

Alan Khazei

A Journey of Rugged Idealism: A Reflection on 20 Years with City Year

Remarks for City Year Summer Academy

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Thank you, Stephen, for that too kind introduction. I am so blessed to know you and count you as a dear colleague, friend, and brother for more than 16 years now. You are like part of my family and when I think of City Year, I think of you.

I also want to thank my wonderful wife, Vanessa Kirsch, and my daughter, Mirabelle, for being here tonight. I met Vanessa through the national service movement more than 14 years ago and she has been my soul mate and inspiration ever since. Those still looking for love, I can tell you this: stick with City Year and national service and you will find it. Maybe you'll even find it this week.

I remember when Mirabelle was two years old, she saw the City Year logo and pointed to it and said, "Daddy, that's City Year on your coat." And then she laughed. Vanessa found a little red jacket and sewed the City Year logo on it, and Mirabelle came to Serve-a-Thon that year wearing the City Year uniform. So she has been part of this organization her whole life, and I am so grateful she's here tonight.

I want to begin by asking each of you to turn to someone sitting next to you, and share your vision for City Year 20 years from now. We will take about three minutes to do this.

[Groups report back briefly about their visions for City Year in 20 years].

Thank you all for sharing those visions. I have no doubt that with your commitment and energy, they can come true. I would like to ask everyone to please stand and join me in the City Year Pledge.

I pledge to serve as a City Year member to the very best of my ability,
To honor the rules and expectations of City Year,
To respect my colleagues and the people and communities we serve,
To provide excellent service,
To lead by example and be a role model to children,
To celebrate the diversity of people, ideas, and cultures around me,
To serve with an open heart and an open mind,
To be quick to help and slow to judge,
To do my best to make a difference in the lives of others and
To build a stronger community, nation, and world for all of us.

Good evening, City Year. It is wonderful to be here with you again at Bentley College. You all are a beautiful sight – a true army of idealism. Every year at this time, when I am privileged to stand before you, I feel the power, promise and potential of City Year.

But in all honesty, this year is also bittersweet for me, as this is the last time I will address you as CEO of City Year.

As you all know, after a lot of hard and thoughtful reflection, I have decided to transition from my role as CEO of City Year this coming September. I was planning to take a sabbatical, but as the time came closer and I reflected on where City Year was at, and where I was at, I realized that it made more sense for me to turn over the reins, not just temporarily, but permanently. It's a hard decision, but I believe in my heart that this is the right one. Both for City Year and for me, as City Year has never been in better hands.

So, as I thought about what I should talk to you about tonight, I thought I should share with you why I have spent the past quarter-century in the national service movement and nearly two decades building City Year; what I think City

Year is fundamentally about; and why I believe that all of us are going to have to step up our efforts for social change and justice in the coming years.

The first rule of giving speeches is to keep it short and sweet. But you know me – I like to break the rules, so I'm not going to do that tonight. This is my last address as CEO and as usual, I have too much to say. I know I have a well earned reputation for giving long speeches. Don't worry; I'm not going to disappoint you this evening.

I first heard about the idea of national service when a guest speaker came to my high school and gave a speech about national service, why we should have it and what it could do for our country. It just made so much sense to me. And after having witnessed the power and impact of tens of thousands of young people engaged in national service, it makes even more sense to me today. The vision of a nation fully engaged in national service led me to dream and to imagine what America and the world have the potential to be if only we could realize our vision, that one day, the most commonly asked question of an 18 year old will be, "Where are you going to do your service year?" I believed then, and I am even more convinced now, that no single idea would more change our world for the better than establishing a year of full-time national service as a rite of passage for all young adults.

Imagine if every September, along with the millions of young people marching off to college, at least one million were entering a year of service in neighborhoods all across the land.

Imagine if rather than engaging only 7,500 people a year, the Peace Corps enlisted more than 100,000 young Americans every year as "citizen ambassadors" to fight injustice and poverty all over the world, showing the world the true American spirit of service and idealism while exposing Americans to the wondrous diversity of people from all corners of the globe.

