**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MARY NELSON**

**THOMAS’ SPEECH**

(**If you want to begin with a little joke, you can say**).... **Honestly**... all I was told to do was get coffee!!! (**And wait for the laugh**). So I did!!! Hello everyone!!! This is a wonderful evening... it is every year, because we get to be together, honor each other, and fill a room with joy, faith, fun, dancing, friendship, and all of the good things **ALL** of us continue to build together in our lives and in our participation at St Catharine School and St Margaret Parish. The dictionary definition of “family” is, “a social unit consisting of one or more adults together with the children they care for.” I know I speak for Mary when I express my gratitude and that of my own family for being accepted and for finding such a nurturing, supportive community as we have found here. The past \_\_\_\_\_\_ years have just continued to reinforce and confirm our faith in each other, in our children, and in our connection and support **for** this and **from** this, our true home away from home. I am proud of the deep friendships we have made over the years and Mary and I are thrilled to share this night with Joyce Kramer and Michael Clancy, two people that give of themselves fully to make sure our school and parish thrive for generations to come.

I suppose if Mary and I had one misgiving, it would be that we didn’t show up sooner “to the party.” I don’t mean tonight.... I’m referring to the long and impressive history this church celebrates. I suppose we had to meet first, commit to one another, and then find our spiritual home for our family... keep in mind that we attended our first Candlelight Ball well over thirty years ago... we were in college. We were young and still learning about life, but we both knew a good thing when we saw it and we wound up dedicating our lives to each other and our mutual expressions of shared values. This place has been a large part of the honor of that commitment. Mary and I moved here from North Jersey about thirty years ago, and from the moment we connected with St Margaret Church, we **KNEW** we had found a home, and to coin a phrase that I’ve heard pretty often... “**It’s the little things**.” It’s the way we were welcomed. It’s the spirit we felt when we entered the sanctuary.... and it’s the gut feeling we both had that this was indeed a place in which we could find comfort and solace.... a place in which would could give of our hearts and express compassion in the spirit of being accepted as part of an involved and dedicated community. All of those “little things,” when added up, form a solid foundation of a life of purpose... to have the privilege to participate with all of you has been and always will be our best gift and richest reward.

As we got on with our lives and built a family, we knew that our children would become an important part of life here at SCS and St Margaret... and they did. Ryan, Sean, and Christopher all received a wonderful education here at St. Catharine’s as well as at Christian Brothers Academy and Jesuit University (**please clarify as needed**). Bringing up three active, enthusiastic, energetic sons allowed Mary and me, as parents, to expand our support of the activities and interests of children. Some of the best times we had growing up were connected to the church... and I mean that for **ALL** of us... parenting is definitely a “**growth opportunity**,” and we learned about ourselves, each other, and the joy that complete commitment to family brings. What a privilege it was to be involved as Cub Master of Den Pack 21, alongside my beautiful wife... and to go on to being Assistant Scout Master was really memorable!! (**Name 2 or 3 highlights of your time in scouting**). There’s nothing like making memories with your kids.... and **everyone else’s**... (**Wait for the laugh**), and that truly was the case. There are so many highlights that I carry with me, like, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ or when \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ . Raising our boys to be fine young men was the experience of a lifetime, but the privilege of being **THE** administrative assistant to years of SCS kindergartners.... that was one of the more delicious and satisfying assignments I will ever have. To paraphrase the commercial.... being able to help my wife? **FANTASTIC**.... being able to provide the tools to support learning and engagement of the leaders of our future? **PRICELESS**.

Mary and I are so blessed to have the life we share. We found each other... we have a wonderful, loving, caring family.... we have more than we might ever want or need, and so we give. We give. Period. All we want is to “share the love” that we’ve been given. It **IS** “the little things” that make a world of difference. The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tsu, once said, “Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in **giving** creates love.” That is really the one thing this world needs... we are humbled by this acknowledgement and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Bless you all!!

