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Presentation of Award to John Sharpe

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Columbia County Association
in the City of New York
Gallagher's Restaurant
New York City
May 6, 1987

Tonight there appears before you a man who has risen to the height of public esteem based on intelligence, grit and the will to push on where others have failed. A man so distinguished among his peers that no right-thinking person dare say a word against him. But enough about me. I am here to present an award to John Sharpe. I can think of no one more worthy of this award than John Sharpe, and neither can he. There are many people (and I include myself among them), who owe a lot to John Sharpe -- headaches, cramps and diarrhea. John always has had a fairly high opinion of himself. He's the only man I know who calls Dial-A-Prayer and asks for his messages.

When I first met John, he always referred to himself in the third person as "The Kid." Today, he's at an age where he no longer can take "yes" for an answer. He recently bought a water bed. Joan calls it "Lake Placid." Joan installed a mirror over the bed. John uses it to shave. I could say that John is quiet, modest and unassuming. I could say those things, but they wouldn't be true. One thing is true, however -- you can go north, south, east or west and ask anybody about John. You will always get the same answer: "Who the hell is John Sharpe?" This is his story.

John was born here in New York City many years ago. I do not give you the year of his birth, except to say that it is written on his birth certificate in Roman numerals. He was a war baby. His parents took one look at him and started fighting. It is not true, as reported by certain family members, that his mother had morning sickness after he was born. It also is not true that his parents looked for loopholes in his birth certificate. As a young lad, he made an indelible impression on all who knew him. He ran away from home at the age of five and, when the police came, his parents couldn't describe him.

John grew up in the Bronx near the Grand Concourse and found his first employment as a Shabbos goy. Even then the Bronx was a tough place. The crime in John's neighborhood was so bad that the neighborhood bank kept its money in another bank. If you called the police, there was a three-year waiting list. Speaking of crime, the FBI yesterday predicted that only a small number of career criminals will be caught this year. The rest will be re-elected or re-appointed. Before he was permanently run out of New York, John studied journalism at New York University, worked as an usher at Radio City Music Hall and ran around with the Shelley Winters crowd. (Am I supposed to be telling about this?) I once asked Shelley about him, and she said: "Oh yes, John. He was the one with the enormous -- hat." John wore a big hat in those days.

The Sharpe family moved to Germantown one day while John was in school. They didn't leave a forwarding address but John found

them anyway. He graduated from Germantown High School, and, somewhere along the line, he started to court Joan. At the end of their first date, Joan was heard to say: "I've had a wonderful time, but this wasn't it." He said that he wanted to see the inside of her house, so she drew him a sketch. Joan tells me there's nothing John did then that he can't do now -- which shows how pathetic he was then.

Actually, the years have been kind to John. It's the months in between that have knocked him to pieces. Only last week, John came home and started to pack. When Joan asked him where he was going, he replied that he was going to Mexico. He said that he heard that they pay a man \$100 a night for his services in Mexico. Joan then started to pack. She said that she would accompany John to Mexico to see how he could live on \$200 a month. In recent years, John has had trouble with his back. At his age, his back goes out more than he does. He has willed his body to science, but science is contesting the Will.

Before John opened his own insurance agency exactly thirty years ago, he worked in the insurance industry in various capacities, including salesman, adjuster, and district manager. At one point, he was employed as a life insurance salesman. His boss said: "When you sell a policy, have every customer complete one of these applications and fill up one of these little specimen bottles. Bring back a completed application and a full bottle for each life insurance policy you sell." At the end of the day, John came back with many applications and put them on

his boss's desk. He then reached down and placed two full pails on the desk. When the boss asked what they were, John said that he had sold a policy of group insurance.

Besides his insurance agency, John has been involved in a number of business ventures over the years -- a driving school, an investigation agency, a credit bureau, a second hand store, a health spa. I asked him why he opened a health spa. He said: "Because I wanted to live off the fat of the land." John always has been a busy businessman. He just doesn't know the meaning of the word "rest." He doesn't know the meaning of a lot of other words, either. He is a self-made man who worships his creator. On his birthday, he sent congratulations to his mother.