Imagine if each of our generations were challenged to be a Greatest Generation. Challenged to work on the pressing needs of their community, country and world at that critical time in their life when they were entering adulthood and still forming their ideals and values. Imagine if they did this with their peers who were very different from them in terms of racial, socio-economic, geographic and educational backgrounds. And what knit them together was their shared year of service.

Imagine if every nation in the world had a year of full-time service as a rite of passage for all young people growing up. And imagine if we had a global service corps that united young people from North America, Africa, The Middle East, South America, Europe, and Asia. Working together as a true global generation and role modeling what the very best of humanity can be.

Imagine just how different our nation and world would be as a result.

We would have the enormous energy and idealism of each young generation put to work against the most pressing needs of our day. We would turn on each generation's "justice nerve." That inner voice that says each one of us CAN make a difference and every one of us MUST try. The voice that I have no doubt led each one of you to City Year. I have seen the power of justice nerves turned on through City Year over and over and over again. And once a justice nerve is turned on, it rarely goes off.

We would have a nation and world in which we not only felt – but truly were – all of us in this together. Universal national service would, I believe, lead to developing the political will to confront and solve our most pressing challenges. It would also lead to much broader participation in our democracy, our public institutions, our military and our civic life, which is vital for a healthy republic.

And so this vision captured my imagination, and when I was 21 years old, I did what many Harvard government majors who believed in changing our country did then, I went to Washington DC to spend a summer as a Congressional Intern. I worked for my Congressperson from NH's First District, Norm D'Amours. Congressman D'Amours was a believer in bringing back the draft. I thought that voluntary universal national service with both military and civilian



options was a better idea. So, I asked my Congressman if I could prepare a report for him on national service as an alternative to the draft. And he said sure. I realize now that he was probably happy that I'd have something to do for the summer that would keep me out of his hair. Even back then, I was a little too earnest and enthusiastic. Little did I know that summer would set me on a path for the next 25 years.

As Michael shared this morning, he had spent the year in Washington DC, working for Congressman Leon Panetta. Cong. Panetta had authored a bill, HR 2500, co-sponsored by Senator Tsongas from Massachusetts, to set up a commission funded with three million dollars, to study the idea of national service. As Michael told you, he put all of his energy into moving that bill through Congress. And so Michael and I spent that summer together using the full resources available to young people on Capitol Hill to deeply investigate the various proposals for national service and to try to move Congressman Panetta's legislation forward. Another roommate, Michael Alter (who would later become the founding Chair of City Year Chicago) was interning for Senator Tsongas, so we figured we had the thing wired. We were young, idealistic and believed that anything was possible.

Well by the end of the summer, Michael succeeded in getting a hearing held on Congressman Panetta's legislation which in and of itself was no small feat. But it never did come up for a vote. And I succeeded in writing a 23 page report for my Congressman. Which, God Bless him, he dutifully read, and then agreed to co-sponsor Congressman Panetta's legislation. Well I figured, at least I made a difference to one Congressman. It was sort of like my own little Congressional starfish.

The next summer, after graduating from college, I decided to defer law school to work on Senator Gary Hart's 1984 Presidential Campaign in New Hampshire, because he was the first and only presidential candidate that year to promise that he would push for universal national service if elected. Senator Hart pulled off a huge upset in the NH primary, but ultimately lost a hard fought and close contest to Vice President Mondale. And although the idea of national service did not move from that campaign to national policy, I did gain many lifelong friends and many lessons about how to change the world.

That fall, I returned to Harvard to attend Law School and Michael moved to New York City to work for the City Volunteer Corps. It was during that year, that Michael and I first started talking about trying to start a similar program in Boston after law school. Interestingly, we came full circle. We saw that national service wasn't moving much in Washington DC and indeed many people, even those who liked the idea, questioned whether it could ever work. And so we realized that if national service was going to happen, it wouldn't start at the federal level, but rather it had to come from the grassroots. It would need some local models, and even more, some action tanks, to demonstrate the ideas, principles and values of national service – to show that it could work – before it would truly become national policy.

