CHARITY EVENT SPEECH

FOR

JIM YANG

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Good evening ladies and gentlemen!! It’s always a pleasure to have the opportunity to get together with an enthusiastic group of people that are united in a worthy cause. Tonight is no exception. Those of you that know me are aware of how much my participation means to me and to my family, and that’s why being acknowledged tonight, as Childhelp’s Honorary Member of the Year is so special. I want to thank all of you for this generous recognition and (**If there are any particular people from the organization that you would like to acknowledge, do it here**) I would also like to take the opportunity to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, who has been so gracious with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who always manages to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and of course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Kristen James\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for her ceaseless ability to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Each year I have noticed thatthe days and weeks leading up to these events are always filled with eager anticipation and I think tonight proves that practice makes perfect! Thanks to all of you who worked to make this year’s event so unique. I would especially like to thank our terrific neighbors, Christen and David James and their family for having the foresight and compassion… for all involved… to introduce me to this wonderful program.

I came to the United States to pursue my college education when I was just nineteen years old. I fell in love with Southern California (**If you want to make a joke you** **can say this with enthusiasm**)…. after all… What’s **NOT** to love??? (**And wait for the laugh**). I decided to stay here in Orange County and make a life for myself. This incredible country provided me with the opportunity to build a successful career, find the woman who was to be my wife, raise two fantastic sons, and of course, to complete the “American Dream” we had the great good fortune to be “**adopted**” by Harley, the **WONDERDOG** (**Wait for the laugh**). I worked very hard to reach my goals and create this great life and I **never** lost sight of the fact that the United States is truly a land of opportunity. I am always aware of how kind God has been to me and to my family. I felt I wanted to do something-to participate in some way in which I would also make a difference in someone’s… or several people’s lives. I began by writing checks… after all… every dollar counts when a community needs to benefit from outreach. I gave financial support to charities that I felt aligned with- those that supported my vision of a better life for others, among them Childhelp, but I knew, deep down inside, that **I was capable of more**. I knew there were other ways in which I could have a more personal association to those that really needed an element of **human connection**. I also wanted my sons to participate and really appreciate all of the blessings we have in our lives, not the least of which is having the privilege to give back. Childhelp had a wonderful solution, and that was the Special Friends Program. It was through this program that I met Sean Tolliver, and all I can say is that **HE** has **REALLY** made a difference in **my** life and the lives of my family members. To say that Sean has been a **BIG** presence in our lives is an understatement. Expecting to meet a scrawny little kid, you can imagine my surprise when a strapping young man 6’3” tall, 195 pound appeared. I instantly had a “Sandra Bullock Bodyguard” moment and a vision that I had possibly found a diamond in the rough… a potential athletic superstar. The math is against us so those thoughts were short lived. We all have dreams of greatness at one time or another and although I admit those visions crossed my mind, I knew I had met Sean and was there for a more important purpose. Sean was great at sports but his academics needed work. Sean’s parents had spilt up when he was very young. His mother became an alcoholic and he barely knew his father. It was clear he needed constant, positive, caring reinforcement. Much to my gratification, I became Sean’s mentor and so our mutual adventure began. Although I emphasized the need for a quality education, we all loved it when **we** would get together for an afternoon and he would play ball with my kids, and cheer them on as they participated in **their** extracurricular basketball and football games. My goal was for Sean to graduate from high school, get a job and continue his education at a city college. I am proud to say that he **did** graduate from high school this year; he is now working at Sports Chalet, and is studying at Orange Coast Community College. It’s been such a gratifying experience- obviously for Sean and definitely for me. One of the highlights has been that my sons have seen what life is like for others and not just their circle of friends. They understand a little more of what it is like to see the world through someone else’s eyes. They have learned so much through their connection to this Special Friend program while interacting with the kids at the Joann House and they have really experienced the feeling of making a difference that comes with giving back. I am so proud of them when I hear that if there is a chance to participate, they are the first ones to volunteer. That **REALLY** impacts their lives, the lives of those to whom they give back, and ultimately the world.

Believe me, it isn’t as easy as I may have made it sound. There are challenges in finding the means to forge a bond and to successfully and effectively enact the purpose of mentoring. I must say that although I have experienced my share of adrenaline rushes through certain successes in the business world, there is nothing quite like the feeling of spending a great day bringing joy to someone **who really needs to have a great day**. And you know what? That kind of giving **really does give back**. I cannot help but smile when I think of Sean’s smile…. and he also knows that if he needs someone to talk to, or to trust for advice, he has that too. It’s those “smaller” things that we tend to take for granted that mean so much to others.

Childhelp currently runs three houses with twenty-four hour full time care and guidance for at risk youth in this community. These kids are supervised but sometimes they need to feel a little special. They, as we all do, need to know that **someone cares**. Believe me, I understand that being a Special Friend is a big commitment. It takes time and attention and lots of personal investment. If it means anything to you, now that Sean is on his way to building a life for himself, I am seriously considering who my next Special Friend will be. Although it would be incredible if you all joined me in this program (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) … After all I can only be Honorary Member of the Year **ONCE**… that I know of!! (**And wait for the laugh**)… there are many, **MANY** at risk kids who need our support …financial and otherwise. Childhelp has been there for so many, but the work is far from done. Think about all of the blessings you have in **YOUR** lives and think about these kids that really deserve a chance in this world. Your generosity gives these kids a glimpse of hope for a brighter future.

Before I go, I want to acknowledge a few more people who have been there for **ME**. They have endured my perpetual type A personality … (**you can make a little joke**) Okay-show of hands… how many can relate to **THAT**??? (**Wait for the laugh**) and they support my decisions and commitments more than I could have ever expected. It is because of them that I am able to give back to those who need me. To my wife \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and to my two incredible sons**,** (**you can say**) who, of course are not here because, hey, they’re teenagers (**or kids- I don’t know how old they are but you can sort of roll your eyeballs when you say that**)- \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thank you for the human connection **you** have given to **me**. Thank you for reinforcing my belief in God’s kindness and blessings, and thank you for being with me on this great ride … and Harley (**is he still alive?.... I hope so!!)** Thank you too!! I love all of you. You all show me what life really is all about!! Thank you everyone!!