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**Folder Title:** Nancy Reagan: Academy of Arts and  
Sciences Luncheon. Oct. 21, 1986

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MRS. REAGAN'S REMARKS  
ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES LUNCHEON  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

October 31, 1986

-- FIRST, LET ME SAY HOW GRATEFUL I AM TO THE ACADEMY FOR PUTTING TOGETHER THIS TWO-DAY CONFERENCE ON DRUG ABUSE. AND SECOND, LET ME SAY HOW DELIGHTED I AM THAT YOU'VE ALLOWED ME TO BE A PART OF IT. I'LL BE HAPPY TO TAKE ANY OF YOUR QUESTIONS FOLLOWING MY REMARKS.

-- WE OFTEN HEAR THE TERMS -- THE TELEVISION ARTS, THE CINEMATIC ARTS -- AND WHAT I WANT TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT TODAY IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY NOT ONLY AS ARTISTS BUT AS CITIZENS. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT RESPONSIBILITY IN REGARD TO DRUG ABUSE AMONG OUR YOUNG PEOPLE. I HAVE COME HERE TODAY TO SHARE THOUGHTS, FEARS AND HOPES WITH YOU.

-- I'M SURE YOU'VE HEARD THIS BEFORE, BUT IT'S TRUE -- KIDS ARE VERY VULNERABLE TO THE POWER OF SUGGESTION AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHERE TELEVISION IS SUPREME. THAT MEANS TELEVISION CAN HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE OR IT CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE. BUT TO SAY TELEVISION HAS LITTLE OR NO INFLUENCE IS NEGLIGENT, IF NOT DECEITFUL.

-- I THINK YOU WOULD BE SHAKEN BY WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLING TO RECOVER FROM DRUGS SAY ABOUT THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY. THEY FEEL VERY STRONGLY ABOUT HOLLYWOOD'S PORTRAYEL OF DRUGS. THEY BELIEVE HOLLYWOOD'S TREATMENT OF DRUGS HAS BEEN FRIVOLOUS, MISTAKEN AND DANGEROUS. HOW MANY TIMES I'VE WISHED THAT SOME OF YOU WERE WITH ME TO HEAR THEM YOURSELVES.

-- LET ME EXPLAIN WHY THEY FEEL THIS WAY.

-- AS I'M SURE YOU KNOW, F. SCOTT FITZGERALD SPENT THE LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE HERE IN HOLLYWOOD. WHEN HE WAS TRYING TO COPE WITH HIS ALCOHOLISM AND HIS DISAPPOINTMENTS AND HIS WIFE'S MENTAL BREAKDOWNS, HE WROTE ONE OF THE SADDEST SENTENCES I THINK I'VE EVER READ. HE WROTE, "I LEFT MY CAPACITY FOR HOPING ON THE LITTLE ROADS THAT LED TO ZELDA'S SANITARIUM."

-- WELL, TAKE THAT HOPELESSNESS AND MULTIPLY IT BY THE CONFUSION OF BEING YOUNG, AND THEN MAYBE YOU COME CLOSE TO EXPLAINING WHAT DRUG ABUSE DOES TO THE SPIRIT OF OUR CHILDREN.

-- YOU, BETTER THAN MOST, UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF TRAGEDY. YOU OFTEN CREATE IT FROM YOUR IMAGINATIONS. DRUGS, ON THE OTHER HAND, CREATE TRAGEDY FROM LIFE ITSELF. I RECENTLY RECEIVED A VERY MOVING LETTER FROM A WOMAN IN THE SOUTHWEST. HER PAIN AND LOSS BURNS THROUGH EVERY WORD SHE WRITES, AND I'D LIKE TO READ PART OF HER LETTER TO YOU.

"DEAR MRS. REAGAN,

I CAN'T SLEEP, I MISS MY SON. HE DIED OF A MASSIVE OVERDOSE OF HEROIN. HE WAS 24 YEARS OLD. HE HAD A 25TH BIRTHDAY LAST WEEK; BUT HE WASN'T HERE; HE MISSED COMING AROUND ON MOTHER'S DAY, TOO. MY OTHER FIVE CHILDREN WERE HERE, BUT A PART OF MY HEART WAS MISSING...

