

AN INTERVIEW WITH PEGGY COBB—A P.E.O. SISTER FOR 75 YEARS!  
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Submitted by Judy Hardin, President, Chapter B, Georgia

Meet Peggy Cobb, age 109, author, illustrator, mother, teacher, and a P.E.O. sister for 75 years!

Peggy was born in 1915 in Minnesota to college-educated parents and grew up with five siblings in a town of around 250 residents. She earned a bachelor's degree in Art Education and later a Master's degree in Art. She was married to Jake Cobb for 59 years and had three children—Peter, Bill, and Katy. Katy was born with disabilities. The family was advised by the doctors to place Katy in a home, as was the norm at that time. Peggy would do nothing of the sort, and Katy became a beloved family member for 45 years. Upon her death, Peggy started the Katy Cobb Music Therapy Program at Union Hospital to honor her memory and love of music.

Peggy moved to the Atlanta area to be closer to her children in 2003. She reports that many P.E.O. chapters invited her to join, but she chose Chapter B because it just felt right. Peggy continues to love her sisters and remains involved in our Chapter. With the help of her son, Bill Cobb, she attends at least one meeting a year. Peggy responds to Evites for meetings and socials, buys pecans for our fundraisers, recruits potential members, and enjoys visits from her sisters. She remains remarkably active, spending time on her computer each day and remaining interested in the world. Peggy is hard of hearing but communicates by reading a speech-to-text translator. Peggy embraces technology and uses it daily! She strives to learn something new every day.

Peggy has written three children's books—A Bat Named Belinda, Design and Sign (an art activity), and most recently, Painter Pan, a story about a five-inch tall elfish character she created in 1943. Her original 1950s Painter Pan watercolors fill the book with remarkable color and happiness.

Peggy once told me that she has belonged to many organizations throughout her lifetime—Delta Kappa Gamma, Sigma Alpha Iota, church groups, and other professional organizations. She has had to give most of them up over the years, but Peggy said, "I want you to know that I would NEVER, EVER, EVER give up P.E.O. It would break my heart because it means so much to me."

Peggy Cobb is a living testament to a life of purpose, creativity, and dedication to the spirit of the P.E.O. Sisterhood. At 109 years old, she continues to inspire those around her. A proud member of P.E.O. for an incredible 75 years, Peggy continues to embrace the mission of P.E.O. and its sisterhood.

I hope you enjoy the following transcript of our interview with our remarkable Chapter B sister.

### DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR INITIATION IN 1949?

Oh listen, I can remember! By the way, back in the old days. P.E.O. was never mentioned. That's why it was called a secret organization. I can remember so well the person that initiated me. I can almost see her face. Everything had to be memorized. She would say I was chosen, not because I had done anything so great, but because I... I use the word epitome because I can't think of another one—I epitomize all of the standards that P.E.O. stood for. Back in those days, too... do any of you remember a Marguerite Smith? She became a national officer. Well Marguerite and I got our invitations on the same day. She was initiated into Chapter Z and I was initiated into Chapter K in Indiana.

### WHAT WERE YOUR MEETINGS LIKE?

Everything was so formal. A typical meeting as I can recall (back when I could hear. You know this hearing loss is a bummer—a bummer but I have to cope). It was very, very formal so that's all I have about that.

Bill was a baby when I was initiated. I had a wonderful woman who helped take care of Bill and helped me with everything. That's how I was able to attend the meetings.

A typical meeting in 1950 was very, very formal. I guess that's the best way I can describe it.

### DID YOU DRESS UP? DID YOU WEAR GLOVES?

Oh, here is something I remember. No one was allowed to wear hats and that was the day when hats were the thing! We could go to meeting with the hat on, but believe me, we had to take the hat off because you weren't allowed to wear hats.

When I think about it today, most of the meetings are formal. I mean they follow a certain routine and so on. You see, I haven't been able to go to meetings today, but do they still follow the President's Book? You know, in one way, that's kind of good. I'm sure they followed the book back then. I think that is unchanged.

### WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS DID YOU HAVE?

I don't know how it is today, but the programs were before the meeting and the programs varied. I can remember the programs and I was going to write them down because Peggy Cobb was not cut out to be an officer. I was the Chaplain once and I was the Guard once,

but that was it. But let me tell you something. Peggy Cobb gave a LOT OF PROGRAMS! These are the things I was going to write down before you guys came—the kind of programs I did. I did one on Paul Revere and his silver and I had to do a lot of research on that one. Of course, all of you know about Painter Pan (Peggy's book, *Painter Pan*, was just published in 2024, but she has told the story of this fictional impish character for many, many years.) I did programs on Painter Pan. Gee, I had a list of about five programs, but I can't remember them now.

