

VFW VOICE OF DEMOCRACY 2016-2017

Savannah Wittman

California

First-Place \$30,000 National Voice of Democracy Winner

My Responsibility to America

It's a cool summer morning and the sun breaks over the hills as I watch men and women in uniform fold an American flag that adorned the casket of my grandfather. I listen as the VFW patriots explain what each fold of old glory represents. I cry, as they hand "her" over to my older brother in full uniform a moment that will forever change my life. I watch, as my brother presents the stars and stripes in her folded perfection to my grandmother as he utters the words, "This flag is presented on behalf of a grateful nation as a token of appreciation for your husband's honorable and faithful ... service".

Yes, this moment changed my life. I realized at this moment that what makes this country great is the heart of service that embodies so many men and women. In essence..... a servant's heart. Personally, I now understand that my responsibility to America is to develop this servant's heart! My grandfather, himself, served our nation for 20 years and my brother continues this tradition of service. There is probably no greater quote about service than that of President John F. Kennedy who stated "ask not what your country can do for you- ask what you can do for your country." This quote challenges our current national culture of entitlement. We have become selfish and need to return to being self-less! It is the selfless acts of service from our veterans that have given us the freedoms we take for granted today. It is the servant's heart of our veterans that stained the beaches of Normandy, the jungles of Vietnam, and the sands of Iraq blood red.

So how can I serve this great nation? First, I must never forget the sacrifices made by our veterans. As it is said, "all gave some and some gave all." The sacrifices our veterans have made must never ever be forgotten and must be written into the hearts of every American. Their selfless acts of courage have forever changed the world. They defeated evil and secured the blessings of freedom for my generation and generations to come. I must be that voice of democracy that reminds my friends, teaches my children and speaks to the world that our nation stands tall because we stand on the shoulders of giants. Men and women who lived a life of sacrifice and service to the greatest nation. Secondly, I must take my responsibility to vote seriously. This has never been more poignant than this election year. In a world of spin and deception it is incumbent on each of us to understand the issues and know the candidates like never before. I must recognize that my individual vote came at a great price. I can serve by encouraging others to take part in our democracy. Our republic is strong because our forefathers created the greatest document of governance the world has ever seen ... the Constitution. I must speak out to defend it and educate my countrymen on what makes our nation so great. I must fight for truth, on which the blessings of liberty flow.

Lastly, I must serve others. Jesus said in Mark 9:35 "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all". Christ was the epitome of a servant leader. I must follow His example, that if I want to lead I must first serve. This is the bedrock of our Constitution, the foundation upon which our nation stands. Our leaders must be servant leaders with a heart of humility and a desire to put others first! The moment seems frozen in time. Tears stream down my face as I watch my grandmother receive our folded American Flag. I listen as seven men discharge their rifles three times. My heart pounds as I hear a familiar sound from off in the distance- a patriot from under an old oak tree plays taps. Thank you grandfather for teaching me about a servant's heart and my responsibility to America!