**FAMILY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JOHN LENO**

Hello everyone.... when asked what makes him happy, the old time comedian, George Burns, said, “Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family.... preferably in another city...” (**Wait for the laugh**). Luckily for all of us, Mr. Burns was not related!! Today we’re gathered as a crowd of interesting, diverse, individuals. We each have our own stories, dramas, accomplishments, and challenges, but we have so much more than that.... we have a common strand that connects us, and even though we’ve come a long way from the sharecropper struggles of those that preceded us, we carry their legacy, character, and strength proudly, undiluted from generation to generation.

It’s so incredible to think that we are all united, related products of a group of people that had practically nothing when they set forth to eke out even the barest of existences as sharecroppers in rural Alabama some\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years ago. Look what we have become in the wake of their challenges... thanks to the determination and dedication they demonstrated, to make a better life for themselves and their sons and daughters, and all of those grand and great grandchildren yet to exist... we are now the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ generation to have inherited the legacy of (**Name the earliest sharecroppers you know of from your family**) of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and it is a privilege to honor their memory.

When we consider the limited .... and sometimes non existent opportunities our forebears faced, it’s important to acknowledge, with considerable pride, how we have risen in their footsteps. They may not have had any worthwhile possessions. They may not have had formal educations, they may not have thought of themselves as having any advantages or privileges in their lifetimes, but take a look around.... Look at **US**... look at what **we’ve** accomplished, what our parents have achieved, what our younger family members are on target to attain, and know one, irrefutable, obvious point.... our family **WON**... we are the payback for the struggles our ancestors were forced to endure. We, as a family, **OVERCAME** poverty and obstacles and divisiveness....and we should all be very proud.

As a family, we make a handsome group, don’t we??? (**Wait for the laugh**)... it’s interesting to see the overlapping characteristics we share.... and whether it’s a familiar hand gesture or the way we pronounce certain words, our commonality gives us away.... we are **FAMILY**. As individuals, we fulfill an even deeper story... one that began in those remote fields. Our family’s grit and determination weathered the storms... deflected the challenges... and found the will not only to survive but to strive and achieve. Here today, we have considerable proof that our forebears **MEANT BUSINESS**! .... Our family **REPRESENTS**!!! Male and female, old and young.... from ages nine to ninety, we’re covered! Our family comes from all walks of life... from doctors to mayors, students to fire chiefs, children to mothers to grandmothers and beyond, there’s something in each one of us that beckons our connection, and that’s wonderful.

There are many definitions and descriptions of the term “family” floating out there.... one standard dictionary definition is,”All the descendants of a common ancestor.” Okay.... that’s a little dry, but accurate. The Urban Dictionary, getting a little more “spicy” claims that a family is, “A group of people, usually of the same blood, who genuinely love, trust, and care for each other. **NOT** to be mistaken with relatives sharing the same household who hate each other. **REAL** family is a bond that **cannot be broken** by any means.” And finally, the **TRUE** meaning of family is described like this, “It is a title given to those we hold dearly to our hearts. We extend it to those who come into our lives and, no matter what, through thick or thin, seem to stay.” For me, I am proud to see **ALL** of you reflected in **EACH** of those descriptions.

The family bond is treasured and sacred. We don’t forget our origins or those who carried us along the way to encourage, support, and inspire us to live our best lives while being a part of a greater, loving whole... and while we owe a tremendous debt to those determined sharecroppers that, in the name of their future.... namely us... **refused to fail**, there are many who have walked beside us, lead us, taught us, and nurtured us, who are no longer physically with us. We cannot ever forget the love and encouragement... and sometimes feistiness, we got from those we have lost, but I know, and I believe, they are with us every step of the way, and it’s a privilege to honor their memory.

There’s a famous poem that has one simple, stand out, inspiring line. It states, “I am part of all that I have met.” While that statement applies to most relationships in life... after all, influence exists and lingers, it is **TRUEST** when we think of our family. We **REALLY** are **a part** of each other. We stand together. We support those that might have difficulties and we cheer each others’ accomplishments. There is no bond in life stronger than the bond of a family that cares. I know how blessed I am to have all of **YOU** in my family. I look forward to continuing to honor our mutual past while looking forward and preparing for our future generations. Thank you all!