

Character



Abstract of the talk given by Mrs. Intissar Tabsh Abou-Khadra, BUC alumna 1950, on Founders' Day, Nov. 10, 1977.

I do not intend to deliver a speech, though the occasion might allow it. This is only a heart-to-heart talk which I would like to address to BUC friends, alumnae, and students meeting here, to share with them some of my experiences in this beloved college which helped me move from darkness to light. It changed me from a shy, self-effacing, veiled woman to a self-confident, open-minded person. Here my literary ambitions were awakened, and I was encouraged to take journalism as a hobby which opened for me new and wonderful horizons. While yet a student, I corresponded with editors of papers and magazines, interviewed important personalities, and developed new forms of liberal education.

Builders

In my senior year, I was elected president and representative of my class. Right after graduation, I persuaded my parents to let me accept a teaching position in Saudi Arabia, far away from Beirut. There in a narrow environment, I took a private apartment where I lived alone and fulfilled my duties as teacher. Later I got married and continued working while I carried out family responsibilities. In 1966, I applied for the certificate of legal translator at courts and obtained it in spite of the obstacles I met because of being a woman.

At the Ministry of Justice I met a friend of my family who, seeing that I was the only woman there, asked me, "What are you doing here?" "Why should not I be here?" I answered. "For how long do you expect us women to live in men's shadows? Why should we not seek success for ourselves, instead of working to ensure it for men?"

Dear friends, it pains me to confess that I have not been the militant woman I ought to have been, and I hope that

circumstances will help many of you to go forward and accomplish for the cause of the Arab woman what we of the earlier generation were not able to accomplish. I strongly believe that if we had had women leaders in the Lebanese government or in Parliament, they would have saved Lebanon from being dragged into the horrible war from which we have all suffered.

It was a moral crisis which ruined our country and we women carry the larger part of its responsibility because it means that we have failed as educators and guides for our children and our men. If we have failed as character-builders, it is because we have failed to build our own characters. It is this task which we should work for, which you should work for, you future mothers, educators, and leaders. Your task is double; therefore, it is very heavy; but I hope you will be able to carry it out and thus do justice to the college motto, "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."