



Pearl Power Academy

by Katherine Gordon Rice

Introduction



Why “Pearl Power?” There are multiple reasons we chose the name “Pearl Power” to represent our identity. First, pearls symbolize maturity, grace and feminine beauty. Perhaps we associate pearls with femininity in part because of the reference in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs which says (in some translations) the valiant woman’s value is far above rubies or pearls. Pearls represent the character of a woman who rises to the top, socially and professionally.

Pearls are developed in an adverse environment. Where do pearls come from? From an irate oyster. A pearl starts as a grain of sand that accidentally gets under the skin of its host. Since the oyster can’t get rid of it, it covers the sand over with layers of nacre so it will be less irritating. Presumably, this is an uncomfortable, suffocating situation from the viewpoint of the grain of sand, no? We can draw an analogy that even if you come from a harsh or rejecting earthly family, you can still become a woman of great value and beauty.

Real pearls can only be harvested by divers who must risk great danger from sharks and other sea creatures and conditions to obtain them. An ignorant or cowardly person will never make the effort, so it is only the wise and brave who are rewarded with pearls. As you grow into a Pearl Girl (a woman of great value and beauty) we want you to have the self-respect to make sure that only the wise and brave are allowed to be in close relationship with you; it is only loyal friends and true-hearted loves who are worthy of the pearl that you are.

I inherited a beautiful string of antique pearls from my Grandmother, who was a lovely lady and a great role model for me. They were given to her as an engagement present by my Grandfather. As there were other women in our family who were older and/or more closely related, it was only by the grace of God that I ended up with them. Many times in my young life it gave me confidence to be able to wear them to job interviews or special occasions. Putting them on made me feel like my Grandparents were proud of me, encouraging me somehow, even though they had moved to Heaven.

It is for all these reasons that we have chosen to call this curriculum “Pearl Power.” We trust that, like a string of pearls, the lessons in the book will give you confidence and a sense of belonging to a larger, more encouraging spiritual family.

Foreword



One day, I was telling my friend Judy about my step-daughter's High School band banquet. You know, the one they have at the end of the year to send off the graduating seniors and to announce who will be doing what next year. I told her how sad it was to see that almost none of the girls knew how to participate in a semi-formal event; they wobbled precariously in their high heels, were at a loss how to introduce their parents and were obviously uncomfortable addressing the public. One girl had on a hideous (and much too short) dress that was so thin that I could see there was writing on the seat of her underwear! "I couldn't quite make out what it said," I told Judy, "But I think it was 'Someone please teach me how to dress!'" We laughed, but it was ironic laughter, tinged with compassion for these girls who were so unprepared for life. And these were the high achievers of the school! The girl with the 'wear was getting ready to go to a good college on a music scholarship. As we shook our heads, Judy commented that we should put on some sort of camp to teach girls this stuff. And thus Pearl Power Academy was born.

There was a time when the ladies of a family undertook to teach the younger girls all the feminine graces, as well as other important life skills, like how to run a home. In wealthier families, girls might be sent to special private schools or might be coached by a series of tutors and governesses. In the earlier half of the last century, privileged girls were sent to "finishing" or "charm" school. When I was growing up in the 'Sixties and 'Seventies, those traditions were less celebrated in the face of the feminist movement.

However, some families enjoy traditions that defy the tides of time and change. Both my grandmothers tried very hard to make up for my lack of instruction in traditional feminine arts whenever they had the chance. My mother's mother taught me a very great deal about fashion and sewing. She had owned a millinery shop (hat store) during the Second World War, and maintained a strong sense of style all her life. She was very creative and practical, and I owe her any abilities I have with a needle. She also enjoyed home decorating projects and was a marvel making her own drapes, throw pillows, etc., skills I



Charm school,
back in the day

am grateful to have been taught as well. She made sure I knew to always carry a clean hanky and had new shoes and matching purse (or rabbit-fur muff, as the season dictated) for Christmas and Easter.

My father's mother, who came from a well-to-do family and was an accomplished opera singer and pianist, taught me much about upscale manners and how to act like a lady. I remember her teaching me how to walk up and down stairs, how to answer the phone, and so many other useful things. She was a very gifted storyteller and teacher, and her lessons were always interesting. She had travelled widely and known much adventure, which added panache and credibility to what she taught. She made sure that I got ballet, art, and piano lessons, and she taught me most of what I know about running a household. She also introduced me to galleries, plays, museums and other cultural opportunities and taught me how to comport myself in adult company. She is also the one who left me her pearls, the ones you see featured in photographs in this book.



My Nana,
Fannie Pitzer Gordon Moore
(the original Pearl Girl)

I also have an Auntie, Faith is her name, who has one of the loveliest homes I have ever had the pleasure of visiting, can entertain and cook delicious food for multitudes of guests, make each one feel as if they are the only person who ever mattered, and makes it look easy. I know it is not. (BTW, in West Texas, "Aunt" is pronounced "Ain't" as in "Ain't Faith." That is perfectly ironic, because she embodies Faith.)

My own mother, who ran her own household with intelligence, economy and fortitude, while building a career as a very gifted kitchen designer, led more by example. She did manage to teach me to cook (*real* cooking, home-made bread and all) and instilled a love of hospitality and adventure, especially in the realm of cooking international foods. She also aspired to learn French in her spare time, and was politically involved -- both activities which set her apart from most of her peers in Oklahoma City at that time. She NEVER gossips or disparages other people, which probably sets her apart from most other humans. She also went to design school at Parson's in New York. I have always admired her character and her spunk. Further, when we misbehaved (which was often), one of my parents' favorite remedies was to force us to copy, longhand, out of Amy Vanderbilt's Book of Etiquette. I still have large portions memorized as a result.



