

**Remarks of Abigail Disney as Prepared for Delivery
Madeleine K. Albright Luncheon
May 29, 2013**

WE INHABIT A PECULIAR BUT ALSO PROMISING MOMENT IN HISTORY. NEVER BEFORE HAVE THE WORLD'S TRADITIONAL DIVISIONS—THINGS LIKE BORDERS, OR REGIONS, OR LANGUAGES, OR EVEN OCEANS AND DISTANCES—NEVER BEFORE HAVE THESE DIVISIONS BEEN SO IRRELEVANT. AND NEVER BEFORE HAS THE NEED BEEN SO PRESSING FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO WIELD POWER AROUND THE WORLD TO LOCATE AND ARTICULATE OUR COMMON GROUND.

OUR MODERN MOMENT HAS ITS DOWNSIDES, THAT'S FOR SURE, MOST IMPORTANTLY IN TERMS OF THE WAY CONFLICT HAS QUIETLY CHANGED. GONE ARE THE DAYS OF BATTLES SUCH AS THE ONES WE WERE RAISED TO THINK OF AS NORMAL—THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE, THE SIEGE OF IWO JIMA, THE NORMANDY INVASION. OUR GENERATION MAY HAVE BEEN RAISED ON THOSE IMAGES OF WHAT WAR LOOKS LIKE, OUR GENERATION MAY EVEN ACT UPON THOSE IMAGES AS VOTERS, AS ACTIVISTS AND AS POLITICIANS, BUT THOSE IMAGES SERVE US VERY POORLY IN THE MODERN WORLD. THEY INHIBIT OUR CAPACITY TO STRATEGIZE WELL, THEY LURE US INTO CONFLICTS WE SHOULDN'T TAKE ON, THEY EXERCISE A POWER OF ROMANTIC ATTRACTION FOR OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN (BUT LET'S FACE IT, MOSTLY MEN) THAT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO RESIST AND IN ALL THESE WAYS, THESE ANTIQUATED IMAGES

OF WAR SUCK US IRRETRIEVABLY TOWARD A REPETITION OF MISTAKE AFTER MISTAKE
AFTER BLOODY MISTAKE.

THE WORLD IS ALWAYS CHANGING, BUT OUR CHALLENGE TODAY IS NOT THE
FACT OF CHANGE, BUT THE RATE OF CHANGE. AND IN THE STRUGGLE TO ACCLIMATE
OURSELVES IN THIS DIZZYING ENVIRONMENT, WE CAN SOMETIMES OVERLOOK THE
CORE TRUTHS ABOUT LIFE THAT ARE UNIVERSAL, BUT WHICH MAY TAKE ON DIFFERENT
FORMS OR APPEARANCES. BUT THESE CORE TRUTHS ARE PRECISELY THE BEST WAY TO
FIND OUR BEARINGS IN THE CONSTANTLY ROILING CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR OUTER
WORLDS. I MEAN, I JUST GOT USED TO TWITTER, AND NOW YOU WANT ME TO
UNDERSTAND VINE???

I SPENT SOME YEARS WHILE MY CHILDREN WERE YOUNG SOMEWHAT TETHERED
TO NEW YORK CITY, LEARNING ABOUT GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S ACTIVISM UP CLOSE. I
MET SOME EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN IN THAT WORLD, MANY OF WHOM HAD DISPLAYED
THE KIND OF COURAGE AND INTEGRITY ONE NORMALLY LOOKS TO EPIC POETRY TO
FIND. BUT THERE IT WAS, RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE, HEROICALLY LABORING TO SOFTEN
THE INJURIES OF POVERTY, RAISE THE VOICES OF THE UNHEARD, PUSH BACK AGAINST
THE DEPRADATIONS OF THAT RELENTLESS INCARNATION OF CAPITALISM THAT
CHARACTERIZES OUR CITIES, PARTICULARLY NEW YORK.

