

ORIGINAL

ADDRESS

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PRESENTED TO THE CHAPEL OF THE FOUR CHAPLAINS

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

FEBRUARY 7, 1989

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I AM DEEPLY HONORED TO BE THE RECIPIENT OF YOUR LEGION OF HONOR GOLD MEDALLION. IT IS ENOUGH TO MAKE EVEN A SURGEON HUMBLE ... AND THAT'S SAYING QUITE A LOT, AS MANY OF YOU KNOW.

BUT THIS IS AN AWARD THAT'S BEEN GIVEN TO A NUMBER OF OTHER PEOPLE WHOM I HAVE ADMIRERD OVER THE YEARS ... I'M SURPRISED AND PLEASED TO DISCOVER THAT I HAVE KNOWN 9 OF THEM PERSONALLY. THEY ARE ALL MEN AND WOMEN WHO SHOWED GREAT PERSONAL COURAGE IN THEIR LIVES AND WHO DEALT WITH THEIR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS FROM A STRONG MORAL BASE.

I'M THINKING OF PEOPLE LIKE JOHN CARDINAL KROLL, BOB HOPE, MARIA VON TRAPP, AND OTHERS ... INDIVIDUALS WHOSE WHOLE LIVES HAVE BEEN AN INSPIRATION TO YOU ... TO ME ... AND TO PEOPLE EVERYWHERE.

I'VE LOOKED UP TO THEM ... AND NOW YOUR AWARDS COMMITTEE AND YOUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES HAVE SAID THAT TONIGHT I CAN BE COUNTED AMONG THAT PROUD NUMBER.

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW DEEPLY I APPRECIATE YOUR OPINION AND HOW HIGHLY I VALUE THIS AWARD.

A WEEK OR TWO AGO, AS I PAUSED FOR A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT THIS EVENT, I COULDN'T HELP BUT BE STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT I WILL BE COMING HERE TO YOUR PODIUM BECAUSE OF THINGS I HAVE WANTED TO DO AND CHOSE TO DO ... AND ALSO BECAUSE OF THINGS I WAS SUDDENLY REQUIRED TO DO, WHETHER I WANTED TO OR NOT.

YES, I WAS A SURGEON IN THIS CITY FOR MANY YEARS -- CLOSE TO FOUR DECADES -- SOMETHING I WANTED VERY MUCH TO DO ... AND DID DO ... AND THE MEMORY OF THOSE YEARS IS A GREAT SOURCE OF PERSONAL PRIDE AND SATISFACTION.

I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT I MIGHT HAVE HAD SOME INFLUENCE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE HERE IN PHILADELPHIA AT THAT TIME ... AND FOR POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE WORLD AT LARGE, ALSO ... AS FAR AS OUR REGARD FOR THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IS CONCERNED.

BUT PHILADELPHIA AND ITS PEOPLE CHANGED ME AS WELL. I MAY HAVE INFLUENCED OTHERS, BUT OTHERS HAVE CERTAINLY INFLUENCED ME. AND IT WOULD BE UNFAIR NOT TO RECOGNIZE THEM.

AND CHIEF AMONG THEM I WOULD LIST THE CHILDREN OF THIS CITY ... AND, FOR THE PAST 8 YEARS, THE CHILDREN OF THIS COUNTRY ... AND OF THE WORLD.

IN MEDICINE AND IN PUBLIC HEALTH YOU SEE CHILDREN AT THEIR MOST VULNERABLE ... WHEN THEY'RE HURT AND IN PAIN, WHEN THEY'VE BEEN ABANDONED, AND WHEN THEIR FUTURE SEEMS TO BE ESPECIALLY DIM. THAT'S WHEN WE SEE THEM.

AND THEY ARE VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE.

THROUGHOUT MY CAREER IN PEDIATRIC SURGERY I WAS TAUGHT SOME VALUABLE LESSONS BY THOSE CHILDREN ... LESSONS OF HOPE, OF OPTIMISM, OF CHARITY, OF GOOD HUMOR, OF HEROISM.

I WAS TAUGHT MANY LESSONS ABOUT THE GENEROSITY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT ... SOMETHING THAT I BELIEVE EVERYBODY HAS AS A CHILD, BUT THAT WE GRADUALLY SEEM TO LOSE IN PROPORTION TO THE NUMBER OF YEARS WE LIVE.

SO I MUST SAY THAT I WAS VERY FORTUNATE DURING MY PROFESSIONAL CAREER THAT I HAD DAILY AND VERY CLOSE CONTACT WITH A POPULATION OF HUMAN BEINGS WHO DEMONSTRATED THE VERY HIGHEST AND MOST SUBLIME HUMAN TRAITS.

I'M STILL SPEAKING, OF COURSE, OF CHILDREN.

I OWE THEM A LOT. WE ALL DO.

AND THAT FEELING OF GRATITUDE AND INDEBTEDNESS HAS CERTAINLY  
BEEN PART OF MY MOTIVATION TO CONTINUE TO WORK ON BEHALF OF ...  
HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ...  
OF CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DEFICITS OF ONE KIND OR  
ANOTHER ...  
CHILDREN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT ... WHO HAVE  
BEEN CRIMINALLY ASSAULTED ...  
AND ON BEHALF OF THE NEWEST CATEGORY OF CHILD VICTIMS ...  
THOSE CHILDREN WHO HAVE BECOME THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF  
THE CURRENT PLAGUE OF AIDS.