My lovely, dauntless Mother,
Carol Williamson Gordon,
CEO of Heartmenders
Ministries, Intenational

Despite all this positive input, the sad fact was that at fifteen, I was a dyed-in-the-wool tomboy, had zero flair for fashion, hair or makeup, looked like never leaving the nest due to being generally unattractive, and had a sullen attitude. My family took action: they sent me to modeling school. This was as close as you could get to “finishing” school in Oklahoma City in those days (circa 1977), and fortunately for me there was a very good one, run by the great JoAnn Fullerton, in connection with her well-respected modeling agency. None of us had any thought of me becoming a model, we just hoped I could learn to dress and act like a girl. It was an expensive investment in my future on the part of my parents; but it literally changed my life. For the first time, I had actual beautiful young women to pattern myself after, and best of all, they treated me with kindness and respect. I simply adored them. They patiently taught me how to wear makeup (I threw away my hideous, cheap kelly green and sparkly blue eye-shadow and pink lipstick and bought Dior instead). They taught me how to dress (I got rid of my older brother's hand-me-down Aerosmith t-shirts and bought my first Halston silk dress) and they taught me how to speak, sit, and walk like a lady. After a number of months of training – lo, and

behold! – they offered me a modeling contract, and I proceeded to work as a model for the next nine years. Working as a model taught me even more than modeling school did. Turns out schlepping a heavy bag around, enduring countless interviews (in the modeling industry they are called “go-see’s”), getting criticized harshly (often) to my face and having to smile the whole time is great training for life.

No iteration of the women who helped shape my life would be complete without an homage to Marilyn Nash, mother of my college boyfriend who took me into her heart like I was her own daughter. Marilyn was a real live movie star who worked with Charlie Chaplin, (among other legends) and was also Debutante of the Year for the Nation in 1948. (Yes, M, I still remember and I’m still gobstruck by what an accolade that is.) To say she oozed glamour and style seems a gross understatement. When I knew her, she owned a boutique called “Auntie Mame’s” in San Francisco, smoked clove cigarettes and drove a Jaguar with a burl-wood dashboard. [I took up smoking clove cigarettes, too, in adoring imitation, but have since wisely dropped that habit.] Marilyn taught me so much about life and femininity, both with words and by her stellar example. She travelled the world, lit it up, and raised four strapping and dazzlingly handsome and accomplished sons, too.



The lovely Marilyn Nash, who so kindly mentored me.

It is with enduring gratitude that I remember the ever-so-useful instruction of these great ladies who taught me most of the things I share in this book. As I have developed my own career, travelled the world, and established a home for my family, there have been countless times I have been grateful to have their wisdom to guide me and prevent me making costly and/or embarrassing errors. Sadly, when one makes a social error, one is likely to be the last to know. No-one will ever tell you that the reason

you were passed over for a date or a promotion is because you lack social graces or because your clothes aren't appropriate or your teeth bespeak lower class upbringing.

When Judy and I first conceived of Pearl Power Academy, we just wanted to help girls in our little town get a leg up on life. But, as is the nature of healthy things, it has grown, and I now get requests from other women in other places to put on Pearl Power Academies for their girls. And we have realized that Pearl Power is just as needed by women of all ages.

We also invite others to use the curriculum we developed to launch your own Pearl Power Academies. It is not hard, and it is a LOT of fun. But the best part is seeing the positive change in the girls/women and the fire of confidence in their eyes as the lessons progress. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it. Should you wish to put on a Pearl Power Academy event in your area, check out our "Leader's Guide" that shares what we've learned about how to do it. We are also available to come in person to teach your group or organization how to mentor using what we've learned.

Pearl Girl Theory 101

You may be familiar with the scriptural description of the ideal woman found in Proverbs 31. But did you know that in Hebrew, it does not say “virtuous” woman, it says “*valiant*” woman? Either is technically correct, but I prefer “valiant”, don’t you? It evokes a much different image.



Let’s aim to be “valiant”

What makes a Pearl Girl? When we say “Pearl Girl” we mean a girl who is beautiful both inside and out. Can you think of some women whom you admire that fit that description? How about Princess Diana? Grace Kelly? I personally really admire a lady named Terri Savelle Foy. A Pearl Girl is beautiful, she is glamorous, she gets the Prince at the end. But there is more to it than that. Let’s think for a bit about women we admire and what it is that sets them apart from more ordinary women. What can we learn from them that we can make our own? I think it has even more to do with character and how the woman acts than it does with her appearance. Even if someone is beautiful outside, if she is rude, selfish and hateful, I don’t admire her *at all!* We want to find role models who are worthy and inspiring.

There is something to know about being a real Pearl Girl that is very important to understand. That is something the French call ‘Noblesse Oblige’. (In English we would say, “Nobility Obligates.”) That means that if you are royal, you have duties and things that you must do for which a commoner is not responsible. Here is an example: Suppose that an enemy comes to your Kingdom and tries to harm your people or steal their land. A commoner only cares about his own land. But a royal person has to do what he or she can to help all the people, right? The royal person might negotiate with the enemy, or if the enemy won’t see reason, might even have to make war and fight the enemy to protect the people.

That is part of being royal – there are a lot of very nice bits, like sitting on a throne or having servants, but it also means you must always be working for the good of your people. That’s what “Noblesse Oblige” means, that if you have the privileges of royalty, you must also take the responsibility.



Some women I admire for various reasons: Doña Joy Latizia, (Queen of Spain and World’s Best-dressed Woman), Gloria Copeland (Christian Minister), Kristin Van Ogtrop (Editor of Real Simple Magazine), Terri Savelle Foy (Inspirational Speaker), Princess Grace of Monaco (née Grace Kelly), Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge (aka Kate Middleton), and Audrey Hepburn (Actress and style leader).