

OUR HEAVENLY FOUNDERS

The scene is laid in Heaven. Seven girls are sitting around on Cloud 10.

Props needed:

telescopes,	lap tops,	white robes,
wings,	microphones,	binoculars,
chairs,	sheets,	
screen with light blue plastic over it,		
clouds on sticks coming from behind the screen, signs saying Cleveland, Ohio and		
Equal Rights for Women in Heaven		

The scene is set in Heaven. Seven girls are sitting around (two may be standing amidst all kinds of equipment and machinery – telescopes, computers, sound equipment, etc.)

NARRATOR: Once again Chapters DU and EC welcome you to Founders Day ____ (year). This year instead of outside entertainment our committee decided to have a program on the founders. We rewrote an existing skit and hope you enjoy finding some things you did not know about the original seven. As we honor our founders...we also hope you will take time to remember the generations of women since our founders who have developed P.E.O. so that you and I can have the gift of membership. And now may we present.....**Our Heavenly Founders.**

HATTIE: It's wonderful to have all seven of us together again! And a miracle that I was able to find you, scattered as you are throughout the heavens. However, my new computer told me exactly where to find you when I fed it a description of each of you.

There you were, Alice, at the Star Theater, directing the play ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN! I hear it is a big hit. How well I remember your dramatic ability at school. (Alice takes a bow.)

I found you, Ella, at Happy Haven working with unruly boys, saving them from being sent down to Hades. You have helped so many boys with your love and understanding.

Suela, you are as pretty and charming as ever and just perfect in your job as a greeter at the Pearly Gates. You make every newcomer feel so welcome.

Alice, with you as a teacher at the Garden of Eden School, we know that each child is receiving the best education possible and that you are adored by every one of your pupils.

And there you were, Franc, marching back and forth in front of the men's Golden Throne Club carrying a sign reading – Equal Rights for Women in Heaven.

(Franc holds up the sign and the others say: We support you in your efforts.)

Mary, I should have known where to find you...at the Paradise Methodist Church carrying on your Christian work. You have been such a devoted church worker.

What am I doing on Cloud 10? Well, you know I was homemaker before I winged my way up to heaven. Not long ago I became bored and restless and wanted to improve myself so I studied computers. Now I'm in charge of all these machines here on Cloud 10. Enough about me.

It is hard to believe that _____ years ago we were all at Iowa Wesleyan. What wonderful memories we have.

Suela: We were normal teenagers who giggled, flirted and broke rules.

Ella: Remember how vain we were? Long hair was the standard but after we went to a lecture given by a popular woman and saw her cropped hair we all cut our hair and wore it that way all through college. It was said that curls from Mary Allen and Hattie could be found in many a man's pocket, gleaned from the barber shop floor.

Alice Bird: We were nonconformists also. Remember when we broke the rules and asked the astronomy prof if we could stay up all night and watch the falling stars? Then the boys arrived, brought food, built a fire and we sang songs. Ella, can you lead us in that favorite song we used to sing? It was Weevily Wheat, I think.

Ella: It's "step her to your weevily wheat, step her to your barley, step her to your weevily wheat, to bake a cake for Charley. Charley, he's a fine young man. O Charley, he's a dandy. He loves to hug and kiss the girls and feed 'em on good candy.

(All join in) The higher up the cherry tree, the riper grow the cherries. The more you hug and kiss the girls, the sooner they will marry." *(All clap)*

Suela: We even danced the Virginia Reel. We danced so long and saw so many stars in each others eyes that to this day not one of us knows whether the stars fell from the sky or not. However, we didn't fool our teacher and our report the next day was a shambles.

Alice Bird: And as always our punishment was the lowering of our grades.

Mary Allen: And, we were frivolous. Our parties were elegant and famous with invitations, formal receiving lines, programs and gold and white decorations. Franc, you would do an oration on "The Emancipation of Women" followed by Ella singing a beautiful song. And if by chance during the evening, a gentleman became too insistent, one of you could signal for help by touching her pin!!

Alice Coffin: And that wasn't always easy as we wore our pin anywhere. Sometimes in our hair attached to a comb and sometimes we gave it to a gentleman friend.

Franc: Remember how mischievous we were that evening we seven accidentally met at Mary Allen's house and made a huge batch of butterscotch... much more than we could eat. Soon seven male students walked in and Mary received them cordially when by college rules she should have put them out at once.

Mary Allen: The candy vanished and the rest of the evening was filled with song. When the faculty called us on it the next day we said: (*Altogether with back of hands on foreheads*) what could seven weak females do when charged upon by seven husky men, just home from the Civil War?

Alice Coffin: We had so much fun until those tricky IC girls tried to break up our friendship by asking only a few of us to join the IC Sorosis Society they were planning to form. Well, we fooled them. Oh, such busy days back in January of 1869...writing a constitution and oath, planning our pin in the shape of a star.

