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## **Full Speech – John O. McManus**

Good Evening. I want to thank you all for attending. It's a very special night to see one of the world's greatest charities celebrate many of its distinguished volunteers.

Tonight, I am the one bestowed with the social concerns award...but truly I am not deserving. Without question, there are a multitude of others who walk the walk with their daily commitment in a way that is far greater than anything that I can do.

What I can say is that I believe in this institution as much as anyone and am committed to seeing it endure through the ages.

I don't have a childhood Y story. I grew up in the Bronx and our Y was my dad driving us on Saturday morning to Jones Beach in our Volkswagen Squareback.

I joined the Y Board because my wife and I had two daughters on the swim team and we wanted to offer our assistance to the administration for the Somerset Hills Y. My wife Rosemary and my mission was very narrow and pointed...

During the service, what developed thereafter was a commitment not just to the swim team, but to the Y as a whole, and what developed thereafter was a commitment to seeing an enduring Y organization long after my children were grown, and what developed thereafter was a commitment to assisting other Ys in the extended community, for there is strength in numbers. Now with role models such as Mark Irwin, our board chair, and David Cerciri, our CEO, what is developing is a commitment to a state agenda and to participating on the national level so we can learn and enhance our own Y universe here in Somerset County.

They say that one of my gifts is fundraising. While it should not be an exclusive end in itself, indeed it is one of many ways to ensure a thriving Y that has capacity to bring attention to and to fund the social concerns and needs we have in our Somerset County community.

For my wife and me, fundraising has become second nature. It starts with a story that we believe in that must be communicated well to a group that is passionate about helping others and delivered to a consistently-engaged, ever-expanding group of patrons.

How did we get there?

It all started with me growing up in the Bronx.

I learned at an early age from my folks that to survive, one must be selective with whom we choose to associate. Associate with friends who challenge you, who elevate you and, in the Bronx, who can protect you!

Number two, while choice of friends is job one, our friends are selflessly entitled to receive as much from us as we expect from them. So elevate them, challenge them and protect them - it is the Bronx after all.

Number three, stay in touch. While friends are expected to always be true and ready to be called upon when we are in need, don't test them! Reach out for no particular reason, let them know that you think about them and find specific things that you know are directly related to them. As your friend, they will always be there - and in the Bronx, we need to know that they will always be there!

Number four, not only should we be generous with our words, advice and support, we must be generous with our time and our resources. Take your friends to lunch, take them to dinner, host an event and make sure that each is invited. As the friendship deepens, there is very little that can interrupt its enduring quality. After all, in the Bronx, true friends are an essential part of survival.

Number five, let your friends know your own passions. If you share with your friends what is important to you, indeed if called upon, they too feel more connected and are eager and ready to support. As a young kid, I was a bit of a wise guy and had a passion to poke fun, and while my friends knew I meant only innocent fun - in the Bronx, others might not be so patient - but they knew my passion and were ready to jump in if the moment called for it.

It wasn't an easy conversion as I chased my wife across the George Washington Bridge to New Jersey and now learn Somerset County survival techniques, but despite the rough go at appreciating the nuanced subtleties of the gentlemen farmers, we've survived.

While my Bronx survival skills are complementary and somewhat transferable to surviving fundraising in the Somerset Hills, I continue to learn - primarily from my Jersey girl wife Rosemary, my dad, who just passed away, each of my children and some great new friends I've made in NJ.

From my wife, I've learned the importance to be patient, to be calm, to listen and to be humble. The first step is to be aware of the importance honey. Give me time!

From my dad, I've learned the importance to always have a positive thing to say to others; my dad would always stop in the neighborhood and say hello and be engaged.

From my daughter Allie, I've learned the importance to push myself to walk the walk in our mission for social change - Allie had us host children from overseas when she was in seventh grade and now she has made a career traveling overseas to serve them.

From my daughter Emmie, I've learned the importance "to take a stand" and commit to it. As long as we've known Emmie, she is sticking up for someone else or some cause; now Emmie is organizing marches even before she has graduated from college.

From my son Matthew, I've learned the importance to plan ahead, to make lists and to have a deep appreciation and passion to protect Mother Earth. Matthew loves the mountains, the sea and his (and Rosemary's) organic garden in the backyard. Now Matt wants to be an environmental scientist.

Finally, from CEO David Cerciri, Board Chair Mark Irwin and VP Kelly Castro, three of my closest relationships at the Y, I learned endurance and passion for their craft. Each one of these folks takes their charge at the Y so profoundly seriously - that I have no choice but to elevate my commitment. We laugh together and at times we cry together, but above all I would feel safe going back to the neighborhood together.

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