### DID YOU EVER DO A PROGRAM ON GARDENING, COOKING, OR ART?

I never did, but I had a friend who did a program on cooking that was a play on words—"Cooking Up Ideas." It wasn't cooking, cooking.

### HOW DID P.E.O. CONCENTRATE ON ITS PHILANTHROPIC PROJECTS DURING YOUR MEETINGS? DID YOU HAVE COMMITTEES TO WORK ON THE PROJECTS?

I honestly can't remember. I think the one who could answer that the best would be this gal right here—(points to Ruth Anne Paradice amid laughter.)

### HOW DID YOU FIND CANDIDATES FOR THE SCHOLARSHIPS? WHAT KIND OF FUNDRAISING DID YOU DO TO FUND THESE SCHOLARSHIPS?

As I shuffle the papers for Peggy to read them more easily, Peggy says, "Oh, boy, you are so organized. I did go over this once, before you got here."

Our candidates for the scholarships—that was really, really something because that is one of the big projects. P.E.O. had these projects for high school and college and everything. Your husband (pointing to Ruth Ann Paradice) was connected with Georgia Tech and it was through Georgia Tech that we found candidates. (Peggy is remembering Chapter B's early participation when she transferred to our chapter.)

### DID YOU HAVE ANY CANDIDATES IN INDIANA?

We didn't have any candidates in Indiana. Ruth Anne asked, "Did you have any committees to find candidates for the other scholarships? PCE? STAR Scholar? IPS?" Peggy replies, "My remarkable memory is not so remarkable, I'll tell you!"

### CAN YOU RECALL ANY PARTICULARLY OUTSTANDING OR MEMORABLE EVENTS FROM YOUR MEETINGS?

All I remember is when we would talk about these candidates (referring to Scholar Award candidates). They were so outstanding and it was new kind of technology. I don't remember any specific candidates. This is where it gets muddled up, up here.

### WHAT WAS THE DEMOGRAPHIC MAKEUP OF THE P.E.O. MEMBERS IN YOUR CHAPTER DURING THE 50S, 60S, AND 70S?

The meetings were very formal. I mean, they were serious! Most of the members were from the business community. That I do remember.

Follow up question—

### WERE THERE MEMBERS FROM ANY OTHER RACE OR ETHNIC GROUPS?

Back in the early days, I don't remember ANY other races. That's changed dramatically. There were never any members from another race.

### HOW DID BROADER SOCIETAL CHANGES DURING THESE DECADES IMPACT THE P.E.O. SISTERHOOD?

In my personal view, I think we're all enriched by diversification and actually, I've been color-blind all my life. It's a person that you see. I always remember To Kill a Mockingbird. It was always one of my favorite books because it was based on a true story.

### IS THERE ANYTHING FROM THE P.E.O. CULTURE OF THAT TIME THAT YOU WISH WAS STILL PRESENT TODAY?

With my hearing the way it is, I have not been able to go the meetings so let me go back to when I was initiated. I went into Chapter K in Indiana and Marguerite Smith was initiated into Chapter Z. We didn't know one thing about P.E.O. Nobody ever talked about P.E.O. so I remember how secret it was. One time I made an off-hand remark—"I've known about P.E.O. for years." Boy, I had people coming at me—"What had you heard?" "What had you heard?" "What had you heard?" That took me aback! I told them I didn't know anything about the organization. All I knew were the people and the people are the ones I related to.

Follow-up questions:

### SO YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE SECRETIVE PART?

NO, I did not like the secretive part!

### YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD CHANGE IN P.E.O. TODAY?

Yes, that's a real good change.

### WHEN DID YOU JOIN CHAPTER B? HOW DID YOU CONNECT WITH OUR CHAPTER?

I would have to get the Chapter B records to find out exactly. But how did I happen to be in Chapter B? When I moved away from Indiana to the Atlanta area, there was chapter after chapter after chapter who invited me to a meeting. I think P.E.O. is almost like any other group, you feel more comfortable with one group than the other. I don't know if they still do that, but don't you think that's a good idea? You get invited to several different ones. I was invited to join several different ones.

### WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT CHAPTER B?

It was just a feeling. Don't you think you have a feeling where you really feel comfortable?

INTERVIEWER RESPONDS—It's still the same today!

