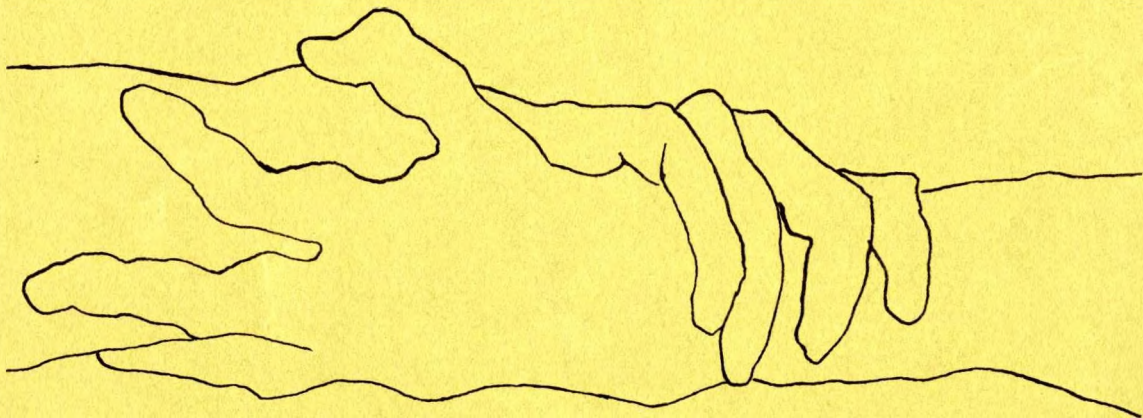


MOTHERS FOR



QUAL EDUCATION



Oh Lord! Here we stand,  
Joined together, heart and hand,  
To help provide better education  
Throughout the land. Amen.

A simple motivational pledge, repeated week after week in East Palo Alto by a group of women -- most from the community, a few from the other side of the highway, white ghettoland. That pledge expresses what the Mothers for Equal Education is all about. The organization incorporated in 1965, but earlier than that, Mrs. Gertrude Wilks gathered together at one church, and then another, small groups of women who were worried about the lack of academic training their children were receiving.

Many youngsters were graduated from high school barely able to read simple words. Many were unable to fill out application forms when they applied for jobs. Mrs. Wilks met with ladies at choir rehearsals, at missionary meetings, and in their homes. Soon she was holding weekly meetings at a church, all the ladies present, discussing school problems, what they could do to erase their invisibility, their childrens' needs and how to fulfill them.

Mrs. Wilks, an extraordinary organizer, realized that there was strength in this group of ladies. They were soon attending District School Board meetings, speaking out about educational inequality, picketing schools, visiting county and state officials. Voices from the middle class, hilly, ghettoland were largely indignant. "Those nervy negroes!" "The children can't learn because their homes are broken, that's why." "The poor teachers face a classroom full of overactive children who are deprived of love and fed the wrong foods at home." "Seven children in one family! No wonder they can't learn." Mrs. Wilks was threatened by mad bigots on the telephone and through the mail. Nonetheless the staunch Mothers continued their work. They pinned their motto on their dresses and on their hearts: OUR CHILDREN CAN LEARN. Every time they were negated by their adversaries, it seemed that a new friend or two would appear, encouraging the group. "Keep on; you're doing what must be done. We're with you. Tell us how we can help."

After repeated efforts, the Mothers realized that they were unable to change the public schools; even though small, meaningless concessions might be made. They decided that they would have to educate their own youngsters. How? Well, they would start a school of their

own, a supplementary school that would meet only on Saturdays. After all, they didn't want to deprive the children of whatever the public schools were able to give them. The Mothers knew that the children could learn; they would teach them to read in the Saturday Day School. As soon as word of the Mothers' intentions went out, offers began coming to Mrs. Wilks. Student teachers, housewives, businessmen and Ph.D.s proffered their services.

The Mothers organized the school, accepting whatever assistance they needed. Potential teachers were given workshops in non-racist attitudes, student expectations theory and phonetic methods of reading. Preparations were quickly made -- the County Supervisor consulted, a church borrowed for Saturday mornings, publicity arranged, etc. On October 22, 1966, the Day School, East Palo Alto, opened at St. Johns Baptist Church on Bay Road in East Palo Alto. OUR CHILDREN CAN LEARN -- motto, belief, reality. That was the beginning. And the children started learning.

The next step for the Mothers for Equal Education was to educate young women in a Home-making Industries Program, so that they might be able to stay home with young children, save money, and even supplement their incomes. From there, the Mothers moved on to the Annette Latorre Nursery School -- named after one of the first Mothers who had passed on. She had also been a Day School organizer, and one of the first Day School teachers.

And so it has gone ever since. The Mothers for Equal Education, dedicated to educational pursuits, has grown stronger and wiser. The Saturday Day School developed into a full time elementary school and a high school that has gained and kept the approval of the California Accreditation

Board. The Saturday School still continues -- its eighth year. The schools are all sponsored and supported by the Mothers; there are no county, state or federal grants. The Mothers also have two Educational Day Care Centers. They have a bookstore too; and the MEE Bookstore publishes books and pamphlets for the parent organization.

Eight years -- and look where they have gone -- those determined, committed women. Only now, they aren't considered outrageous. They proved that the children learn when taught in an exciting, humanistic environment. But the Mothers are as busy as ever. They raise funds for the schools through concerts, art bazaars, luncheons, educational rallies, black and white conferences, theater parties, and much more. One can find a Mother most anyplace, doing most anything that may help the students and the schools.

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