And so, in the fall of 1986, almost exactly 20 years ago, we sat down and used a 125K Apple Macintosh computer to write up the first plan for City Year. Now even though this is my last speech to you as CEO, don't worry, I won't take the rest of summer academy to recount the next 20 years of City Year. If you want to learn more about that story, buy the book I hope to write this year.

But I do want to share with you the two people who inspired me more than anyone else to dedicate myself to launching and growing City Year, my Mom and Dad, Amir and Carmeline Khazei. A doctor and a nurse, who went into medicine to help heal people, fell in love in the operating room, and have been together for almost 50 years.

My dad originally comes from Iran. Like many immigrants, my father fled a dictatorship and came to America because it promised freedom, democracy and equality under the law for all people. My dad raised me to believe that America is the greatest country in the world because it was founded on the universal ideals embodied in our Constitution and Declaration of Independence that welcome and inspire citizens from all over the world. My dad told me over and over as a young boy, that America was the only country in the world he felt he could come to as a foreigner and become a citizen, feel fully welcome and be able to use his full talents to contribute to others. He told me repeatedly, that you could be anything you want to be in America if you were honest and willing to work hard enough to achieve your dreams.

But my dad also raised me to recognize that there is sometimes a gap between the ideals of America and the reality of government policy. He told me as a little boy about a popularly elected Prime Minister of Iran, named Mossadegh, who was leading Iran to democracy. But our CIA joined with the British government to engineer a coup in Iran in 1953. They deposed Mossadegh and returned the Shah to power because Mossadegh had nationalized the oil fields. And in one fell swoop the march of democracy was brought to a halt in Iran. So my dad taught me to deeply love this country enough to greatly appreciate it, but also to love it enough to want to help realize its ideals.

My mom's family comes from Italy. She is the classic Italian Catholic. She will fall in love with you over the phone. And she is so warm, engaging and utterly irresistible you will undoubtedly fall in love with her too. That was made clear to me when our former receptionist at City Year, Smiley, who mostly only knew my mom from phone calls my mom made to me, invited my mom to her wedding. I was happy to go along as mom's date. My mom taught me to appreciate and try to see and unlock the good in every single human being and to try to love everyone.

In many ways, my work with City Year is an expression of the greatest lessons, values and ideals that my mom and dad taught me. It is my way of saying thank you to them for the sacrifices they made for me and my three siblings, and for saying thank you to America for welcoming both sides of my family as immigrants to this unique and special land. And so with the ideals and inspiration my parents gave me, and with Gandhi's teaching that "you must become the change you seek in the world," I joined with Michael, Jennie Eplett Reilly, Neil Silverston and others to start City Year.

And for me, if I had to sum up what the journey of City Year has been about, I'd say it was a journey, first and foremost of Rugged Idealism. Rugged because we refuse to give up on our big goals and dreams, and Idealistic because we live by our values and ideals. I strongly believe that City Year has succeeded because it has tapped into America's heritage of rugged idealism. And indeed, the heritage of all great movements for change around the world, which at their heart depend upon rugged idealism.

Some people claim that America was founded by Rugged Individualists. I strongly disagree. America has been built, at each key point in our history by Rugged Idealists. People who came together around shared ideals and fought relentlessly to put those ideals into practice. Rugged idealism to me is doggedly pursuing one's ideals no matter the severity of the challenge, or scorn of the cynics.

Now, by idealism, I do not mean naiveté, hopeless dreaming, namby-pamby, pie in the sky schemes, or even simple optimism. Idealism, according to Webster's Dictionary, is "the practice of forming ideals and living under their influence." And according to Webster's rugged means: "presenting a severe test of ability, stamina, or resolution, or strongly built or constituted." That is exactly what we have tried to do with City Year. We have committed to the ideals of service, inclusivity, active citizenship, youth empowerment, civic leadership, public-private partnership, community, social justice and the power of love. And we try hard to live under their influence and fight relentlessly to put them into practice.