I CAME TO LOVE THESE WOMEN AND TO SEE THEM AS MY “TRIBE.” THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT DREW US TOGETHER, A COMMON ETHOS, THAT WAS DEEPER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN ALL THE EXTERNALITIES—RACE, CLASS, GEOGRAPHY, LANGUAGE, HISTORY—THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE MADE US FEEL DISINCLINED TO BOTHER WITH FRIENDSHIP. AND YEARS LATER, WHEN MY KIDS WERE OLDER AND I STARTED TRAVELING FURTHER AFIELD TO SEE WHAT THAT KIND OF ORGANIZING LOOKED LIKE IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND OTHER CULTURES, I WAS STUNNED TO DISCOVER THAT IT LOOKED AND SOUNDED AND ACTED EXACTLY THE SAME. THAT DEEP ETHOS, THAT VOCABULARY ABOUT JUSTICE, THAT INCLINATION TO BRING A SENSE OF HUMOR TO EVERYTHING NO MATTER HOW ROUGH THINGS COULD GET, THAT REFLEX TOWARD DEMOCRACY, THAT SISTERHOOD—THAT SHARED ETHOS WAS IMMEDIATELY AND TOTALLY IDENTIFIABLE WHETHER IT WAS IN A JOB TRAINING PROGRAM IN RABAT, A SEX TRAFFICKING PROGRAM IN CAMBODIA OR A PEACEBUILDING PROGRAM IN LIBERIA. ALL THESE DISPARATE WOMEN WERE IN FACT THE SAME PEOPLE WITH THE SAME ASPIRATIONS AND THE SAME STYLE OF ACTION. GIVEN THAT NONE OF THESE GROUPS HAD EVER HAD THE CAPACITY TO KNOW EACH OTHER, MUCH LESS COMMUNICATE, I’M STILL NOW SURE HOW THIS MANAGED TO HAPPEN, EXCEPT THERE MIGHT JUST BE SOMETHING ABOUT BEING A WOMAN THAT DRAWS THIS ETHOS OUT.

WHEN I STARTING MAKING FILMS ABOUT THE COURAGE AND TENACITY OF THE WOMEN I MET AROUND THE WORLD I DID SO IN PART TO SPREAD WHAT I SAW AS THE GOOD NEWS. I WAS A BIT OF A LOST LAMB WHEN I HAD BEGUN MY WORK IN NEW YORK CITY, A GIRL WITHOUT A DIRECTION, WHOSE PROPER PLACE AND HIGHEST PURPOSE ON THIS PLANET WAS IN NO WAY MAKING ITSELF KNOWN TO HER. AND IN MY COMARADERIE WITH SOME OF THE BRIGHT, POWERFUL WOMEN OF THE CITY I HAD FOUND NOT ONLY A GREAT WAY TO MAKE SOCIAL CHANGE, BUT ALSO A PURPOSE OF MY OWN. THAT WAS THE GOOD NEWS I WANTED TO SPREAD—THAT IF YOU TAKE YOURSELF OUTSIDE OF YOUR NORMAL CONFINES, IF YOU LEAVE THE FAMILIAR BEHIND, IF YOU OPEN YOUR HEART TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT AS WELL EDUCATED AS YOU ARE, YOU KNOW PRECIOUS LITTLE ABOUT THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF ITS INHABITANTS, IF YOU HAVE THE HUMILITY TO WORK HARD, SIMPLY TO BE USEFUL AND TO LEARN—YOU WILL FIND YOUR MARCHING ORDERS FOR A LIFE OF MEANING AND A TRIBE ALONGSIDE WHICH TO DO THE WORK OF YOUR HEART.

IN MAKING FILMS I'VE SEEN MYSELF PARTLY AS A SOURCE OF IMPORTANT AND LACKING INFORMATION, PARTLY AS A RABBLE ROUSER PRESENTING ALTERNATIVE IDEAS ABOUT ORGANIZING FOR POLITICAL POWER, AND PARTLY EVEN—DARE I SAY IT—AN ARTIST EXPRESSING HERSELF. BUT MIXED IN WITH ALL THESE OTHER MOTIVES HAS

BEEN TO BE THE PURVEYOR OF THE BEST KEPT AND POTENTIALLY MOST WELCOME
SECRETS ON EARTH.

WHAT HAS ALL THIS GOT TO DO WITH TECHNOLOGY AND WOMEN?

EVERYTHING. IT IS TECHNOLOGY, AFTER ALL, THAT IS DRIVING THE RATE OF CHANGE
WE ALL CONTEND WITH. AND IT IS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO
SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT WOMEN'S CAPACITIES AND ORGANIZING SO MUCH FURTHER
THAN I EVER HAD A RIGHT TO HOPE WHEN WE FIRST STARTED PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO
HELL. AFTER ALL, WHEN YOU WAIT TILL YOU'RE 47 TO MAKE YOUR FIRST FILM, YOU
REALLY HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE ANYONE BUT YOUR RELATIVES WILL EVER COME
TO SEE IT.

