

**Be Inspired**  
**Colorado State Council President 2016 - 2017**  
**Acceptance Speech**  
**May 21, 2016**

I would like to start my time with you tonight by telling some stories. Everybody loves a good story, right? So, *we had a sign in my house when my kids were growing up that said "Around here, normal is just a setting on the dryer."*

Well, I was raised in a military family, so our "normal" was a little different as well. With my Dad's career in the Army, it was normal for us to travel and live in different parts of the world. I attended 3 schools in the first grade alone. It was normal for us to stop our vehicles on base and stand beside them at 5 every evening while taps played over the loudspeakers. At mealtimes, it was normal for me to learn to use chopsticks and speak Japanese from Okinawan girls while they learned English from me and the girls in my Mom's Girls Scout Troop. It was normal to have all but my immediately family live on the other side of the world, and to have close friends that I considered 'family' - something I still consider normal to this day. When we were stateside, it was normal for us to invade small town Michigan and harass our family for several week stretches. It wasn't until I got older, and moved out on my own into the world that I realized that my normal wasn't actually that normal.

**Webster's defines perspective as " a particular attitude toward, or way of regarding something; a point of view.**

So let's look back at my "normal" childhood with some perspective. At the time, I didn't always appreciate the opportunities that our life was giving me, because my perspective was narrow - I was a kid, just trying to be a kid. As I look back on my childhood now, with the years of my own experiences between then and now, I can see what a gift I was given. My perspective has shifted. My childhood, and the experiences I had then, shifted my point of view as I built my life. How many of you here could say the same?

For example, now, there is not a time when Taps is played that I don't get a big knot in the back of my throat. Every time I see a pair of chopsticks it takes me back to the opportunities I had as a child. I feel like I am doubly blessed now because I have relatives living close by that I am able to rely on. I get together with my cousins now on a yearly basis-we talk and laugh about childhood memories, that though different, have the same common threads that I am so thankful that I have taken the time to find. I have my close friends here tonight that are also my family too. I can't imagine my life without them and I hope they can't imagine their life without me.

Part 2 of my stories tonight <this is the good stuff, this is where you ladies come in> brings me to my ESA journey.

It has been 16 years since my friend Pam and I spent a lot of time together working on parent teacher projects for school. She knew what was ahead for me. Pam suggested I join ESA because my kids were heading into middle school. She politely told me “Kathy, your kids are growing up, they are not going to want you in middle school, you need to get a life.” Everyone has a Pam friend, right? Just tells you like it is...give you a little bit of an attitude adjustment by making you look at things in a new way.

A few years later, my kids were getting close to heading out on their own, and so I was struggling with balancing my commitments to ESA and spending time with them. I was on the ledge ready to jump, so to speak. Phyllis, sweet spunky Phyllis, helped me change my perspective a little bit, she said “Kathy, ESA will be still be here when your kids strike out on their own, so its ok to put family first right now, in fact, it’s the Right thing to do”

In 2009 I was at a point where I could start going to state functions. In talking with Shirley Telinde at Spring Board, she asked me to be her State ESA Foundation Counselor. My first thought, “Other than my makeup, I don't even know what Foundation is” but I like Shirley, and I trusted she wouldn’t lead me to far astray - so “sure”. Well, becoming a member of Foundation opened a whole new world of ESA to me. I was fascinated to know that we gave away all these scholarships annually and I could be a part of it. To this day I continue to participate on the IC level as a scholarship coordinator.

So why tell you these stories? I’m telling you this because (1) these 3 women are exceptional and they all played a part my journey here tonight and (2) these 3 simple conversations helped changed my perspective in looking at my present so that I could be inspired to change my future.

**Back to definitions, Webster’s definition of to inspire is “to make, to give, to cause” as in “to make somebody want to do something, give somebody an idea, or cause something to happen”. All three of those ladies inspired me because they helped make things happen in my life.**

ESA is all about inspiration. What an incredible organization we belong to where we can do all kinds of wonderful and unique things on a local level. We can do as much or as little as we want in our cities. But wait, not just the local level, the state and regional levels - Our Mountain of Towels is quite a statement made every year to the Easter Seals Camp. At the national level what we are able to do with the St Jude’s Children’s Hospital is absolutely astounding. In talking with Charlotte she gave me the cumulative total given from ESA through May 31, 2015...\$208,481,968.29! WOW! And we don’t even stop there - we are international! Think about that, all of us, with our unique “normal” childhoods, can come together, from all over the globe, and work together to get so much good done.

Now, sometimes when we get in the middle of these projects and we get tired, or we lose sight of the end result, or we get caught up in little differences, we can become discouraged and feel like it might be easier to just get on the ledge and jump. That is when we need to adjust our perspective just a little to gain back the inspiration we had when we first got involved. I realize that life is not all sunshine and roses but I do know that time and time again when I have just changed my perspective just a little, there has been a whole new world opened up that gives me the inspiration I need to go farther than I ever thought possible. Take a few minutes and think about people in this room that inspire you. I would challenge you to take time tonight to tell them how they inspire you, help them change their perspective and see how much they matter here.

Inspired people inspire others.

When it came time to decide what my theme for the year would be, it was thinking back on these three conversations, and what I want for our great organization that helped me. “Be Inspired” has radiated from the beginning on the inside of me since I began this adventure. When we are inspired we see colors a little brighter, laugh a little louder, maybe love a little deeper. Our burdens seem a little lighter when we are inspired with purpose. We just have to adjust our perspective sometimes.

My philanthropic project, Hope for Heroes, is a natural marriage with this theme. All the groups we help inspire us with how they handle what they are facing and what they are overcoming. Most people don’t choose what they are facing, but deal with what comes. One group is unique in this sense, they choose willingly to pit themselves up against difficult situations: The military. In today’s world that seeks comfort and security, brave men and women step up every day and say “I choose to serve my country. I choose to make myself uncomfortable so others can enjoy comfort.” Their perspective is outward-focused, and inspiring. To sign up for something even if it means giving up your life for it.

So what motivates you? What makes you step up to the challenge? What makes you sit back and go, “Wow, that is incredible!”?

The moral of my stories then, because all good stories should have a moral, is this,

If you can change your perspective;

If you can focus on the good, and pass over the bad;

If you can remember the common goal and forget the little differences;

If you can see the purpose and avoid the distractions;

Then you can be inspired, and you can be inspiring. If that is our focus, we will accomplish great things together.

~Kathy Ellingson