Many years ago, John came to my office and said: "I'm going to buy my daughters some blocks for Christmas!" The blocks turned out to be North Second and South Fourth. Since then, John has been an important factor in the real estate business in Hudson. His tenants always had a high regard for him. He always gave them a little something extra. One year it was ulcers. He once had a tenant who was a very comely young lady. He rented the apartment next door to a young man. As the young man was moving in, he stopped and whispered something into the ear of his new neighbor. She said out loud: "Oh, no. You got that when you signed a lease with John Sharpe."

John has made a lasting mark on politics in Columbia County, but not as a candidate. One year, both candidates for a particular office were so bad that John distributed blank bumper

strips. He once said of a politician on the opposite side of the aisle that if you gave him a penny for his thoughts, you'd be overpaying him. John always admired the candidate who adopted the motto: "Honesty is no substitute for experience." He always tells the story of the politician's girlfriend who said of the politician: "All he does is tell me how good it's going to be."

W.C. Fields said that a woman drove him to drink and he never stopped to thank her. John Sharpe brought me into politics and I never stopped to thank him. And for good reason -- I'm not grateful. Because of him, I go to work every day in a tattered black bathrobe while my brother goes to the office of Miner & Miner and makes money. I well remember how he induced me to run for District Attorney. He invited me to lunch at Kozel's with Al Callan, who then was the Columbia County Republican Chairman. When I left the office to go to lunch, I told my father that I knew what Sharpe was up to and that I never would run for any office. I left Kozel's on my hands and knees, several hours after I arrived, as a candidate for District Attorney. I was drinking bourbon in those days.

I do not discuss John's military career, except to say that he retired from the Army Reserve with the rank of Major in the Corps of Engineers. I held the Reserve rank of Captain, but I always wanted to hold Sharpe's rank so I could be Major Miner. John was tempted to stay on regular active duty because the Army was his kind of place. He loved their motto: "Join the Army, see the world, meet interesting people and kill them." His idol

was General George "Blood and Guts" Patton. General Patton said: "The object of war is not to die for your country, but to make the other bastard die for his." Although John loved the Army, he did say that he preferred to see the government get out of war altogether and leave the whole field to private industry.

I conclude on a serious note. I've been acquainted with John for about thirty years and probably know him as well as anybody outside of his family. He has been a true friend to me in every sense of the word. We've had some great adventures together over the years. We were almost left ashore while sailing the Caribbean, our jeep was stuck in the mud in the jungles of Yucatan, and we were in some other tight spots that I do not care to discuss as a matter of good taste. John is a thinker. He has a sense of history and he can analyze current events in their historical context. He is a man of many talents and he even thinks he knows how to sail a boat.

But I think it's about time for everybody to know the secret of John Sharpe, and I have chosen this occasion to tell it. A lot of people think of John simply as a hard-nosed businessman, and I suppose that in many ways he is. But the secret of John Sharpe is something that I have observed during the thirty years I have been his friend, and it is this -- that next to his family, the most important thing in the life of John Sharpe is the good of the community. Just look at the activities to which he has donated so much of his time and considerable organizational talent over the years -- Community Chest, United

Way, Jaycees, Chamber of Commerce, Boy Scouts, the Hospital, the Council on Alcoholism, the Private Industry Council, and many more.

John is one of the most charitable people I have ever known. He is not only a significant contributor to all the customary charities. I have seen him reach into his own pocket on many occasions to help men and women down on their luck and to help children and even to help political candidates who needed a few extra dollars for their campaigns. For, strangely enough, John never was interested in politics as an end in itself. His interest always was in good government and good candidates willing to provide that good government. First, last and always, John Sharpe is concerned about the welfare of his fellow men and women. He really cares. That's his secret, that's why I am proud to be his friend, and that's why I am honored to present him with this well-deserved and long overdue award. The placque reads: