

March 7, 2022

## Roaring and Soaring Edition



Dear Friends,

A week ago, I had the pleasure and privilege to be honored with the Woman of Distinction Award at a luncheon given by Palm Beach Atlantic University. It was a beautiful affair at The Breakers, for sure.

But what made it all the more special was not the food and decorations. Rather, the room was filled with mostly women, young, middle-aged, and older, who shared a singular purpose, one that embodies the very mission of that university: to lead fulfilling lives through learning, leadership, and service.

I was immediately reminded of some lyrics of the famous Helen Reddy song: "I am woman, hear me roar...I am wise...I am strong...I am woman!"

Indeed, we – women – have not only gained our voice, we've gained a playing field of our own. And on that field, we are making a difference and changing the world.

The women at that luncheon, and especially the young women I met from the university, clearly demonstrate this in their actions and advocacy.

Consider what my co-honoree Ronnie Heyman has achieved. She is a successful attorney, corporate executive – she is chairman of GAF Corporation, the nation's largest manufacturer of residential roofing and building materials -- and a dedicated benefactor who has distinguished herself in art, public service, and philanthropy.

And consider the amazing accomplishments and difference-making initiatives pioneered and spearheaded by past Woman of Distinction awardees: Lilly Pulitzer, Barbara Nicklaus, Lore Moran Dodge, Frances Fisher, Suzanne Wright, and Audrey Gruss, to name but a small few who possess what Helen Reddy sang about -- they are wise, they are strong, and their "roar" is being heard through their passion and compassion, commitment and creativity, intelligence and instinct.

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I also think of one woman who possessed these traits in abundance – my inspiration in all my charitable endeavors: My own mother!

She was a teacher and the greatest lesson she taught me was generosity – of spirit, of selflessness, and of service. We lived of very modest means in Philadelphia. But even during the height of the Depression, she always saved some of her pocket money. Then, when people who were in dire need knocked on our door, my mother would always have something to give them. She sacrificed things for herself in order to give to others.

That lesson inspired me when I was a young Broadway musical actress and was asked if I would perform at a benefit for disabled Vietnam veterans at the Rusk Rehabilitation Hospital in New York. I'm sure you all know the story by now -- how I was totally unprepared for what I saw: Men without arms and legs; men with empty sockets where their eyes used to be; men without noses and ears; men who had horrible burns all over their bodies.

And you remember that when I was performing "Somewhere" from "West Side Story," and I got to the line "Hold my hand and I'll take you there," I reached down to take the hand of one of those men. But he had none for me to hold. I could barely finish the song.

That was one of the most defining moments in my life. Then and there, I promised God that I would do something big to recognize their sacrifices. That was the foundation for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial and the many other initiatives I've undertaken to ensure that our nation's 4.2 million disabled American veterans are never marginalized or forgotten.

I could never have realized any of these accomplishments if others didn't share my convictions – the same ones shared by the women at last week's luncheon. Most assuredly, it is because of the women of our LIFE family whose voices are "roaring" through their generosity, kindness, and commitment to live a life of purpose and service.

Of course, I'm proud there are women in my own family – my daughters and granddaughters – who are following in these footsteps with their own philanthropic endeavors.

One of my favorite singers of all time, Dolly Parton, has said: "If your actions create a legacy that inspires other to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, then you are an excellent leader."

With International Women's Day tomorrow, Tuesday, March 8, may all of us women commit to be such leaders and Women of Distinction. Let's keep roaring and soaring!

*Lois*



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Sunday, March 26, 2023

The Breakers ★ Palm Beach

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