PEGGY: LET ME ASK YOU GUYS THIS—WHEN PEOPLE TALK ABOUT P.E.O., DO THEY WHISPER?

We reply, "No."

THEY TALK ABOUT P.E.O. AS BEING A GROUP?

We reply, "Yes!" and Peggy smiles.

PEGGY CONTINUES: I HAVE A NIECE WHO HAS MOVED BACK TO MINNESOTA—MARY JO RAJALA. SHE WOULD MAKE A WONDERFUL P.E.O.

Interviewer: I will help you. There is a form called "Introduction of a Woman Who is Not a P.E.O." We would need her name, address, phone number and email.

Peggy: Oh that would be wonderful.

Peggy (still seeking members for P.E.O) :

There is a woman here who is a therapist. She would be a great P.E.O.

Interviewer: We met her! Peggy, you invited us here to meet her a few months ago. We really liked her and invited her to attend one of our luncheons and programs. She told us she was interested, but that she had gone back to work full time and would have to wait.

Peggy: Was she already asked? Oh, that's good!

THE P.E.O. LEADERSHIP AT BOTH THE INTERNATIONAL AND STATE LEVELS ARE MAKING A CONCERTED EFFORT TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE ACROSS ALL WALKS OF LIFE. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS?

I don't have any opinion so can I ask you? What do you think? Do you think it's good? We reply, "Yes!" Peggy replies, "Then I'll join you!" People say, "What keeps me going?" I always say if you can learn something new. I've already activated my mind and have learned something from you guys today.

YOU ONCE TOLD ME YOU'VE BELONGED TO MANY, MANY ORGANIZATIONS AND THAT OVER THE YEARS YOU HAVE SLOWLY DROPPED ALL THOSE MEMBERSHIPS EXCEPT FOR P.E.O. WHY DO YOU WANT TO STAY IN P.E.O.?

I can tell you exactly—it's the people. If I was to drop P.E.O., I would feel just terrible. I would feel a loss of friendships with those I've known and loved all these years. I would never, ever, EVER drop my P.E.O. Every time I think of P.E.O. I think of the objects and aims. I think those say a whole volume about P.E.O. Anyhow, I don't ever want to lose you guys even if I can't get to the meetings.

WE LOVE YOUR FAMILY MOTTO: FURNISH YOUR MIND WELL AND YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO LIVE. CAN YOU GIVE US SOME MORE INSIGHTS ON HOW TO LIVE A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE?

I've been asked this over and over again. I always say, "Be flexible and you won't get bent out of shape." and then "Humor, don't leave home without it."

Did I ever tell you about my mother? Back before she was a teenager, she studied old people and watched the ones she wanted to be like and the ones she didn't want to be like. Have I told you about the poem she wrote? I'll have to find it so you can read it at one of your meetings. She studied old people and one thing she observed was they would tell the same thing over and over and over again. Mama was so sick of hearing the same thing over and over when she was a little kid that it was hard to get her to tell us something that we already knew.

YOUR PARENTS WERE COLLEGE EDUCATED—THAT'S VERY UNUSUAL FOR THAT TIME. WHAT WERE THEY LIKE?

I grew up with the idea that everyone should be educated—women as well as men. This was just something that was part of my growing up. (All five of her siblings got college degrees.)

Also, Mama would see people with their skin carelessly washed and boy, we got scrubbed within an inch of our life.

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

I had one brother. Fritz was the youngest of the family. I had four sisters. Three of them older. I was number four of the five girls. I remember my sister was 12 when my brother was born. A boy at her school told her, "Well, I bet there won't be any more kids in your family. They finally got a boy." People used to say, "Can you imagine being the brother to all these girls?"

### YOU WENT TO COLLEGE TO BE A TEACHER. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

I tell you, I never wanted to be a teacher. I loved art! I wanted to go to a really good art school. Back in those days, there was never any market for those with an art degree and never any market to get a job. My only alternative was teaching.