SO I'VE DONE SOME THINGS ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN BECAUSE I'VE WANTED TO. AND I'M HAPPY THAT I'VE BEEN ABLE TO.

BUT I'VE ALSO DONE SOME THINGS THAT I HAD TO DO BECAUSE I WAS WHERE I WAS AT THE TIME. THAT'S BEEN ESPECIALLY TRUE DURING THESE PAST 8 YEARS, WHEN I'VE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING YOUR SURGEON GENERAL.

I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE NECESSARILY GONE LOOKING TO TAKE A STAND ON "BABY DOE" OR "BABY JANE DOE," IF I HAD REMAINED HERE IN PHILADELPHIA.

I WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY INTERESTED IN THOSE CASES AND MAYBE I'D HAVE WRITTEN SOMETHING ABOUT THEM FOR THE NEWSPAPERS OR FOR ONE OR ANOTHER PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL.

BUT INSTEAD I SPENT THE BETTER PART OF TWO YEARS WORKING ON BEHALF OF THE "BABY DOES" OF THIS WORLD, TRYING TO GET MY COLLEAGUES IN MEDICINE, LAW, SOCIAL SERVICES, AND GOVERNMENT TO MAKE SOCIETY A SAFER, MORE HUMANE PLACE FOR THEM.

I'M GLAD I HAD THAT OPPORTUNITY ... GLAD THAT I WAS WHERE I WAS, WHEN THOSE QUESTIONS CAME UP ... AND GLAD THAT I COULD HELP IMPROVE AN OTHERWISE TRAGIC AND PROFOUNDLY UNFAIR SITUATION.

THAT WAS ALSO THE CASE WITH AIDS AND WITH MY REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ABORTION.

I DON'T THINK ANYONE ENTERS GOVERNMENT SERVICE HOPING TO BE TORN APART BY ENORMOUSLY COMPLEX HUMAN EXPERIENCES. YOU DON'T USUALLY ASK TO SERVE WHERE YOU KNOW THERE IS A REAL THREAT TO THE SURVIVAL OF YOUR MORAL CODE, MUCH LESS YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, IT WAS ON MY WATCH THAT THE TIME ARRIVED FOR US TO GO ON A FULL OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY. AND IT WAS ALSO THE TIME WHEN THE AIDS VIRUS LAUNCHED ITS FULL OFFENSIVE AGAINST US.

I APPRECIATE VERY MUCH YOUR APPRAISAL OF MY PERFORMANCE DURING THESE YEARS OF GREAT CHALLENGE. I KNOW THAT I'M NOT A VERY GOOD JUDGE OF MY OWN PERFORMANCE, BUT I'M PLEASED THAT YOU DO APPROVE.

YOU SAY IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH COURAGE. AND AGAIN, MAYBE THAT'S SO ... AGAIN, I'M NOT THE BEST JUDGE.

BUT I DO KNOW IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH ANGER ... MY OWN ANGER ... AT THE ARROGANCE, THE INSOLENCIE, THE AUDACITY, AND THE SHEER BRASS OF AN INDUSTRY IN OUR FREE MARKETPLACE TO PURSUE GREATER PROFITS THROUGH SALES OF A PRODUCT THAT IS, BY EVERY SCIENTIFIC STANDARD, A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER TO THE HEALTH OF MANKIND.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT COURAGE ... BUT I DO KNOW IT WOULD BE OUTRIGHT COWARDICE FOR A SURGEON GENERAL NOT TO TAKE A FIRM AND UNCOMPROMISING STAND AGAINST THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY.

AND, ODDLY ENOUGH, THE SAME IS TRUE FOR AIDS. THIS IS A VICIOUS, DEADLY VIRUS THAT LIVES OUTSIDE ALL THE RULES AS WE KNOW THEM. WE'RE TRYING TO GET A HANDLE ON THE VIRUS SO THAT WE CAN PRODUCE A VACCINE, BUT SO FAR THAT HANDLE HAS ESCAPED OUR GRASP.

IT'S ALSO A VIRUS THAT HAS ARROGANTLY DARED US TO TALK ABOUT HIGH-RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AND DRUG ABUSE BEHAVIOR. AND WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THOSE THINGS, BECAUSE WE HAVE TO IN ORDER TO SAVE LIVES.

AS I SAY, I WAS TAUGHT A GREAT DEAL ABOUT LIFE BY THE PATIENTS I CARE FOR ... CHILDREN WITH SERIOUS, LIFE-THREATENING HANDICAPS AND CHILDREN SMILING THROUGH THE TEARS OF A DAMAGED LIFE.

BUT I WAS ALSO TAUGHT A GREAT DEAL BY THE ADVERSARIES I'VE MET, WHILE SERVING AS YOUR SURGEON GENERAL. THE MAIN THING THEY TAUGHT ME WAS THIS:

THAT I SHOULD DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO  
MAKE SURE THAT THEY DON'T WIN.

ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THIS HONOR. IT IS ONE I  
WILL ALWAYS CHERISH.

THANK YOU.

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