Jehan Sadat: The Importance of Family Values

By Erin McFee ’07

“My mission is to continue my husband’s work in peace,” said Jehan Sadat, former First Lady of Egypt, and widow of Nobel Peace prize-winner Anwar Sadat, in her opening remarks at the Leadership Conference. After her husband’s assassination in 1981, Madame Sadat explained how she went on to create numerous organizations promoting the rights of women, veteran services, housing for the orphaned, and a host of other projects serving humanitarian interests.

When listening to the former First Lady speak, it was apparent that the work and spirit of Anwar have guided her in all of her pursuits. Sadat explained how the two met and spoke of the man who came to her 15th birthday party and announced, “I don’t have money to bring you a present, but I will sing you a song.” They were married two months before her 16th birthday.

Learning How To Do More Than Just Endure

“We have done more than endure,” Sadat said, reflecting on her work for women’s rights. Among her many accomplishments in the area of women’s rights, Sadat is responsible for organizing Egypt’s Talla Society, a cooperative that works to raise the living standards of women, and facilitate the move to self-sufficiency for the impoverished. In addition, the activist also formed the first rehabilitation center in the Middle East for veterans and civilians disabled in conflict.

During her remarks to the audience, Sadat spoke of the social injustices built into the structure of Egypt’s society, citing the practice of keeping girls home from school, as well as violence in the household. She cautioned those who doubt the abilities of the unfortunates. “Do not confuse the lack of education with a lack of intelligence. Peace, development and progress depend on the participation of women.”

A Singular Vision

The quest for world peace is an overriding theme that drives Madame Sadat in all of her endeavors, including the university work she has pursued in the United States since 1985, as well as her other humanitarian activities. When listening to her speak, it becomes evident that Sadat is a woman who believes in the goodness of people and the common desire for a peaceful state among mankind. She sees that, “differences are merely a matter of nuance, and not substance.”

During the Q&A session moderated by CNN chief international correspondent, Christiane Amanpour, Sadat spoke about the current situation in Iraq, and the role of the
United States in the Middle East. When asked, “what do you think the president should do?”, Sadat replied, “He should first believe in peace.”

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