My work at City Year and my study of history have taught me that all great change begins with an idealistic notion. It is the voice that says sometimes powerfully, sometimes movingly, often quietly, always insistently – "Things aren't what they could be, things aren't what they should be, we can do better, and we must try."

Idealism works. It has the power to change lives, nations and the course of history. And it is not simply my experience



with City Year that convinces me of this, it is reflecting on what has happened in our world since we launched City Year. In 1989, when we started our first full-year City Year program there were 69 democracies in the world, today there are 121. Rugged Idealists from Lech Walesa, to Václav Havel, to Corazon Aquino, to millions of unheralded citizens who took to the streets in velvet revolutions, lay behind this march of democracy. The Berlin Wall came down without a single shot being fired. The Soviet Union disintegrated, Eastern Europe was liberated, and free market economics swept the globe. Nelson Mandela went from prisoner to president in a remarkably peaceful revolution. Peace came to Northern Ireland in a Good Friday agreement. For the first time in human history, a majority of people on our planet live under some form of democracy.

And people all over the world – including all of you here – are fully occupying what President Harry Truman called the highest office in a democracy – that of citizen. In the past 20 years there has been an explosion of growth in civil society and the citizen sector. In the U.S., we have gone from 464,000 non-profits in 1989 to 1.1 million in 2002. These include organizations founded by City Year staff and corps alumni, like Citizen Schools, Kaboom!, Camp Starfish, Blackfeet Youth Corps, Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School, Admission Possible, ServePac.org, Youth Star Cambodia, and many others. Worldwide, the number of civil society organizations has grown by at least 43% over the past ten years. We have crossed the tipping point. Citizens all over the world are seizing their power and forging the future.

If there are any skeptics out there, if there is anyone whom I haven't quite convinced to believe in idealism, I offer you the following unassailable argument: the Patriots won the Super Bowl not once, not twice, but three times and the Red Sox finally broke the curse and won a World Series! If that won't make you believe in Idealism – or at least the value of the patience of Job – nothing will.

Now along with these truly historic breakthroughs, we have faced numerous challenges and traumatic events. Most recently, the terrible day of September 11, the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the Iraq war, genocide in the Sudan, AIDS, terrorism, persistent global poverty, the ongoing struggle for peace in the Middle East, and more. And on top of it all, we have the polarization of our country, perhaps best captured by pundits and partisans constantly dividing us into red and blue states, rather than recognizing what we really need is to be reminded we are all red, white and blue Americans.

The juxtaposition of all of these events, makes me believe that we all need to buckle down and reengage in the struggle between idealism and cynicism. Here in America and around the world. Why? Because idealism inspires action and change. Cynicism leads to apathy and fear.

Idealist Act. Cynics re-act. Idealists create, Cynics tear down. Idealists say, "Lets Go!, How can I help? I have an idea." Cynics respond: "It'll never work. Why Bother? And how do I know that you are doing it for the right reasons."

When Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus, she was practicing rugged idealism. When just a stone's throw from here, our forefathers threw the tea into Boston Harbor, they were practicing rugged idealism. When the Abolitionists insisted that slavery was morally wrong and had to end, they were practicing rugged idealism. When Abraham Lincoln, against all odds, held our Union together, he was practicing rugged idealism.

When the Suffragists fought for women to be treated as full citizens and equals by having the right to vote, they were

practicing rugged idealism. When Nelson Mandela repeatedly refused early release during 27 and half years of prison, he was practicing rugged idealism. When students sat in at lunch counters, boarded buses for freedom rides, launched the anti-Vietnam war movement, marched in Tiananmen Square, and rose up in Soweto in 1976, they were all practicing rugged idealism.

