**CONFERENCE SPEECH**

**FOR**

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Hello everyone.... I have a question... Did you ever have the thought... “How did I get into this situation?” ... and then did you ever have a second thought, “How do I get out?” I see you nodding your heads!!!! Believe me, you’re not alone.... but I **CAN** tell you one thing that I really want you to remember.... you are **bigger** than your problems. You are **greater** than your circumstances.... and you are **strong enough** to push through limitations..... and even when the odds seem impossible to beat... even when it seems like you’re alone and can’t handle the crisis... or the struggle... or the mountain of issues you might be facing, remember to keep breathing... place one foot in front of the other... remember you’re not the only person with a problem... no matter how big it might be...and somehow, hold on to the image that you **WILL** get through. A very wise man once said, “Problems are not stop signs. They’re **guidelines**.” And today we will discuss what can be done to use our inner strength to make dreams into realities.

We’ve all heard stories of struggle and strife and somehow, while we do our best to sympathize, we also can’t help but imagine, “what would I do in that situation? Would I make it through?” Here’s a little story.... let’s see what comes up for you as I tell it. Once upon a time, there was a little girl.... young enough to believe in her dreams... old enough to be aware of the harsh reality in which she was living. Every child deserves a decent chance at life, but many don’t get that chance. This little girl came into the world, with, as it’s said, “the deck stacked against her.” She was born to a poor, uneducated, teenaged mother. Her father was not around. Housing conditions were unstable.... in other words, this little girl and her mother could **NOT** catch a break. And as she got older, instead of improving, conditions got worse. As she grew up, her housing situation became unstable.... her mother’s alcoholism made matters much worse and eventually, the two became homeless.... at best, the living arrangements were bad, but being homeless was worse. The neighborhood was filled with crime and drugs and everywhere the young girl turned, there was danger, squalor, and good every reason to give up hope and sink into the dark hole of despair. But there was one thread to hold onto.... even with her drinking and all of the trouble she had to endure, the girl’s mother never stopped encouraging her to believe in herself.... to have plans... to imagine a better life. There was one thing that the mother possessed in abundance.... one gift that no one and nothing could take away from her, at the center of her very being, even when she couldn’t always express it, and that was the love, encouragement, and the constant reminder to her daughter to keep her dreams alive. Helen Keller, a person with seemingly insurmountable strikes against her, said, “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

... And the little girl dreamed... and the young girl continued to dream and plan, and the dreams got bigger and deeper as she got older. There was one other thing the young girl had, and that was an enthusiastic, encouraging grandmother, and if any grandmother had a chance to also be fairy godmother, this one was it. She gave the girl not only hope, but the tools to bring the dreams to life. When the girl played dress up, she pretended to be a businesswoman... and it felt **GOOD**! When she dreamt of being a chef, Grandma’s kitchen was at her disposal.... she had a notion to be a florist? Her grandmother’s garden almost magically became her warehouse.

By now, some of you may have put two and two together and figured out that I am **THAT** little girl, and being her with you, sharing my story, working with you to realize your own dreams and goals.... well, I have to confess..... we may not have realized it at the time, but each one of you were part of my dream.... (**If you want you can add this- if you think it works**) you know, like in “The Wizard of Oz,” when Dorothy wakes from her dream and realizes that all of her friends were with her.... and now I want to encourage **you**. I want to be the part of your dreams and goals that encourage your “What if’s,”... Your “Is it possible’s?” .... your doubts about whether you have what it takes to make your plans a reality. **YOU DO**. You’re strong enough. And like I said earlier, problems are **NOT** stop signs. Actually their more like vitamins for our soul. They teach us. They make us stronger... they establish what doesn’t work in life and then give us warning so we know that we can “recalculate” to avoid the pitfalls in the future.

So, yes. That little girl was... and still is... me. I dreamed about being a businesswoman in professional clothing and **HERE I Am!!!** My childhood left an enormous impact on my life. In addition to the dreaming I did, I also got the chance to see what **NOT** to do, and to develop the tools to encourage others to make sure to leave room in their lives to dream.... to be curious... to plan the details of a healthy, productive, balanced and engaged life. Anything you can imagine is possible... all it takes is hard work, determination, and the will to make your dreams come true... Together we can get that done!! ... one more thing... I recently saw a post on social media. It was very simple. It said, “**YOU CAN. END OF STORY**.” Thank you all!!