



 **State Farm**[®] *presents*
**TEACHER as
HERO AWARD**

2017 Teacher as Hero Award Ceremony Keynote Speech by Kathie Poerner, 2016 Teacher as Hero Grand Prize Winner

Congratulation to all the heroes that are being honored here today. I would like to thank Mr. Kevin Orangers from the National Liberty Museum and Dwayne Redd from State Farm for inviting me to speak.

To say it is an honor to be here is an understatement. I am in the presence of greatness!

How do you explain what makes a person a hero? I have asked myself this question since last year.

I remember how thrilled I was to receive this award. I also remember walking around the museum and staring into the faces of all the heroes that hung on the walls. As they stared back at me, I was struck with an overwhelming sense of purpose and positive energy.

But as I stared back at them, I thought to myself, "What am I doing here? I am not a hero!" My actions did not match the caliber of these men and women. Being recognized as a hero was a foreign concept to me, as I am sure it might be for most of you.

You might compare yourself to the civil rights activists who are displayed here and feel you do not deserve the same recognition. As education professionals, you might not have given up your seat on the bus or gone on a hunger strike to overthrow an imperialist empire. However, you do stand up for the rights of your students. You participate in civil disobedience on a daily basis by marching into the headwinds of the naysayers and the sometimes negative political discourse. You disobey this rhetoric in order to fulfill your vision of an educational atmosphere in which all students are treated equal and can achieve success. Your classroom is the shrine of democracy, and you are the gatekeepers.

You might also be thinking that you have never run into a burning building, or responded to a 911 call to save a life. Here again, as educators you touch the lives of each and every one of your students. You resuscitate those who have been in an academic coma, and illuminate their future possibilities by instilling in them the confidence to try. You run interference by gently encouraging the reclusive student to be brave and come out of the shadow of obscurity to participate in activities. You disengage students from their belligerent selves, not by using the jaws-of-life, but through acts of kindness. These life-altering actions produce students who are prepared to be productive citizens.



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Also, you might have attempted to compare the charitable actions of Mother Theresa to your own as an educator. While you have not devoted yourselves to the poor of Kolkata like she did, you commit acts of charity every day. Throughout the years you have purchased countless cookies, flowers, candy, spaghetti dinner tickets, car wash tickets, wrapping paper and the famous cheese cakes. In addition, you dig into your own pockets to ensure a student has lunch money or the means to participate in a school activity. Your charity even extends to providing a student with a coat in the winter and sneakers in the spring. These acts of selflessness are the very definition of charity.

This concept of being a hero may take some time to sink in; it took me about a year and several conversations with Kevin and Dwayne before I realized that as education professionals, we do belong in the spotlight. We need to own it!

The mission of these two men, along with the National Liberty Museum and State Farm, is to change the conversation about the teaching profession. It is to remind us and the public of the sacrifices, dedication, and willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty that many in this profession demonstrate on a daily basis. The true meaning of this honor is to elevate the profession to be on par with all the other heroes within the walls of this museum. Because, according to Joseph Campbell, "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." And each and every one of you fits this description. You deserve the title of hero.

Now, as with any true hero, your job is not done. It is your duty to carry this forward. You are now responsible for changing the conversation.

You must shout down the apathetic voices that attempt to minimize your devotion!

You must forcefully speak up for the integrity and dignity of your fellow colleagues!

You must interject your passion into every conversation you have about teaching!

And lastly, you must tell all who will listen that this is a noble profession that has a profound impact on the future!

CONGRATULATIONS!