When City Year alumni from all over America responded to the call to uproot their lives to found City Year Louisiana in just 90 days in response to Hurricane Katrina, they were practicing rugged idealism. When each of one of you pulls on your Timberland boots and your City Year Jacket and pledges to “serve with an open heart and an open mind to build a stronger community, nation and world for all of us,” you are practicing rugged idealism. And we need you to step it up and practice harder. Why?

Because idealism seems to be in retreat here in America. A country that was literally founded with a Declaration of Idealism on July 4, 1776. We may be the richest country in the history of the world, but for the fourth straight year, the census tells us more Americans are living in poverty. 37 million. More than 13 million of them our children. 50 million Americans, including 10 million children, do not have health insurance. 3.5 million people, well over one million of them children, will be homeless in a given year in America.

Right here in our beloved city of Boston, youth violence is at the highest level it has been in more than ten years. Virtually every day the paper is filled with new stories of senseless acts of violence. It has to stop. It is no wonder a recent study conducted by America’s Promise showed that 40% of our youth do not believe the American Dream is within their reach.

Around the world, the situation is much worse. 842 million people across the world are hungry, and six million children die every year as a result of hunger. About 1 billion people – one fifth of the world’s population – currently live on less than \$1 per day.

These numbers are not just statistics. Every single one of them represents a human being, a fellow citizen of our planet, who is struggling. Who needs our help. Taken together they are a wake up call for our democracy, a warning we must find new and better ways to build prosperity, opportunity, and most of all liberty and justice for all. The solution is not political ideology. It is not Big Government, Small Government, or any government alone.

The solution is you. It is the person sitting next to you. It is the children we recruit to join the Starfish Corps, Young Heroes and City Heroes, the citizens and companies we engage to join us in service and the citizens who step forward to join the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, the South African National Youth Service, and the military. It is anyone who steps forward to be a rugged idealist.

The solution is to develop a system of voluntary universal national service for our country and for the world. To call upon all young adults to take at least one year to learn the hard and rugged skills of practicing idealism. I have dedicated the past 20 years of my life to this dream.

When Michael and I made our first plans for City Year, we didn’t know if City Year was going to last ten weeks, or ten months, let alone ten, and now almost twenty years. We couldn’t have told you then, that today we would be working in Columbia, South Carolina, let alone Johannesburg, South Africa. And I am deeply grateful for what we all have accomplished together:

We have established City Year programs in 16 cities in America and in South Africa.

9,500 corps members have served 990,100 children and youth, dedicating more than 15 million hours of service.

Our corps members have enlisted 17,890 starfish corps members, young heroes, and city heroes.

We have partnered with more than 970 corporations and more than 2,100 community-based organizations.

952,700 citizen volunteers have joined us in service.

Collectively, our alumni have been eligible for \$44,887,500 in post-service scholarships.

Everything at City Year is more important than money, but it all costs money, and we have raised more than 414



million dollars. Unfortunately, we have also spent almost all of it.

We helped to inspire AmeriCorps and worked with others to help save AmeriCorps when it was threatened.

And while Michael and I get recognized as the Co-Founders, City Year exists today not because of us and what we've done, but because there is a spirit of public service in our country and our world. A spirit of rugged idealism. A burning desire for people to be part of something larger than themselves. We have been lucky enough to tap into that spirit and now, there are literally thousands of people to thank for City Year's growth and success. Especially the corps members and service leaders who answered the call to serve, and all of you who have committed yourselves as City Year staff and senior corps members to realize the promise of City Year.

I cannot possibly thank by name all of the thousands and thousands of people who are responsible for City Year's success but I do want to single out the extraordinary leaders who have served as City Year Board Chair: Matina Horner, Ed Cohen, Jeff Swartz, Eli Segal, and now Ilene Jacobs. Each one of them brought unique and great skills and passion to their role and made me a better leader and City Year a stronger organization.

I cannot tell you how meaningful it is to see a dream become a reality and to work with people you deeply admire and love to make that dream happen. And that has been the journey of City Year for me. I am deeply, deeply grateful to all of you and to everyone who has supported this dream for the past two decades. It has gone beyond my wildest imagination.