### WHAT WAS YOUR HUSBAND'S NAME AND HOW DID YOU MEET HIM?

My husband's name was Jake Cobb. How I met him? I wish there were words to describe him. The way I met Jake was it was just like it was supposed to be. He was working on a degree at George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee which is now Vanderbilt University. He was so curious about the name Vanstrom (Peggy's maiden name.) He had a picture in his mind of a tall, gangly, clumsy blonde Swede. I was chosen by my school to represent them at a college in Nashville. I had never been below the Mason Dixon line. Jake had never been above the Mason Dixon line because he was from North Carolina. The college told Jake if you want to meet these candidates, read their letters. He chose my name, Peggy Vanstrom and somebody else from New York. I missed my train. My sister had got me a ticket because I had to be there for a meeting so I took a plane from Chicago. He went to meet me and was looking for this tall blonde Swede and he got the shock of his life. I was very appropriately dressed and had on a big picture hat. Two older people got off the plane and then I did. Jake came up to me and asked me my name. During the three-day meeting, I was always assigned to Jake's car to see the Parthenon or other sightseeing things when there was a little break. At the end of that visit, he told his family, "I have met the girl that I am going to marry." Two years later, we did! There is a word I can't think of that means it was kind of just supposed to happen. "Destiny?" Yes!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDREN. YOUR FIRST BOOK, A BAT NAMED BELINDA, WAS ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER, KATY. YOU RAISED A DAUGHTER WITH DISABILITIES IN THE 50S. YOUR PROGRESSIVE ATTITUDE KEPT HER AT HOME WITH YOUR FAMILY WHEN AT THE TIME, DOCTORS WERE TELLING PARENTS TO PUT THEIR CHILD IN AN INSTITUTION. WE SO ADMIRE THAT! TELL US ABOUT KATY.



Peggy smiles and turns to me and says to my surprise, "You were a special ed teacher, right?" I said, "Yes! You remembered that!" Well, we were told by this doctor, this specialist that Katy would never walk and she would probably never talk. You be wise to find some place for Katy. Well, Katy was just a pretty, little doll and I was darned if I was going to put her somewhere. She was the best thing that could ever have happened in our family. When I think of Katy with her disability, I can think of nothing but happiness. She was incapable of hate or worry or anything. Her heart was just love. Katy died at age 45 from undiagnosed stomach cancer. She had qualified for a group home and was just joyful all the way through. The doctor who operated thought he could give her a couple of good years in a nursing home. I said to Bill, "Can you imagine Katy in a nursing home?" She could climb, she could ride a two-wheeler without guide wheels. She could do all kinds of things. I kept wondering if we were involved in getting rid of placing people in institutions. I also wonder about the people who were just lost that had so much to offer.

The doctors were baffled when things started going wrong. Her lungs filled with fluid and her heart started to falter.

Katy just loved music. It was her life. So when we knew we were going to be losing Katy, we set up a music therapy program in her memory at Union Hospital in Terre Haute. People who never heard of Katy will benefit through music because of her. I think that's great.

Katy loved the Overture from Romeo and Juliet. Katy could carry a tune and knew the words to "I Left my Heart in San Francisco." She knew all the words and she could sing! Yes, Katy could sing! So anyway, that's my story about Katy. I just think good thoughts about her.

**PEGGY, RUTH ANNE WANTS TO KNOW WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN LIFE?**

My biggest challenge in life is to keep active mentally. You see, I'm pretty well wheelchair bound. I can use a walker to get around that way, but this is it. The saddest thing that I see in all this complex is people whose minds have been so good and finally they just aren't interested. There's so much apathy. I really think that I'm challenged. But you guys, your visit today has been a wonderful challenge to me! After you leave, I'm going to go over all these things again. I am reminded of the woman from Canada who is 100 years old. They asked her, "How in the world can you still be teaching?" Peggy emphatically gestures with both hands—She said, "You have to have a PASSION for life and learn new things and then share your ideas." That's what I try to do.

**PEGGY, YOU USE THE COMPUTER ALL OF THE TIME. YOU ALWAYS RESPOND TO OUR EVITES AND YOU PARTICIPATE IN OUR FUNDRAISERS. WE'RE PROUD OF YOU FOR THAT!**



My connection with the outside world really is the computer, but also I got one of these CapTel phones. Those are for the hard of hearing. Like with Bill, I'll telephone him and the phone will ring and he will answer. On my CapTel phone, there are the words.

PEGGY IS TIRED AND THE INTERVIEW IS CONCLUDED. HERE ARE SOME PICTURES OF OUR AMAZING CHAPTER B SISTER! KEEP GOING STRONG, PEGGY!



Peggy displaying 2 of the 3 books she has published.



Peggy in front of a collage display all of her "press releases."



Peggy at a P.E.O. meeting, celebrating her 109th birthday.



Kathleen giving Peggy her 75 year sash and crown at the 2024 convention.



Peggy exclaims, "Look at all my sisters!"



Peggy in courtyard greeting Scholarship recipients.