**MILITARY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**BRANDI HEATH**

Good Morning ASD. Thanks for the opportunity to speak about Women's History Month. This year’s theme focuses on “Visionary Women, Champions of Peace and Nonviolence.” To be honest, when LS2 Rogers brought up this topic in conversation and **then** mentioned she wanted me to speak, I laughed and protested a bit... I mean... why would anyone want to hear **me** speak??? I said "I’m not old, I have only been in the Navy for **eighteen years** and I don't have a story to tell.” In looking back at that moment, I had a revelation.... and even a little “**AHA**” moment can go a long way in acknowledging the immeasurable contribution we women have made in every phase of life... in families... politics... the professional sector... the military... so I started thinking, researching, and realizing that my first reaction was too typical. Whether or not we’ve actually championed peace and nonviolence, our participation is crucial to the survival of civilization... that might be a rather **big** statement, however, I think we, as women, have **naturally** done whatever was needed throughout life.... we’ve kept our noses to the grindstone and we’ve dedicated ourselves to the success and well being of those around us. The truth is, we **ALL** have a story. We **ALL** are warriors dedicated to nurturing, keeping peace, and supporting and sustaining community and consciousness...whatever and wherever that might be needed. We are all serious contributors to the critical mass that will allow our voices to be heard.... and **HEEDED**. Today and this month is not specifically about me.... it’s about **US**... our inter-connection, and the sisterhood that is ours for the taking. Based on that, I am proud to speak on this topic.

One fun fact... Women's History Month goes back all the way to 1978, the year I was born, and for those that are calculating... let’s say that equals experience, wisdom, knowledge... please let’s **NOT** use the word **O-L-D**! (**Wait for the laugh**). After LS2 left, I reflected on her comment that “I do have a story.” As I said, today isn't about me but it **IS** about the many ladies that have gone before me. It reminds me that we can learn from those who have dared. We can all be champions for change... No earnest, honest gesture is too small -We can draw from the lives of those that led and continue to show the way. We can even aspire to follow in their footsteps. The truth is that we are **ALL** extraordinary women... and sometimes it takes a national month of reckoning to allow us the opportunity to realize and reflect on how we can work to make the world a better place... as we amplify women's voices to honor the past, inform the present and inspire the future.

Malala Yousafazi was just fifteen years old when she started speaking out and advocating for girls and their right to learn... and she was almost killed for it. At **FIFTEEN** years old. She persisted. Her work on behalf of education for girls is a global game changer. Knowledge is power and Malala is **relentless**. She has said, “We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced.” We can learn a critical lesson from this brave young woman.... our voices **count**.

In an article posted on the World Economic Forum website, there are several articles worth reading, but one in particular caught my eye... “Women Are the Key to Peace.” The article mentions that cease-fire negotiations that exclude women participants are more likely to fail. It goes on to explain that with increased global conflict, the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres called for a “surge in diplomacy for peace” and acknowledged and advised that the effort needs to include increasing the number of women mediators.” We also learn that research has shown that negotiations are more effective when women are involved. The article goes on to state that when women are “at the table,” the chances of peace lasting longer than two years increases by 20%. Some women who have been actively making a difference include Betty Williams and Mairead Macguire, cofounders of Community for Peace People. Their outreach focuses on the conflicts in Northern Ireland. Liberia has Leymah Gbowee to thank for the social and political change in her country. Liberia can claim the first female African head of state thanks to those efforts when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf assumed that leadership role. Both women won the Nobel Peace Prize. in the Philippines, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer became the first woman to sign a major peace accord.

The list goes on and every day, thankfully, as women realize and accept their inherent strengths, more women show up, step up, and get the job done. Eleanor Roosevelt, the great First Lady who, in her time, made a significant contribution to society, once said, “A woman is like a teabag. You never know how strong she is until she’s placed in hot water.” (**Wait for the laugh**). We, as women, know how to live in “hot water.” We face challenges every day and we have no choice but to “figure it out...” “Make it work...” and ...”get it done.” It’s time that we own our strength and recognize the “superpowers” we naturally possess.

 In our own country, record numbers of women were voted into Congress last year. As we look to the past for guidance, we are reminded of the work of Susan B Anthony, one of the leaders of the suffrage movement, Josephine Baker, known as an American entertainer in Paris... was also an advocate for Civil Rights and a staunch supporter of the resistance during World War II. Dorothy Day was a journalist and activist in the early part of the 19th century.

These women have all left us a rich, dedicated, and diverse road map for us to explore and emulate. It is time for all of us to acknowledge our strengths, recognize our wisdom, and celebrate our partnership to make this world a better, more peaceful and productive place in which to live...

Thank you!