THE BEAUTY OF SISTERHOOD
by
Bernadine Forsyth, Chapter SA, Colfax, Iowa
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This is a program that celebrates sisterhood. It is timeless.
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I have interspersed many of my personal thoughts with articles and poems from earlier P.E.O. records. I would suggest to our newer members that you keep your Records for the articles and ms fit many occasions. I have often used them in church and circle lessons or programs.

I would like to begin by reading a poem I found in quite an old Record and believe it fits perfectly for this occasion.

The Beauty of Sisterhood
To sing the songs of joy and harmony in our Sisterhood.
To practice the virtues of Faith, Love, Purity, Justice, and Truth.
To listen with our hearts to the needs and desires of others.
To learn to count our daily blessings.
To be thoughtful enough to communicate our loving concern for each sister.
To light candles of praise for work well done.
To speak words that encourage and words that comfort.
To know that it is only through giving that we receive.
To be loyal to the ideals of P.E.O. May this be our P.E.O. symphony of love!

Since 1869 when seven girls took vows together and P.E.O. came into being, each member has entered the sisterhood through the challenging experience of initiation. It is a time of discovery and dedication, but it is also a joyous occasion as each new sister is welcomed into the warmth and friendliness of chapter life.

At your initiation you became a member of a vast organization, rich in tradition, far reaching in influence. Its membership includes many thousands of women in hundreds of chapters in the United States and Canada. Yet whenever you meet with P.E.O.'s, you will find the same affection and kindness you have found in your own chapter. This unity is based on our belief in the same ideals, adherence to the same regulations and the observance of the same traditions and customs. Then too, P.E.O. is not just another club or women's group; it is a sisterhood in special meaning of the word. They may even help to explain our devotion to P.E.O.

In an organization as old and closely-knit as ours, customs and traditions have developed through the years to be passed on to each new P.E.O. We all know that our husbands have no formal organization as such, but long ago it was recognized that their patience, loyalty and cooperation played an important part in the success of P.E.O. and they are affectionately called B.I.L. 's or brothers-in-law, since we are sisters to each other. Whenever we meet another sister, whatever her age or station in life, we are to feel free to address her by her given name.

We occasionally hear very amusing stories about ideas that people have about the meaning of our letters. Many are funny and ridiculous combinations of words suggested, but even these we do not deny but laughingly say, "Your guess is as good as any." While there is much in our ritual that is known
only to ourselves, there rarely is any purpose served by stressing the secret aspects. When people ask about the meaning of our letters and what we believe in, it is more courteous to them and shows greater respect to answer, "It is a philanthropic, educational organization." This gives an explanation of our purpose and offers a simple, dignified way to answer a well meant question.

There is another unwritten precept which we all encounter. Whenever we are asked to do something in P.E.O., we do not refuse lightly. There is good psychology behind this precept. We may feel we have neither the time or the ability to carry out an assignment or fill an office, yet there seems to be time to do the things we really want to do and we do learn by doing. When we willingly and cheerfully take part in the work of the chapter, we are enabled to use what talents we have and we often develop new ones.

Long ago a beloved P.E.O. gave this advice, "We must look for basic integrity and those qualities of character which will last through the years when choosing a friend to become a sister in P.E.O. Charm, possessions and accomplishments are of course desirable, but look further for those endearing qualities of tolerance, unselfishness and the ability to cooperate with others." If a woman has these traits, she will be a good sister in any chapter for there is more to being a P.E.O. than regular attendance at meetings and entertaining once a year.

In a lighter vein, there is an anecdote about a young woman who was invited to attend a P.E.O. event. She felt it was an important occasion and asked what she should wear. The P.E.O. who had invited her had been a member for many years and she smiled when she said, "Wear something you can forget about so you can be yourself." Some of the best-dressed ladies I have ever known are P.E.O.'s but some of the P.E.O.'s may wear the same dress all year. I really never noticed.

I quote now directly from the article I mentioned from which I have taken much of this paper, "Love - - P.E.O." by Laverne Hartley, past president of Virginia State Chapter. "In my own experience in P.E.O. the words 'to seek growth' have particular significance and I have found this to be true in the lives of many P. E. O. sisters. As a tree sends it branches higher, its roots grow deeper. In the beginning when we are young and vigorous and have much energy to pour into chapter activities, we feel the wonder and the goodness of our great organization and are proud to be a part of it. We feel we understand what P.E.O. is all about. There is so much we can see -- the towering branches of our philanthropies, a wide spreading influence, its great accomplishments. But as the years go by, our understanding of P.E.O. deepens, just as the tree sends down its roots. As time takes inevitable tolls in our lives, there are empty spaces filled because of P.E.O. and we begin to realize that the real meaning of our sisterhood does not lie in those things to which we point with pride, but to the deep and secret growth within our hearts and the love of our sisters. Among women who believe in the ideals of P.E.O. there must be no pettiness. Small annoyances are crowded out by love."

P.E.O. came into being because seven girls were friends and wanted that friendship to deepen and endure throughout their lives and to be of help to others. Through the years it has grown in numbers and strength and power but the spiritual beauty, the idealism, the loving spirit are just as real and beautiful today as in the days of our founders.

It seems to me that the blessings of P.E.O. are three-fold. The first comes quickly to mind. It is an iron-clad guarantee of friendship! I shall call it "instant friendship". The very moment we become
P.E.O.s we acquire a circle of friends, special friends, each one guaranteed to be worthy of her place in our circle of friendship. The second is that we are always needed! Even on our busiest days, I think we would all feel a little lost if we weren't sometimes really needed. We must remember to look around us and be aware of when we are needed. Sometimes the most obvious needs are the more easily missed. Many times we needed to share joy as well as sorrow. Many times even just an understanding glance, or the squeeze of a hand, can change a disappointment to a moment of comfort and relief. The third blessing falls into place most naturally, for as we have responded to a loving concern for each other, we have grown! We have increased our capacity for loving and being loved and we have a richer, fuller life. How lucky, how very lucky, we are to hold membership in an organization related so closely to the quality of living! Yes, we are truly blessed in the beauty of P.E.O.

Sometimes I look into the sky
And see one special winking eye
That makes me certain that its glow
Is watching every P.E.O.
And, from its vantage point above,
It links the stars we wear with love.