WHAT HAS BEEN SO INTERESTING TO ME ABOUT THE LIFE THE FILM HAS TAKEN
ON IN THE FIVE YEARS SINCE ITS RELEASE IS HOW ABSOLUTELY UNIVERSAL ITS
MESSAGE HAS BEEN. WEIRDLY, OUR FIRST OFFICIAL SCREENING WAS IN SREBRENICA,
BOSNIA, A MONTH BEFORE THE TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL. BUT RATHER THAN FEEL
DISTANCED BY THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE WOMEN IN THE
FILM, THOSE BOSNIAN WOMEN SAW THEMSELVES IN THOSE LIBERIAN WOMEN, AND IN
SCREENING AFTER SCREENING, IN COUNTRY AFTER COUNTRY THOSE REACTIONS WERE
REPEATED TIME AND AGAIN.

FILM MAY SEEM LIKE AN OLD MEDIUM TO TALK ABOUT AS A TECHNOLOGY, BUT IT IS A TECHNOLOGY AFTER ALL. WE GET SO EXCITED BY ALL THE SHINY NEW STUFF AS IT COMES ALONG WE FORGET THAT RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES SIT SOME VERY POWERFUL TOOLS. DON'T GET ALL "TED" ON ME AND TURN THE NEW INTO A FETISH—IF WHAT YOU WANT IS TO REACH PEOPLE AS POWERFULLY AS POSSIBLE, YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE A MEDIUM THAT IS BEST SUITED TO YOUR MESSAGE. AND FILM IS JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER NEW FORMS OF TECHNOLOGY YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT. LIKE SOCIAL NETWORKING IT CAN BE USED EITHER TO UNITE OR TO DIVIDE PEOPLE. IT CAN MAKE PEOPLE FEEL THEIR POWER OR FILL THEM WITH DESPAIR. IT CAN INCITE HATRED AND IT CAN INSPIRE LOVE. AND SO IT IS BOTH A DANGEROUS AND POTENTIALLY HEALING MECHANISM THAT WE NEED TO TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY AS WE MOVE FURTHER INTO THE UNCHARTED WATERS OF THIS NEW CENTURY.

IN 2011 MY PARTNERS AND I CREATED A FIVE PART SERIES FOR PBS CALLED WOMEN, WAR AND PEACE. WE DID SO TO DEFEAT THE PERSISTANT TENDENCY OUR CULTURE HAS TO THINK OF WAR AS STRICTLY A MAN'S WORLD, A TENDENCY THAT DULLS OUR GENUINE GRASP OF THE FULL COST OF THE WORLD'S SECOND OLDEST PROFESSION. PBS MAY SEEM LIKE A GREY OLD LADY TO ALL YOU FOLKS WHO INHABIT A WORLD THAT IS MOSTLY ON LINE, BUT LET ME TELL YOU WHY WE DID THIS WITH PBS. HBO GETS HIGHER NUMBERS FOR BROADCAST IT IS TRUE, BUT IT IS ONLY AVAILABLE TO

PEOPLE WHO CAN AFFORD PREMIUM CABLE AND THEREFORE HAS NO CAPACITY TO REACH OUTSIDE OF A POPULATION THAT IS WELL-TO-DO, WELL-EDUCATED AND GENERALLY POLITICALLY PROGRESSIVE. PBS, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS A PIPELINE RIGHT INTO EVERY LIVING ROOM IN AMERICA. IF YOU CARE TO WORK HARD ENOUGH, THE EYEBALLS ARE THERE FOR THE TAKING, AND WITH PBS, SINCE EVERYTHING STREAMS ONLINE ONCE IT'S BROADCAST, YOU CAN KEEP DRIVING VIEWERS TO YOUR MATERIAL INDEFINITELY.

NOW WE STARTED THIS PROJECT IN LATE 2008, JUST AS THE MARKET WAS TANKING, AND IT WAS A MIRACLE THAT WE MANAGED TO RAISE THE 4.5 MILLION DOLLARS IT TOOK TO MAKE THESE FILMS AT THE QUALITY THEY DESERVED TO BE MADE. BUT WHAT THAT MEANT WAS, THERE WAS SIMPLY NO ONE THERE TO SUPPORT US WITH MONEY FOR A TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING BUDGET. IN FACT, KEN BURNS WAS ON THE AIR A MONTH BEFORE US WITH ONE OF HIS DOCUMENTARIES AND I CONFESS TO A TEENY TINY BIT OF JEALOUSY WHEN I WOULD GET OUT OF A TAXI AND REALIZE I'D BEEN RIDING UNDER A SIGN FOR HIS SHOW, WHEN I WOULD RIDE A SUBWAY CAR FULL OF HIS ADS, AND WHEN I WOULD COME HOME AND SWITCH ON JEOPARDY TO RELAX AND FIND AN ENTIRE JEOPARDY CATEGORY DEDICATED TO HIS FILM. I MEAN, WE DOCUMENTARIANS LIVE IN A WORLD OF SCARCITY AND WE HAVE TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, BUT GRRRRRR!

