

LOIS POPE'S REMARKS AT THE AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL DEDICATION

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Many years ago, I got my start on Broadway as an actress in musical theater. In the late 1960s, I was asked to entertain patients at the Rusk Rehabilitation Center in New York City. I was a little naive and clueless about the horrors that war can inflict on the bodies and minds of human beings. As I walked into a room filled with disabled Vietnam vets, the piano started and I began to sing the tune *Somewhere* from *West Side Story*. As I got to the line "hold my hand and we're halfway there" I was stunned as I reached out to a nearby vet who had no hand! It was the first of many lasting impressions which shaped my resolve to one day do something for disabled veterans.

Years later in 1995, I stopped to pray at my cousin's name inscribed in the Wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Beside me, a multiple amputee struggled to lay a bouquet below a comrade's name. Like many of you who have visited the Wall, I was extremely moved. As I turned to leave, I asked a park ranger if he knew where a memorial to disabled veterans might be. He said he knew of none. That was the catalyst that sent me on my 16 year quest to build this Memorial so that justice and honor be given our nation's disabled veterans who now number some 4 million.

The Memorial we dedicate this morning is the rightful achievement of the many who devoted countless hours, energy and talent to the project. Chief among these were the late Jesse Brown, former Sec. of Veterans Affairs, and Arthur Wilson, past National Adjutant of the Disabled American Veterans. To the many donors to the Memorial, both large and small, you have my profound gratitude. This magnificent edifice was principally built with donations from the public and largely from the disabled veterans themselves!

I pray that this Memorial will stand as an enduring expression of our Nation's honor and esteem for our disabled veterans who continue to

suffer long after the battles have ceased. May it also stand as an ever-present reminder to all of us of the full cost of war. Today, my journey that began so many years ago in New York City has ended but our fight for disabled veterans continues and our commitment to their cause shall endure!