

Remarks by Incoming President

Helen Wolfmeyer, AU

May 2, 2020

Let me begin by sharing a bit about my journey to this day which really began many years ago with two strong independent women and my role models - my grandmother and my mother.

Both my grandmother and my mother taught me not only the value of education but the qualities of perseverance & determination. And above all they were true examples of the importance of faith, family and friendship.



Agnes Krogssund Sime my maternal grandmother immigrated from Oslo, Norway by herself at age 21. She lived with her uncle near Decorah, Iowa. While she never shared her reason for leaving Norway (although there is a family legend of a broken romance) she was determined to embrace America. Grandma taught herself the English language by reading David Copperfield – a book she knew well. She worked at Luther College in Decorah, moving to Des Moines to work for a family in their home and after some time moved back to the Decorah area where she met my

Grandfather, Tom Sime, also a Norwegian immigrant.

My mother Alma Sime Sharp was the oldest of their three surviving children. Education was very important in their family; area school ended in 8th grade so Mom attended a boarding school in Minnesota for high school, went Iowa State Teacher's College (now University of Northern Iowa) for Normal Training and became a teacher in a one-room country schoolhouse. A few years later she went back to ISTC for a specialized degree in art education and taught art in elementary school in Newton, Iowa where she met my father, Roy Sharp a local farmer.



Mom and Dad settled on the family farm living in the same house my dad moved into when he was 3 years old. Together they raised 5 children - 4 boys and me – the youngest and the only girl. (A happy sidenote - my nephew is managing the same family farm and today is raising his family in the same house.) As most farm kids were, my brothers and I were members of our local 4-H clubs – back when you joined either “a boys club or a girls club”. For those of you who have shared this experience you may remember the 4-H pledge –“I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living - for my club, my community, my country and the world.” Club members recited the pledge together as each meeting began. To me they were words to live by and they have “stuck” with me since.

Having had such a positive experience with an organization based on these values and growing up in a home where we were encouraged to seek higher education and supported to find our own path, it was an easy decision for me to become a part of a woman's organization with the virtues of Faith, Love, Purity, Justice and Truth as well as one committed to empowering women through educational opportunities. I can't help but feel that empowerment and our virtues go hand in hand! When we look closely at the numbers, we can clearly see the impact of P.E.O. Annually, P.E.O.s raise around \$7million in total for our projects and Cottey College. And, here in New Jersey alone our totals bear repeating --- a total of \$106,896 for International projects and \$4410 for the state projects. Due to any number of circumstances, a chapter may feel like they are insignificant because they can't donate as much as they think should or even what they thought they could when doing the annual budget. We must stop that thinking ---because together we made a great impact through the donations. Every little bit helps! Together we can and DO make a difference; we are a powerful group of women! While we talk finances, here is another amazing aspect of P.E.O. that I like to tout – we are a no debt organization. Totally debt free, including Cottey College. In my opinion – that speaks to commitment, dedication and certainly power.

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My P.E.O. path since 1988 has led me to this place today. A position to experience with all of you the history and legacy of P.E.O. a sisterhood that is like no other women's group I know. We empower women to excel through educational opportunities, we empower women through support of each other and we empower women through fellowship & friendship. I want us all here in New Jersey to feel "The Power of P.E.O. – Embrace It – Share It –Live It."

We are at a time when our numbers are just holding steady – maybe on some shaky legs – but we can increase our numbers and strengthen those legs. How do we do it? We do it together – together we can all feel the Power of P.E.O. and here are some challenges to get us on our way in 2020 and into 2021:

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- 1) **Embrace The Power of P.E.O.** – Begin by reviewing your chapter's history...when did it begin, what are some of your chapter's highlights over the years, enjoy your chapter's story and share it in your chapter and throughout the State. We all have a story to tell!! Celebrate how P.E.O. began with a mere 7 young women and continues today 151 years later as women help women reach the stars. Secondly, take on a leadership role in your chapter and/or at the state level. You never work alone; the rewards are many! Be a part of P.E.O. in New Jersey to building our legacy and making history!
 - 2) **Share The Power of P.E.O.** - It is so satisfying to empower women through educational opportunities – how many applicants for projects did you sponsor last year? Why not Increase that number by at least one this year! In addition, each member should strive to give the gift of P.E.O. – keep the "YOU + 2" campaign alive. It is good to bring one; but to bring 2 adds strength in numbers. It may take a while to bring in a new member; keep inviting her to your socials, talk about P.E.O., share some past Records (our magazine -not some of your old LPs) with her and someday she too will become a Sister.
 - 3) **Live The Power of P.E.O.** –Start something new for your chapter, something besides your monthly business meetings. Try a once-a-month activity -- a book group, an afternoon walking/hiking group, a breakfast outing, a yoga session....and invite friends, neighbors, relatives and ALL sisters – active, non-participating and inactive – but don't just invite them – pick them up and bring them! And, consider giving the gift of the RECORD to newly inactive members to show them you care and want them to keep informed about P.E.O.

I truly believe in The Power of P.E.O. -- our 150-year history and the legacy our Founders established prove that. I welcome your enthusiasm, I encourage your participation, I cherish your support and I look forward to the year ahead. Thank you!