BUT WE TOOK THIS LACK OF ADVERTISING FUNDS AS A CHALLENGE AND I AM WEIRDLY HAPPY IT WORKED OUT THAT WAY BECAUSE NOW I CAN BE CERTAIN OF HOW MUCH CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH A SMART, HI/LO TECH CAMPAIGN OVER AND ABOVE WHAT TRADITIONAL MARKETING CAN DO. OUR FILMS REACHED ALMOST 13 MILLION UNIQUE VIEWERS, 10'S OF THOUSANDS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS, HUNDREDS OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, AND CONTINUE TO FIND VIEWERS ON LINE AS WE SPEAK. EVERY ONE OF THESE VIEWERS WE REACHED THROUGH AN AGGRESSIVE SOCIAL NETWORKING CAMPAIGN THAT STARTED A YEAR BEFORE THE FILMS WENT ON THE AIR, INVOLVED EVERY WOMEN'S GROUP AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION WE COULD CONTACT, AND TOOK ADVANTAGE EVERY RELATIONSHIP ANY ONE OF US HAD EVER FORGED. AND WE COMBINED OUR ON LINE STRATEGY WITH GOOD, OLD-FASHIONED SHOE LEATHER. WE GOT OUT OF OUR OFFICES AND WENT TO THE LOCAL AFFILIATES AND SHOOK EVERY HAND AND MET EVERY LADY AND SPOKE TO EVERY SCHOOL GROUP, CHURCH GROUP AND BLOCK ASSOCIATION THAT ASKED US TO COME. IN FACT, I WAS ON AIRPLANES ON 28 OF THE 31 DAYS OF OCTOBER. GOD BLESS MY SAINTED HUSBAND. AND IN COMBINING THE ANALOG AND DIGITAL IN THIS WAY, I THINK WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE A PRETTY ASTOUNDING CASE FOR THE POWER OF THE TECHNOLOGIES THAT PRESENT THEMSELVES TO US NOW WHEN YOU HAVE ENOUGH OF A WORK ETHIC TO DEPLOY THEM IN COMBINATION WITH ALL THE OTHER THINGS WE'VE BEEN GOOD AT DOING ALL

ALONG—THINGS LIKE GATHERING, TALKING, USING THE PHONE, THE RADIO, PUTTING UP POSTERS, HANDING OUT FLIERS. ATER ALL, IF THE INTERNET ON ITS OWN IS SO GREAT, WHAT ARE ALL OF YOU DOING HERE RIGHT NOW? THERE IS NO SUBSITUTE FOR HUMAN CONTACT—WE NEED IT LIKE WE NEED OXYGEN—AND DEPLOYED AS A COMPLEMENT TO HIGH TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATION (TINA DOES THIS VERY WELL WITH WOMEN IN THE WORLD) IT CAN BE AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL MEANS OF GETTING A MESSAGE OUT.

I'M TELLING YOU ALL THIS BECAUSE ONE THING IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND. THIS IS OUR MOMENT. AT NO TIME IN HISTORY HAVE WOMEN HAD ACCESS TO SO MANY RESOURCES. MORE THAN THIS, AT NO TIME IN HISTORY HAS A SERIES OF TECHNOLOGICAL MECHANISMS BEEN AT OUR FINGERTIPS THAT SO FLUIDLY LEND THEMSELVES TO THOSE THINGS THAT WOMEN DO BEST AND SO BEAUTIFULLY COMPLEMENT WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY BEEN DOING FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

WOMEN ORGANIZE HORIZONTALLY. THEY TEND NOT ONLY TO FORGE NETWORKS BUT ALSO NETWORKS OF NETWORKS. THEY TEND TO HOLD ON TO HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND THEY TEND NOT TO SEE THOSE RELATIONSHIPS JUST IN TERMS OF THEIR MATERIAL BENEFIT OR SHORT TERM USEFULNESS. WOMEN, HAVING BEEN EXCLUDED BY EVERY SYSTEM THAT BENEFITS BY MAKING SURE PEOPLE ONLY SEE DIFFERENCES, TEND TO SEE THEMSELVES IN EACH OTHER, IN SPITE OF DIFFERENCE

OF RACE, RELIGION OR NATIONALITY. WOMEN LIKE TO CONNECT AND SYNTHESIZE,
AND TEND NOT TO THINK IN SILOS. THEY RELATE. THEY REMEMBER. THEY CONNECT
AND THEY TALK. AND TALK. AND TALK. AND ALL OF THESE QUALITIES MAKE US
PERFECT DWELLERS OF THE ONLINE UNIVERSE THAT NOW BECKONS.