And yet, while I am overjoyed at and deeply appreciate the progress of City Year and that this institution is becoming built to last, I must tell you, that I am not at all satisfied with the progress America has made on the idea of universal national service. Interestingly, if you had asked me in 1981 if we would have universal national service by 2006, I would have said absolutely and in fact, I bet it will come much sooner.

It is important that national service has received strong bi-partisan support. President Bush 41 established the first office of national service in the White House. President Clinton took a quantum leap with the creation of AmeriCorps. And our current President Bush established the USA Freedom Corps after 9/11.

And yet, with all of this bi-partisan support, which is significant, we still only have 7,500 people in the Peace Corps, and only 75,000 AmeriCorps members with only about half of those serving full-time. And while we survived and overcame the extreme gutting of AmeriCorps funding in 2003, we still find ourselves fighting annual budget cuts to a program that is less than .015% of the total federal budget. AmeriCorps funding at \$383 million is just over one hundredth of a penny for every dollar of President Bush's FY07 budget proposal of 2.77 trillion.

And yet as rugged idealists we cannot be discouraged or give up because we haven't yet reached our "one day" vision. Rather, we must rededicate ourselves to that vision and that dream. And if we all do that, I have no doubt we will get there. For as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

When I announced my plans to leave at the headquarters/Boston staff meeting last week, Michael said that from now on, everyone should ask themselves "What would Alan do?" That was, as usual, too kind and generous of Michael. I

would simply say to you, always try to do what you think is right. I have tried to use one prism for every decision I have made as the Co-Founder and CEO of City Year: “What is best for the national service movement as a whole?” At each juncture I’ve asked, “How can City Year be best utilized and leveraged to advance that one day vision?”

And now I’ve come to one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever had to make and that is to leave City Year as CEO. In many ways, it would be easier and more comfortable for me to take a year’s sabbatical and just return to the work, the organization and mostly the people, that I deeply love.

And yet, after a lot of reflection and soul-searching, I’ve realized that it is time for me to move on. I did a lot of thinking when Eli Segal, our dear Board Chair and the founder of AmeriCorps, unexpectedly passed away last winter. Eli was a Rugged Idealist to his core and a role model for me in all things. He was deeply humble while also being a leader in business, government, politics and the non-profit world. Eli constantly sought and found ways to make a difference.

Eli had a remarkable ability to both support me, but also push me, and to support City Year and push City Year. Eli mentored me to make sure City Year was Built to Last and able to thrive and grow with or without me. Nothing would make Eli happier than when I told him something amazing had happened at City Year and I had little or nothing to do with it. As Chair, he led me, the Board and all of us at City Year to keep investing in the organization and the national service movement. And thanks to his leadership and guidance, I believe City Year is stronger than it has ever been.

I believe Eli would agree that it is time for me to get out of my comfort zone and push myself to think about other ways I can continue to serve. To do what I can not only to bring about that one day vision, but even more importantly, do what I can to bring about the world of social justice that vision beckons us to.

Indeed, I believe at this time in history, we have arrived at the classic Chinese notion of crisis – where the world faces great danger on one side and great opportunity on the other. And each of us, in our own way, in the coming days and months, is going to be called to look in the mirror and think about what more we can do to make a difference in the world. Each of us will have to step it up even more, if we are going to overcome the many challenges facing us, and bequeath a world to our children that is better than we found it.

We have to remember in a democracy, we as citizens ultimately have the power in our own hands. We cannot wait around for the next Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., John or Robert Kennedy, Cesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, or Aung San Su Kyi. But rather, we need to look to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to our fellow citizens to each do what we can to confront the challenges in our neighborhoods and our world. And if we unite for the common good, we are bound to succeed.