DAVID USED TO MISS OTHER MOTHER'S DAYS AND BIRTHDAYS, MINE AND HIS; AND I WOULD BE HURT AND I WOULD BE ANGRY AT HIM THE NEXT TIME HE SHOWED UP -- HE ALWAYS CAME BY LATER,

WHEN HE WAS BROKE OR HUNGRY, AND I GUESS, MAYBE JUST NEEDED TO KNOW THAT I WAS THERE AND THAT I CARED.

THIS YEAR I COULDN'T BE ANGRY. ALL I COULD DO WAS GO TO HIM WITH FLOWERS AT THE CEMETARY. I'D RATHER HAVE BEEN ANGRY THAN TO HAVE HIM GONE AND NEVER GET TO TELL HIM...I LOVE HIM.

PLEASE LET ME KNOW HOW I CAN HELP...PLEASE HELP ME TO KEEP OTHER MOTHERS FROM HURTING FROM SUCH NEEDLESS DEATHS...PLEASE, I'D LIKE TO TALK TO PEOPLE, TO YOUNG SCHOOL KIDS, TO ANYBODY...I NEED TO DO SOMETHING. I MISS MY SON."

-- AS YOU CAN TELL, THIS MOTHER DESPERATELY NEEDS TO DO SOMETHING SO THAT THIS TRAGEDY DOESN'T WEIGH SO HEAVILY ON HER LIFE. SHE NEEDS TO DO SOMETHING AS THERAPY FOR HER SON'S DEATH. THE QUESTION IS WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO? AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS ARTISTS AND AS CITIZENS?

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-- TWO RECENT STUDIES IN THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE INDICATE HOW STRONG TELEVISION'S SUGGESTIVE POWER CAN BE. RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND THAT TV COVERAGE OF SUICIDE, EITHER

IN NEWS REPORTS OR IN FICTIONAL PRESENTATIONS, TRIGGERS AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF TEENAGERS WHO KILL THEMSELVES. THOSE KINDS OF FINDINGS CAN'T BE IGNORED.

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-- YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE. YOU CAN USE THAT POWER TO DISMISS THE DANGERS OF DRUGS, OR YOU CAN USE IT TO HELP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAY NO TO DRUGS. I'M NOT FOR ONE SECOND SUGGESTING HOW YOU OUGHT TO WRITE, ACT, PRODUCE OR DIRECT. WHAT I'M ASKING IS THAT YOU NOT COLLABORATE IN THE ILLUSION THAT DRUGS ARE FUN; THAT DRUGS ARE MERELY A CASUAL, SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE PART OF LIVING; THAT DRUGS CAN BE EASILY HANDLED SO ONE NEED NEVER FEAR ADDICTION.

-- THAT'S WHAT I'M ASKING FOR; WHAT I'M HOPING FOR IN ADDITION IS THAT SOME OF YOU WILL ALSO LEAD THE WAY IN PRESENTING CHARACTERS WHO FIRMLY REJECT DRUGS IN ANY FORM. WITH YOUR HELP, I BELIEVE WE CAN STEADILY, PERSISTENTLY, IMAGINATIVELY BEGIN TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION ON YOUNG MINDS. ALL I'M TRYING TO DO IS REACH OUT TO YOU, BECAUSE YOU CAN HELP REMOVE OUR CHILDREN, YOUR OWN CHILDREN, FROM DANGER.

-- OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, I HONESTLY BELIEVE TELEVISION HAS TURNED THE CORNER AND BECOME AN ALLY IN OUR BATTLE. TODAY THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY HAS NO MAJOR APOLOGIES TO MAKE FOR THE WAY IT DEALS WITH DRUG ABUSE. ITS DEPICTION OF DRUGS IS MORE SERIOUS, MORE REALISTIC AND MORE CONCERNED.

-- THAT DOESN'T MEAN I DON'T BELIEVE THERE CAN'T BE IMPROVEMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, NO SOONER DO SOME CHARACTERS WALK ONTO THE SCREEN THAN THEY'RE OFFERING SOMEONE A DRINK OR POURING ONE FOR THEMSELVES. THAT'S AN UNCREATIVE WAY TO GET A CHARACTER FROM ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM TO THE OTHER.

