get off the dime."
We didn't want to follow Carrie Nation or her kind
We preferred to promote a woman's mind.
We just couldn't see ourselves
Knocking bottles off of shelves.
Tho' Hattie's great suggestion gave me pause --
I was sure we could succeed with our cause
I sketched the star that Alice Coffin wanted for our pin
We were ready to begin.
To announce ourselves dramatically
We made aprons at my Father's house -- systematically---
Following through our plans we marched down the aisle
Wearing our brightest smile
Our aprons and stars ablaze with P.E.O.
The curiosity and interest set us all aglow.
A great moment in our lives -- and happily yours--
We did the beginning -- the ground work chores.
We think of Hattie as faith-- she believed--
Through her we were conceived.
But somehow we needed to expand -- to grow --
Numbers are necessary to show
Some power and attain our goals
So we included townswomen and explained our roles.
In an ever-changing atmosphere life means growth and evolution.
We must let go of old ideas to find a better solution.
Our whole lives rest on the brink of discovery
Use the past when needed for recovery.
Keep the faith shining true
Whatever the problem -- love will see us through!

MARY ALLEN:

Hattie and Franc came dashing into my room
Excited, gay, full of vroom --
(What a lovely word -- I like its sound!)
Franc said, "Hear my heart pound?"
It's so excruciatingly much
Oh, Mary, Mary this is such -- It's such --
Mary it's the most -- Hattie thought of it -- Tell her, Hattie -- oops, you'd better sit --
This is really something -- just hear --."
"Give me a chance, Franc dear,
Hattie laughed and interposed --
I remained composed --
My friends called me the one with poise --

I didn't even make much noise --
I couldn't even find out what this was all about --
The only way to hush up Franc was to shout --
They were so astonished they fell upon my bed
And Franc rolled her eyes and held her head.
When Hattie could she told me of the light they hoped they'd lit
On the stile that afternoon and before she quit
I knew this was something big --
Something better than a knowledge of trig --
Our purposes could be lofty and great
With the right team we'd not disintegrate.
Who else should we ask
To help us with our task?
Allie Bird for wisdom and literary bent,
Alice Coffin for her sense of justice -- heaven sent,
And so our list grew until seven of us formed the Pleiades.
We felt as wise and capable as Socrates --
Education is important -- humor is a must
So I would leave you with a sacred trust:
The right kind of humor can unburden the world -- I just know --
Please take large doses of laughter for love's sake in P.E.O.

ALICE BIRD:

I am Alice Bird, nicknamed Allie
I reached my peak in literature -- math was my valley.
They tell me I have a questioning mind.
I'm always seeking answers hard to find.
The most challenging ones are my meat
Let's improve the world -- that's my beat --
So when Hattie, Franc, and Mary descended on me
I saw a vision and promptly joined the three.
We must have a pledge ceremony and a ritual --
Something beautiful and spiritual.
I helped with the ceremonies -- I liked to write --
It took some time to find the words -- meaningful and bright --
I'm proud of what we did back in 1869.
It seemed to me we created something very fine.
We had a lot of fun, too. We liked to play
We were a high-spirited lot -- and gay.
I was part of a quartet that entertained.
We did great things we thought -- few complained.
The Jedediah Club was our name
We gained some unusual fame --
When we sang at a Junior Class exhibition

People stamped their feet and lost their inhibition.
They shouted and laughed and clapped their hands.
We had a time meeting their encore demands.
The Civil War was finally done
Lincoln had been shot -- turmoil temporarily won.
Don't ever give up -- no matter how rough the way --
Precept upon precept -- step by step, day by day
Searching questing, always showing
Your true spirit of love and wisdom in P.E.O.ing.

ALICE COFFIN:

You know my name, Alice Coffin -- one of the seven.
I wanted the star for our pin -- a star straight from heaven.
Franc sketched it and lettered our P.E.O.
We preferred English letters and left them so.
I somehow get involved in singing with Ella --
"In the Starlight" was our big hit -- singing a capella.
We had such fun in the early days
With our calico party, and dinners -- had entertaining ways.
A strawberry party out of season
Gave us an excellent reason
To show our ingenuity and use our imagination --
My story is no exaggeration --
There were no strawberries anywhere
So we used oranges -- so who's to care?
Oranges or berries
Our fun never varies.
Methodists didn't dance in my day
And I loved to dance the night away
So I took a daring chance
And joined a Church where I could dance --
I joined the Episcopalians
I have my sober, serious side --
Life can't be all dip and glide.
I believe that man's imagination
Is God's instrument of creation.
I find that necessity is not the mother of inventions
But imagination beyond our ordinary conventions.
Our imaginations lead us to participate
As co-creators of our universe and fate.
We founders did have fun
So do you -- but P.E.O.s work is never done.
Use your imaginations and see what you can do --
What benefits from starshine and love show through!

SUELA PEARSON:

Suela Pearson is my name
In college I built my fame
As the singer of sentimental tunes
Full of moons and Juries.
Another -- "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still" --
Fascinating number if you will.
We were not always perfect -- not by a shot.
We met at Mary's one fine night
To make butterscotch candy -- that's all right --
But seven others came in and stayed --
We sang and ate and thus we strayed.
We should have sent them on their way
College rules forbid them to stay.
But we didn't and I'm glad --
If we'd been perfect you'd be sad!
So we were called before the President
And told to repent.
We repented as told, but we did it again!
We were high-spirited and we had a yen
For fun and frolic as well as high ideals --
Life needs a mixture before it congeals!
And sociability is a worth-while aim
It's an important part of the lifelong game.
Light the beauty that's inside each of us
And we become beautiful without any fuss.
Thus it is that we in P.E.O. endeavor
To light a flame of beauty to last forever.

ELLA STEWART:

I am Ella Stewart, one of the Pleiades
Or, if you prefer, one of the aborigines --
(In P.E.O., that is, not in anthropology.)
I taught music but not musicology --
That came after I'd done my thing.
I used music to alleviate the sting
Of life for lost, wayward boys.
One of greatest joys
Was to find a way to teach
So that I could truly reach
The defeated and the down --
Oh, yes, I see you frown --
We had our juvenile delinquents even then.
Science changes but how much do men?

I gave the pledge to Alice Bird
Who then read the word
Initiating the six and here were we
Small, happy, and full of glee.
Here, then, our P.E.O. was officially begun
In the music Room at Iowa Wesleyan.
If there were just one thought I'd leave with you
It would be, serve others through love, pure and true.

NARRATOR:

I rubbed my eyes and sat up straight
It must be getting late.
The sun was gone, the air was chill
Did I sleep against my will?
So what? I learned a lot
And my wish -- I got!
I heard the Founders talk
And saw them walk
They came alive for me
Who cares -- dream or reality?
I'm glad they were imps sometimes
And got out of line sometimes
For that makes them so magnificent
And keeps their work so significant --
Those dickensy women gave us faith, love, and loyalty
Reverence, wisdom, justice and purity.
That is a heritage that can easily be
Passed along for ten-times one-hundred and three.

Source: Margaret Elms, IO, CA, 1994