And I believe City Year and AmeriCorps, and programs for national youth service are about readying idealistic armies for that moment and that change. I hope as you do your work at City Year you will do it with a high sense of purpose. With the understanding and belief that you are part of a movement. And a part of history. And we need to figure out a way, as I said at cyzygy, not just to have one cyzygy, but one thousand cyzygies. We need to find a way such that the extraordinary spirit to serve and to give we all saw and felt in America after September 11th and after hurricane Katrina hit, does not just come alive at times of clear and extreme crisis, but animates our everyday culture and our everyday civic life.

And when I looked in the mirror in the past few months, my own inner voice said, it is time for me to look for the next challenge and the next way to serve. I will be working on a book about City Year, the national service movement and its role in advancing social justice and building democracy in America and around the world. I will also be a Fellow at the Kennedy School’s Institute of Politics, teaching a study group on “Social Entrepreneurship, National Service, and the Action Tank Approach to Change.” I am an entrepreneur, and if I’m going to do anything else entrepreneurial in my life, now is the time to do it.

I’m not leaving City Year – I look forward to serving on the board and will always be involved and committed to City



Year and to all of you.

From the beginning, we tried to develop City Year so it wasn't dependent on any one person for its long-term success. It has been a great privilege and blessing for me to work with all of you to build and grow City Year. I have total confidence the organization will not only do well, but it will do better.

I am so blessed to have an extraordinary partner in Michael. From day one, we have led City Year together. I am grateful that Michael is passionate about continuing to lead City Year through the next phase, as we all saw so beautifully this morning. Michael has been the key architect of everything important that has happened at City Year, and his leadership is exactly what's needed now, for City Year's next era. We are lucky there are two of us so this can be an easy transition.

As most of you know all too well, Michael and I first met as freshman year roommates at Harvard College on September 8, 1979. It was definitely the hand of destiny at work. We stayed roommates for the better part of the next 13 years, until August 23, 1992, the day that Michael got married. And then he kicked me out. I adore his wife Charlotte, so I understood the need.

Befriending Michael, working with him, and becoming like brothers, has been one of the greatest blessings of my life. When people ask me for advice about how to found an organization, I always tell them: first, find a partner. Everything will be easier and much more rewarding. And no one could have had a better partner or friend than I have had with Michael for these past 25 years.

Through my work with City Year, I have been privileged to meet Presidents and Prime Ministers, Corporate CEO's and Civil Rights giants. But I have met no one quite like Michael, a true patriot who combines a brilliant mind with a deeply loving heart, a passionate commitment to change and a deep rugged idealism and belief in people – especially young people. Michael has a rare willingness to always do the hard thing, if he thinks it is the right thing, even though it may not be the popular thing. Michael is an intensely loyal friend and colleague, who knows how to have your back. He has had my back going on 27 years now and I am eternally grateful. I can tell you from numerous experiences, he will always be there for you when you need him.

Simply put, without Michael, or Brownie, as I like to call him, even though the former Director of FEMA almost ruined that nickname, there would be no City Year as we know it.

Without our Brownie, there would be no City Year Logo or Red Jacket.

Without our Brownie, there would be no PITW booklet or Idealist's Handbook.

Without our Brownie, there would be no Stone Soup or Pillars of Sustainability.

Without our Brownie, there would be no Site Charter or Major Financial Policies.

Without our Brownie, there would be no Daily Briefing, E-Newsletter or CY Intranet.

Without our Brownie, there would be no City Year pledge, or Flag on our Uniforms.

Without our Brownie, there would be no City Year Endowment, \$10 million gift from Atlantic Philanthropies or successful \$40 million Capital Campaign.

Without our Brownie, there would be no strong City Year culture, concept of City Year Powertools, or naming things powerfully like NOSTUESO, Strong Circle, Serve-a-thon and Supercharger.

Without our Brownie, there would be no Unified Opening Day or Graduation and none of us would ever learn how to SAIL.

Without our Brownie, there would be no Cup of Idealism or Lifetime of Idealism Award.

Without our Brownie, there would be no permanent, Boston, National and Global Headquarters.

Without our Brownie, there would be no City Year Los Angeles start-up happening.