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE STUNNING. THAT ETHOS THAT I TALKED ABOUT
EARLIER, THAT MYSTERIOUS UNIVERSAL SISTERHOOD THAT I'VE SEEN LATENTLY
EXPRESSING ITSELF ALL AROUND THE WORLD—THAT ALL HAPPENED WITHOUT THE
INTERNET. IF WE COULD FIND A WAY TO TAP INTO OUR STRENGTHS AND BUILD SUCH A
COMMON SET OF PRINCIPLES WITHOUT ANY CAPACITY TO LINK OR NETWORK OR
COMMUNICATE, HOW MUCH MORE COULD WE DO WITH THOSE CAPACITIES
UNIVERSALLY DISTRIBUTED? HOW MUCH MORE POWERFUL WOULD THESE WOMEN BE
IF MORE VISIBLE TO EACH OTHER, AND TO US? HOW MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE IF THEY
COULD SHARE THEIR LEARNING? HOW MUCH MORE POLITICALLY FORCEFUL IF THEY
COULD ENSURE THAT THE MESSAGES OF JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS THAT MOTIVATE THEM
MADE THEIR WAY OUT TO THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS THAT
COULD STAND WITH THEM TO HOLD SYSTEMS AND PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR
BEHAVIOR?

BUT THE FACT THAT THE POTENTIAL IS THERE IN NO WAY GUARANTEES THAT
WE WILL BENEFIT FROM ITS PROMISE. WE COULD WELL BLOW THIS MOMENT. IF WE

APOLOGIZE FOR OURSELVES OR INDULGE OUR TENDENCY TO BE TERRITORIAL, UNKIND AND UNGENEROUS TO EACH OTHER, WE WILL BLOW IT. IF WE CONTINUE TO SHY AWAY FROM CAREERS IN THE STEM FIELDS WE WILL NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO MAKE OUR OWN SYSTEMS ANSWER WELL TO OUR NEEDS. IF WE CONTINUE TO HOLD OURSELVES BACK OUT OF FEAR OF SEEMING TOO POWERFUL TO STILL BE ATTRACTIVE, WE WILL BLOW THIS.

SO GIRLS, I AM SAYING THIS TO YOU WITH ALL MY HEART. SUPPORT EACH OTHER. WHEN A WOMAN DIRECTS A FILM, GO TO IT. AND DON'T BITCH ABOUT IT BECAUSE IT DIDN'T DO EVERYTHING ON EARTH YOU THINK A FILM SHOULD DO. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HELD A MALE DIRECTOR TO SUCH A HIGH STANDARD. HAVE YOU SEEN A MICHAEL BAY FILM? AND WHEN A NEWSPAPER SPENDS SERIOUS TIME ON THE SHOES OF THE WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL, AS THE WASHINGTON POST DID LAST WEEK, WRITE THEM ENRAGED LETTERS AND LET THEM KNOW THAT WE EXPECT BETTER. AND WHEN A WOMAN WRITES AN OP/ED PIECE IN THE NEWS PAPER, TRY NOT TO WONDER WHO SHE THINKS SHE IS, BECAUSE SHE'S PROBABLY ALREADY STRUGGLING WITH THAT IN HER HEART ANYWAY AND THE LAST THING SHE NEEDS IS CONFIRMATION OF HER INSECURITY FROM YOU. AND WHEN YOUR DAUGHTER ASKS FOR A DOLL FOR CHRISTMAS, GET HER A DOLL AND A COMPUTER, AND WHEN YOUR SON ASKS FOR A COMPUTER, GET HIM A COMPUTER AND A DOLL. AND WHEN A WOMAN STEPS UP TO RUN

FOR OFFICE, PERHAPS IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS, FOR GOD'S SAKE, CAN YOU
LEAVE HER PANTSUITS ALONE ALREADY? CAN YOU PLEASE DEMAND BETTER OF OUR
MEDIA AND OUR PUNDITS? CAN YOU MAKE SURE THAT WE TALK ABOUT IS WHAT SHE'S
TALKING ABOUT AND NOT WHAT SHE'S WEARING? LETS DO IT DIFFERENTLY THIS TIME,
AND SEE IF IN DOING SO, THE PARADIGM JUST MIGHT SHIFT FOR GOOD AND ALL. THANK
YOU.