**MARY’S SPEECH**

Hello everyone... (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**).... **WOW** Tom!!! How do I top **THAT**? .... but you of all people know I **DO** like to have the final say ... (**and wait for the laugh**). To all of our wonderful, thoughtful, compassionate, and generous friends, I second everything that my husband has said. You know us really well and so you know that our natural habitat is in any scenario in which we are supporting, encouraging, and rooting for others.... and while for most of my career, the individuals with whom I have had the honor to spend my days generally don’t indulge in anything stronger than a refreshing glass of milk or a nice fruity juice box, (**Wait for the laugh**) this acknowledgement is the recognition of a lifetime and both Tom and I are humbled as we raise a glass to honor all of **YOU**.

Bishop Fulton Sheen said, “Show me your hands. Do they have scars from giving? Show me your feet. Are they wounded in service? Show me your heart. Have you left a place for divine love?” In a large way, this sums up our purpose in life... to give... to serve... and to express thanks to God for all the gifts that truly humble us. From the first time we danced, as college kids, at the Candlelight Ball, Tom and I were smitten. We found each other, we found our destiny, and we found our path. It took a couple of years to “migrate” from northern New Jersey, but our purpose didn’t waiver.

As the years went on, we built our home, we continued to learn and grow in our careers.... with my degree in elementary education and my passion for early childhood development, I taught kindergarten at my alma mater, Lacordaire Academy... we “nested” and filled our home with our three wonderful sons. While I took that “eighteen year sabbatical” to raise our kids, Tom continued to make us so proud growing his considerable skills and building his career at Proctor and Gamble. By the way, as most of you know, those corporate skills were put to even **better** use as my treasured administrative assistant.... but that comes later... no matter what we were doing, we always had St Catharine’s and St Margaret’s in our hearts and minds.... there was always time to give back... and Tom and I truly believe that the more you give, the more your ability to share and do good expands. From being an active member in the St Catharine Parent Teacher Association to being “Leader of the Pack”.... well actually den mother to the one and only Pack 21 of the Cub Scouts, I can assure you, the privilege was all **ours**... to be able to have a part in providing memories of a lifetime to young children in their formative years... it doesn’t get better...

I treasured my role as an involved, engaged, enthusiastic SCS parent. We loved supporting the school that gave so much to our sons. We treasured the lessons they learned and we were inspired as we observed and encouraged them on their path to becoming fine, respectful, respected, young men of faith and integrity.

When our sons were old enough, I realized it was time to go back to the mission that meant so much, and I became the SCS kindergarten teacher. People say that if you do what you love, you never work a day in your life. For me, that was and is the absolute truth. I can’t imagine anything more gratifying than inspiring creativity and curiosity in young children that will grow with them for life. To paraphrase a wise educator, “Give me the child when he or she is five years old and I will show you the adult...” To me, teaching kindergartners... helping them discover who they are, allowing them to self express and find their voice, is the greatest gift I can imagine. I want to take a moment to thank every young pupil at SCS who has allowed me the privilege to teach them... to every parent, you have **NO IDEA** how your children have taught and contributed to **OUR** lives... to all of my fellow tenacious teachers, amazing administrators, sincere supporters, and kind, considerate colleagues, we are completely grateful for the gifts and opportunities you have given to us and our family. And Tom? Your love, support, humor, and administrative skills have been transformational.... in every single aspect of life. I didn’t know it was possible to love a job more than I already did.... and then you added caffeine, enthusiasm, love, and that irrepressible smile.

Our boys, Ryan, Sean, and Christopher have grown into fine young men. Our family has grown too, and our daughter-in-law, Lauren adds more joy, greater dimension, and new perspectives... and for all of that we are so thankful. We are also blessed with the first of the **next** generation, our grandson Oliver, and so the circle of life expands and we prepare for new lessons, new blessings, and more gratitude. Yes. I hand out little notes... they’re little pieces of me that act as small keepsakes... tokens of affection and appreciation. (**Is it possible to place a little note under each person’s plate with “Thank you. You are special.”? If so, you can say**). Please look under your plates. It’s just a little note from Tom and me to let you know.... **YOU. ARE. SPECIAL**.. St Margaret’s and St Catharine’s is special. Our relationship and our shared devotion is special.... and while tonight is the acknowledgement of a lifetime for my husband and me, it just inspires us to do more, be kinder, act with greater consideration, and continue to encourage others to support our wonderful church and school for years and years to come... for Oliver... for his kids... for **yours**. We love you. We are truly humbled. Thank you bless you all!