Hattie: It is because of P.E.O. that I asked you to come here today. You see, a few days ago I had the most awesome, but thrilling experience. I was playing around with this telescope and when I turned it down toward earth, I saw a bright light that looked like a huge star.

Everyone says: A' Star on Earth!! Impossible.

Hattie: Excitedly, I turned knob and focused closer and instead of a big star I was looking at a room full of ladies, each wearing a small star with the letters P.E.O. I think they were in California. As one lady was speaking I hurriedly turned on the sound equipment. She was talking about a philanthropic, educational organization...IPS, ELF, BIL and Cottey College. As I listened, I learned that over 250,000 P.E.O.s in thousands of chapters had loaned millions of dollars to girls seeking an education. But then this new fangled sound equipment went dead and I never did find out what BIL stood for.

Franc: With those fantastic figures could that possibly be **OUR** P.E.O. Society?

Hattie: When I left earth there were only six chapters and some of them were about to disband. Mary you were the last to arrive in Heaven. What do you remember?

Mary Allen: Yes, I came to heaven in 1927 and there was a Supreme Chapter. Several State Chapters and local chapters were springing up everywhere. Also an education loan fund had been established to help girls attend college. Isn't that amazing? And in the year 1927, Ohio formed a State Chapter.

Hattie: Now that we are all together wouldn't it be special if we focused this powerful telescope on earth again and found more stars and another P.E.O. get together? (*She looks through the telescope.*) Oh, oh, there's the light, there's a star and there is the room full of women with the star pins. The sign says Cleveland. The ladies in Cleveland all look so happy and appear to enjoy being together. The room seems to radiate love and friendship. They just have to be P.E.O.s. They are just like us for they

come in all shapes and sizes. It looks like they've had lunch and, Suela, I think they had your applesauce cake for dessert. Let's turn on the sound. Oh, quiet girls. One of the ladies is about to speak.

Narrator: Welcome ladies. When P.E.O. was organized in 1869 there were almost no societies for women. During the Civil War there had been Army Aid Societies where women met to make bandages for the soldiers and they learned the joy of working together for a common cause. With the surrender at Appomattox the Army Aid Societies ceased to be. The P.E.O. Sisterhood was one of the pioneer societies for women. Today we honor the founders of P.E.O. Those seven girls developed a friendship akin to that of sisters. They shared special interests, secrets, goals, joys and heartaches that bound them together. Those seven teenage girls laid the foundation of love and friendship for this International Sisterhood of over 5,600 chapters. Our founders exemplified the virtues of faith, love, purity, justice and truth and their interest in education and social service led us to become a philanthropic educational organization.

(Narrator moves her mouth as if she is talking but the attention goes back to Cloud 10)

Ella: We sure sound great but we had some very human traits. We were angry that only two of us were invited to join IC Sorosis. Within an hour we had formed a society of our own, drafted a constitution where we agreed to care for one another, to make our communities better, to be better members of society and always to learn. We administered an oath of secrecy and selected a name. Anger can be a great incentive!!

Suela: We were also vindictive because we played a game of one-upmanship on the IC's. When we heard our rivals intended marching into chapel en masse in identical new blue uniforms, all seven of us stayed up most of the night at Franc's home making our own uniforms.

Alice Bird: Remember when we got to chapel early and hid in the janitor's closet and when the ICs were coming we made our entry just ahead of them flaunting our new white aprons dotted with stars. We created quite a stir, which we intended to do. Yes, we were vindictive like all teenagers.

Franc: We were also a bit selfish at first. We wanted to band together... just us. If you recall we did not want other members.

Hattie: See if you can get them in your telescope again. What are they saying about us?

Narrator: *(Girls in aprons slowing begin marching in)* And so we pay tribute to Alice Bird who drafted the Constitution and wrote the oath. P.E.O. was her child. Alice was interested in everything and everyone and she stayed closest to the Sisterhood in her adult years. She married and had four Children.

We pay tribute to Alice Coffin who suggested the star for our pin. Alice was always interested in education and she taught school all her life and never married. They said she was generous to a fault.

We pay tribute to Mary Allen who added the religious touch to our organization. She was born, bred, and destined to wear the star. She married a minister and had four children.

We pay tribute to Hattie Briggs who said: "let's form a society of our own." Although she was modest and retiring, she was a leader who was sensitive to the needs of others. She married and had two sons. She loved being a homemaker and mother. Her death marked the first of the seven to pass away.

We pay tribute to Ella Stewart who inspired us in philanthropic venture. Ella specialized in music and gave piano lessons. She never married but taught school working with wayward boys all her short life. She died at the age of 46 having burned herself out in service to others.

We pay tribute to Franc Roads who said "let's go find the others" and for her endeavors in the advancement of women. Franc was alive to every issue of the day. She was a reader of the classics and a leader in the world of art. She had two children and to....

(Back to Cloud 10)

Franc: Look at them marching in just like we did. Those girls look older than we were. Maybe they need some younger members.

