

Acceptance Speech

It is an honor and a privilege to stand before you today as the President of the Department of Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

Before I proceed, I want to share some family history. My Grandmother, Ursula, was born in a farmhouse in Austria. Her family was Slovenian. When she became of age, she was determined to get away from the fighting in the Baltic countries. I assume her marriage was arranged. She and my Grandfather Matthew came to America. They had started their family but there were problems back in her country. My grandmother, with a baby in tow, crossed the ocean again. I don't know exactly what happened, but things didn't work out the way she wanted them to. She was angry and was anxious to come back to America quickly. Her friends tried to persuade her to wait for a different ship, but she wasn't the least bit interested in waiting. They insisted that this ship was so beautiful, and she would be so comfortable on the trip. Nope, she stood her ground! The ship they spoke of just happened to be the Titanic. She would have been in steerage with no likelihood of survival; thus, I would never have been born. Another situation arose with my mother. She was one of their ten children. In those days polio was running rampant with high death rates. My Mom contracted the disease. Somehow, by the grace of God she survived but only after having to start over, as if a baby, to crawl, stand and walk. So, in retrospect, I survived the Titanic and Polio to be with you today.

As I gathered my thoughts, I wondered, "What is the definition of the word President"? Here is what I found. "It is the elected head of a republic, head of a college, university or company. It is the head of a society, council, or other organization". We **are** that other organization today and what an extraordinary organization it is!

I thank you for the faith you had in me when you elected me as Department Guard. I sincerely thank you for your support and encouragement along the way. I thank my late husband, Dan for suggesting to the Mars, PA Post 7505 Commander that I should join the Auxiliary. Oh, I pushed back at first, but they won me over!

My Son, Dan and my daughter-in-law, Carla never objected to my Auxiliary meetings or my District meetings on a Sunday afternoon. We just planned meals around them. Every once in a while, I would bring dinners home from the District meeting so that was definitely OK. When she was very small, I had to take my oldest granddaughter, Isla to the meetings. She behaved very well; however, a few people objected but most had no problem with it.

Before Ben and I got married, we talked about my running for Department Guard. He gave me his full support but encouraged me to think about it some more and talk to my Auxiliary sisters. I took his advice and I confidently made my decision to run. "Thank you, Ben."

How I conduct myself as President of the VFW Auxiliary will determine my success as a leader. All Line Officers, Program Chairmen and Committee Chairmen are **leaders of future leaders** by their example and dedication to our Veterans.

"Leadership" shall be our mantra this year!

I am asking you to step into the 2023-2024 **"Let Freedom Ring"** year with me!

Walk with me as we serve our Veterans and their Families. No Veteran or their family should do without basic needs.

Walk with me as we raise our voices in Washington for Veteran's Legislation. VFW Legislative Chairmen attend the conference in D.C. to spend precious few minutes with lawmakers or aids to convince them that Veterans need and deserve specific benefits.

Walk with me as we teach our children to respect and appreciate our flag, our Veterans, and our beloved United States of America. Our schools used to be a primary support of this ritual. Sadly, now there are exemptions.

Walk with me as we, the VFW Auxiliary, proudly assist local service organizations. Identifying ourselves as Auxiliary members not only shows our pride, but it also provides an opportunity to invite others to join us.

Walk with me as we encourage our youth to express their knowledge of our Country's history and their expectations for her future. We have heard some of the most amazing VOD and Patriot's Pen essays.

Walk with me as we mentor our members in the fulfillment of their leadership roles. We are not born as leaders, but we can learn.

Walk with me as we provide entertainment, companionship, and other services to our hospitalized Veterans. They enjoy the time we spend with them, and we work hard to maintain that privilege.

Walk with me as we expand our communications and record our accomplishments for posterity. We must publicize who we are, what we do and why we do it.

Walk with me as we establish new Auxiliaries and revitalize existing Auxiliaries. Ask to make a presentation to a bachelor post. Give struggling auxiliaries support and suggestions to assist them in bringing new life into their meetings.

Walk with me as we support our current membership and commit to building an even stronger member base. Never pass up an opportunity to be a recruiter.

Walk with me as we secure the future for Veteran families in need of assistance through the National Home. Support and promote the National Home at your meetings.

Walk with me as we promote the Buddy Poppy, that little red flower, that speaks volumes about how much we care about our Veterans! Volunteer to collect donations and spread the word about the flower's origin.

Together, we will accomplish great things! If we work together, cooperate with each other, respect each other and give credit where it is due, enthusiasm will abound, and energy will flow. What we do should never be a chore. It should be a labor of love. Our Veterans need us. We will never let them down.

Yes, I accept the position of President of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary! Will you walk with me" into this 2023-2024 "Let Freedom Ring Year"???

Thank You!

Respectfully,

Mary Jean Cuddyre Mastridge,

President, Department of Pennsylvania

Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary