

**On Leadership  
Cincinnati, OH**

**Keynote Address  
May, 2007**

**School for Creative and Performing Arts  
by Mary Pierce Brosmer**

Close your eyes for a few seconds: whom do you see when I say "leader?"

The success, ambition, ego, profit driven win-at-all-costs, rack up grades and activities to put in your resume, compete dog-eat-dog in every arena to have a career in theater, visual arts, make a name, become a household name, celebrity, get in the best schools, shock if necessary, build a comedy career or visual arts or poetry career from shock and vulgarity--anything to be a "player" permeates our sense of leader---and I say look where it's got us---

I know a writer on leadership who thinks the word itself should be discarded has become so tainted it is dangerous to use: my own preference is that we rehabilitate the word.

Now, close your eyes and summon an image of the person or persons whose presence in your life has most helped you be fully who you are. This person is so authentic, so real, so who she or he is that you learn by seeing both her gifts and her failures, challenges because she doesn't hide them.

The person I summon did not go beyond the sixth grade; she was no one's idea of Woman of the Year, prom or homecoming queen--queen of anything, but the qualities I saw in her-- have informed my own sense of leadership and I believe as fiercely as I believe anything are more necessary in today's world than the status, ambition success and ideology-profit driven leadership which brings us Enron and deteriorating cities and schools, the Iraq war and the devastation of the planet.

Early Letter in Spring II, 2006

Dear Mother,

This morning the prayer words  
"Mary Queen of Heaven"  
float into my reverie  
on our you & I  
stalk of motherline,  
grandmothers pruned long  
before we could know them.

Today I am naming you  
Isabel Queen of the Kitchen  
Chairwoman—though we said "man" then  
of the annual Crestline High School  
Marching Band Uniform Fund  
Spaghetti Dinner.

In the new, state-of-the-art  
South Elementary School  
kitchen you reigned.

With my girlfriends in our frilly  
servers' aprons setting tables in the cafeteria  
I watched you above bubbling pots  
of homemade sauce, your non-recipe/recipe,  
stout Italian woman weaving  
among the other mothers  
prepping salad, cutting homemade pies  
setting kettles to boil for pasta,  
your never-manicured, clean hands  
speaking your language of encouragement,  
direction-without-condescension

It strikes me now how this was  
the only place I could watch you perform.  
Women then were so far behind  
scenes, the cleaning, ironing, arranging flowers  
stage-hands for priests and principals,  
petty town politicians, policemen  
all the princes  
of our lives.

But through the kitchen pass-through  
a proscenium of sorts, I saw how  
you inspired—

my friends all loved you  
brothers' friends too  
crowded our tiny concrete porch summer nights where you  
reigned from a porch rocker set between geranium pots  
dispensing no-nonsense advice  
You joked and laughed  
but ALWAYS appropriately.  
You were steadfast that mothers should be mothers  
not faux girlfriends flirting and preening.

You courted no one, did not engage  
in village intrigue  
what could be intense competition  
for small town prestige.

Mother, your reigning was

the raining-love-and-common sense  
kind of Queenship,  
if you had  
a status-conscious,  
bone in your body I never felt it  
press in on me  
and we hugged often.

(Dad said his mother was cold;  
stoic Scotch-Welsh  
the Pierces  
were a more imperious lot  
with their books and well-spoken  
aloofness  
in coal-mining towns)

Despite the jealous rumor of one  
of my friends' mothers that  
"you pushed me" into achievement:  
band, choir, honor society,  
in musical theater---

Oh, not a bit of it  
you made space for me to express  
what your life suppressed but did not  
extinguish

JUST LOVE, put to good use.

What I would hope with my heart of hearts for you is that you would see leadership as

my mother practiced it in her small arena: Encouraging, directing-without-  
condescension, appropriate boundaries / use of power/ raining love and common sense/  
Making space for yourself AND others to express Love, put to good use,

Inspiring, not with empty words but with: showing up, making: (food and art and  
businesses and classrooms and organizations)

I hope that you will always understand leadership as being about creating not destroying  
the fabric of the community,

I hope that you will understand leaders are not ABOVE the law, or above returning phone  
calls, honoring commitments, cleaning up messes, admitting mistakes, telling the truth---  
not only are leaders not Above such things because they are very important people,  
bigshots on campus---you hold yourself to a higher standard in these mundane matters--  
that is leadership expressive of a clear vision of what you hope the world could be with

your help, but not you as the "HERO" but as the one who is more in touch with his soul than his Role.

I am a leader by virtue of being the mother of a dream, the dream of an organization in which reverent attention to the quality of relationships, telling the truth, creating spaces for people to build a better and more conscious world through the art of writing and the practices of community

an arts/ a literary organization which is not afraid to use the words: "sacred" grateful, humble, conscientious, hospitable, kind, and even love--

If in some even partial way I have been able to be for these few minutes on stage, which is not my preferred place from which to lead, like my mother I lead best from being among rather than above, but if I have been able to enact even a small bit the qualities of a poet-parent-seeker-ordinary person fiercely standing for something model of leadership, I will have earned the honor it has been to be listened to by this good gathering tonight.

Thank you.

Mary Pierce Brosmer