Alice Coffin: You know these traits of ours she's talking about aren't great qualifications for history-making but we also were loyal, creative, and intelligent. We had to be to enroll in college in a day when many of our peers barely finished grammar school. We were energetic and unafraid to break barriers. P.E.O. was really a revolutionary idea in 1869.

Suela: Turn up the sound again. I think the lady is talking about me.

Narrator: And the last founder is special to Cleveland and to us because she spent all of her adult life here. She is Suela Pearson. Suela was charming, gay, and gracious, beautiful and intelligent. She seemed meant to be adored and adored she was. She was lovely as a dream and no one could resist her loveliness. She was always surrounded by a galaxy of young men ready to pay her homage. In this day and age she would be called the flapper of the Seven. There was no account in the records as to what her actual input was in the organization of P.E.O., but they always said her contribution was her beauty, her vivaciousness and the joy she gave to others. Her specialties were playing the piano and speaking pieces and she was outstanding in elocution. Maybe if we encouraged her she would speak to us today.

Everyone in the audience begins clapping.

Suela: Thank you Sisters for inviting me to speak at this Founders' Day Luncheon. It sounds so wonderful to say "sisters." You see, after I left Mt. Pleasant I lived in Cleveland and, since there were no chapters in Ohio, I never again was privileged to attend a P.E.O. meeting, so this is very special to be among sisters today.

Oh, I'm getting ahead of my story. Back to the beginning. Have you ever heard of anyone else being named Suela? My father read a Spanish novel where Suela was the heroine and he liked the name so much they named me Suela. My father was a doctor of homeopathic medicine and my mother, Eleanor Rose McKinley Pearson, was a beautiful and cultured woman from a distinguished family. She was an aunt to William McKinley, President of the United States.

I was born in Cleveland in August, 1851 and in 1860 when my brother Will and I were in grade school, my father decided to try life in frontier Iowa and we moved to Mt. Pleasant. When I was 15 I entered Iowa Wesleyan University and met Hattie, Ella, Mary Allen, two Alices, and Franc.

Although we were different from each other we liked many of the same things and became good friends. In 1869 there were almost no societies for women. The timing was right for a women's organization and after those IC Sorosis girls didn't include all of us we formed our Sisterhood in response to our own needs. We wished P.E.O. to be a society of more lasting name and reputation. We did not for one moment wish it to be a mere college fraternity.

In 1876 I married Frank Penfield, a man of Mayflower descent. He was associated with the Standard Oil Company and later a real estate developer. We lived near the Rockefellers home in Cleveland and we entertained and were prominent in Cleveland society. Today our residences are not in existence. They are high-rise office buildings on Euclid Avenue between 7th and 9th Streets. We had two children, Marie Rose and Frank. Frank died while a freshman at Yale University during surgery. Rose was educated by private tutors and in finishing schools in Cleveland and Boston.

In spite of my fairy-tale beginnings all did not go well. After I was married for 25 years the following item appeared in the August, 1901 P.E.O. Record: (*Read from a P.E.O. RECORD*) "Trouble of more than one kind has overtaken one of our honored 'original seven'. Mrs. Suela Pearson Penfield has gone bankrupt in the New York Courts. She secured a divorce from her husband in Cleveland, Ohio receiving \$50,000 alimony. Certainly, P.E.O.s will sympathize with the woman now so unfortunate, whose beauty and goodness are among the treasured traditions of early P.E.O." Can you imagine reading this in the P.E.O. Record? Anyhow, troubles then of other sorts came into my life and I lived out my days in genteel poverty.

Regardless of what happened in my life I was always proud to be one of the original seven and part of the development of P.E.O. We could not have dreamed that our

society would bless the lives of thousands of women through more than a century of years. Thank you for your kind attention this afternoon and from the bottom of my heart my deepest thanks for carrying so successfully our dear society into the 21st century.

Narrator: Thank you Suela. You are good at speaking pieces and it was special for us hear from you today.

Suela and her daughter Rose made their home together until Suela's death on September 11, 1920 at the age of 69. P.E.O. did not come to Cleveland until February, 1924 when Chapter D was organized. Suela had always hoped that Rose could be a P.E.O. and in 1938 Rose became a charter member of Chapter AH. Both Rose and Suela are buried at Lakeview Cemetery right close to the Rockefeller graves. Although our seven founders now belong to Chapter Eternal they live in the hearts of the thousands of P.E.O.s throughout the world.

Hattie: Oh, they shouldn't be honoring us. We should be honoring them. We seven founders wish to pay tribute to the thousands of P.E.O.s who have carried our dreams far beyond our wildest imaginations, who have picked up the pieces we dropped along the way and have built an organization that not only has enriched the lives of those who wear the star, but the lives of all women. To you we pay tribute today by lighting this flame of P.E.O. which we hope will burn forever and ever." (*Lights the candle*)

Franc: Girls did you hear it said that we now belong to Chapter Eternal? Come on, we have to get organized!!

Presented by Chapter DU and EC Ohio
Cleveland Reciprocity Founders' Day Celebration
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