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-- MY HUSBAND AND I THOUGHT "SHORT CIRCUIT" WAS VERY FUNNY, EXCEPT FOR THE SCENE ABOUT THE ELDERLY COUPLE WITH THE POT IN THEIR GLOVE COMPARTMENT. SOME SAY IT WAS A SILLY LITTLE JOKE THAT LASTED 10 SECONDS. I SAY IT WAS A GRATUITOUS SCENE, NOT NEEDED, AND WHEN YOU'VE SEEN WHAT I'VE SEEN IT'S SIMPLY NOT FUNNY.

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-- WHEN AN ADULT BUYS DRUGS, HIS RESPONSIBILITY DOESN'T SIMPLY STOP THERE. THAT ADULT IS ANSWERABLE FOR THE CRIMES OF THE DRUG PRODUCERS. THE BUYER IS PART OF THE CHAIN OF VIOLENCE AND ILLEGALITY. DRUG PRODUCERS KILL AND TORTURE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS OR ANYONE ELSE WHO STAND IN THEIR WAY. THEY MURDER, THEY BRIBE, THEY EXTORT, AND THE PERSON WHO BUYS DRUGS IS INVOLVED. DRUG PRODUCERS FINANCE THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT A FLICKER OF CONSCIENCE. AND THE ADULT WHO FATTENS THE DRUG PRODUCERS WALLETS IS PAYING WITH BLOOD MONEY.

-- I BELIEVE EVEN IF YOU JUST ACCEPT DRUG USE, YOU ARE INVOLVED. BY ACCEPTING DRUG USE, YOU ACCEPT A PRACTICE THAT IS DESTROYING LIVES. I BELIEVE YOU HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO BE INTOLERANT OF DRUG USE ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, BY ANYBODY. YOU HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FORCING THE ISSUE TO THE POINT OF MAKING OTHERS UNCOMFORTABLE AND YOURSELF UNPOPULAR.

-- I WAS INTERVIEWED BY A MAGAZINE REPORTER WHO TOLD ME OF A DINNER SHE'D ATTENDED WHERE COCAINE WAS PASSED OUT. SHE FELT UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT SHE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. SHE SHOULD HAVE -- SHE SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN UP, TOLD THE PEOPLE WHAT SHE THOUGHT AND

LEFT. BY STAYING, SHE GAVE TACIT APPROVAL -- NOT JUST TO THE DRUG USE, BUT TO ALL THE CRIMES AND PAIN DRUGS CAUSED ON THEIR WAY TO THAT TABLE.

-- THIS IS A MORAL ISSUE AND YOU HAVE TO TAKE A STAND. YOU CAN'T WEAKLY LOOK THE OTHER WAY. YOU CAN'T PRETEND THERE ARE NO CONSEQUENCES TO DRUG USE. YOU CAN'T HIDE BEHIND THE IDEA THAT DRUGS DON'T HURT ANYONE BUT THOSE WHO USE THEM.

-- LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOU ARE CREATIVE PEOPLE. YOU ARE THE NATURAL ENEMIES OF DRUGS BECAUSE DRUGS KILL CREATIVITY. THEY KILL THE EMOTIONS; THEY KILL THE INTELLECT. THEY KILL EVERYTHING YOU REPRESENT.

-- I HOPE YOU ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT DRUG ABUSE. AND I WANT TO RECOGNIZE THE PROGRESS YOUR INDUSTRY HAS MADE. I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR WHAT YOU'RE NOW DOING. BUT WE CANNOT LET UP OUR PRESSURE.

-- MARTIN LUTHER KING ONCE SAID, "HE WHO PASSIVELY ACCEPTS EVIL IS AS MUCH INVOLVED AS HE WHO HELPS TO PERPETRATE IT." I CAME HERE TODAY WITH A PLEA TO YOU TO BE PASSIVE NO LONGER. I CAME WITH A PLEA TO HELP ME FIGHT DRUG ABUSE.

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