And without our Brownie, the Good Brownie, there would be no City Year Louisiana, to help clean up the mess that the Bad Brownie, helped to create with his lackluster response to Hurricane Katrina.

I will never forget a conversation I had with Michael last fall, soon after Katrina hit. It was the weekend that the Red Cross announced that it needed 40,000 volunteers. Michael called me around midnight. He couldn't sleep. He said he thought we should send the entire City Year corps, yes, all 1,000 corps members, to Louisiana and Mississippi immediately to help with Katrina relief and recovery. He was totally serious. He said it was the moral challenge of our generation and we needed to respond powerfully. We stayed up until 3:00 am in the morning talking back and forth with me arguing that it just wasn't possible to send the entire corps and us finally compromising by agreeing to try to launch a new City Year program in Louisiana in an unprecedented 90 days. And people say that I'm the crazy visionary at City Year.

For every major challenge we've overcome, every opportunity we've seized and every organizational breakthrough we've made, Michael has been at the very center of City Year providing extraordinary leadership, sound judgment, tireless work, brilliant thinking, and an outstanding commitment to excellence. I could not have asked for a better partner or a better friend. I will deeply miss working by Michael's side on a daily basis.

I am excited that City Year's board of trustees has unanimously chosen Michael to be the leader of City Year. There is no better person for the job. And not only City Year is fortunate, but our nation is fortunate, as Michael is one of the leading visionaries in both the national service movement and the social entrepreneur movement. He is truly a national treasure.

I am also grateful Jim will be there to support Michael in leading City Year into a new phase of growth and development. Simply put, Jim has been doing an outstanding job as Chief Operating Officer. It has been remarkable to watch him from the time he was a corps member to now leading the organization. Even with significant growth and the challenge of opening City Year Louisiana on an emergency timeline, on virtually every measure last year – the number of sites that finished in the black, recruitment, retention, fundraising, service impact, visitors – we did better than the year before, which is a testament to Jim's leadership as COO. And before becoming COO, Jim co-founded City Year Philadelphia, a site that has now gone through three generations of leadership successfully.

We have never had such a strong senior leadership team at City Year made up of a wonderful combination of longtime City Year veterans and people who bring new energy and experience from outside the world of City Year. It has been an extraordinary privilege for me to work with them all, in addition to Michael and Jim: Evelyn Barnes, Sandra Lopez Burke, AnnMaura Connolly, Rob Gordon, Sean Holleran, Charlie Rose, Nancy Routh, and Stephanie Wu. No one could ask for better colleagues or friends.



Beyond the senior leadership team, the depth of leadership at City Year is tremendous, from the regional directors, to the executive directors, to the department directors to the senior corps members and all of you who are gathered here with us. And we are also very blessed to have a deeply committed board of trustees and site boards comprised of top leaders in the business, academic, and non-profit fields.

So – we are in excellent hands, poised for growth and success in the coming years. And I would like to ask all of you to support the leadership of this organization in any way that you can. They are all superb leaders, but it will take the support of everyone here – the entire organization, to make sure that we succeed. Simply put, as Michael has led us to understand, the more we work as one united organization, the more impact we will have.

As you all know, City Year’s mission is to build democracy through citizen service, civic leadership, and social entrepreneurship. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest civic leaders of all time, said that there were three keys to building a democratic society: The ballot, the jail and the spinning wheel or the spade.

The ballot is the basic rights – especially the right to vote – that you get automatically by being a citizen in a democratic society.

The jail is your right to protest. Your right of civil disobedience. Your right to put at risk the most precious thing you have in a democracy – your freedom, your liberty – in protest over some law that you think is fundamentally unjust. By doing so, you can arouse the consciousness of the citizens in the democracy to change the law.

But, Gandhi said that it was the spinning wheel or the spade that was actually the most important of the three to make a democratic society work. For Gandhi, the spade was the willingness of citizens to get out there and do the day to day work that it takes to build a democratic society. To form associations, to teach people to read, to build houses for the homeless, to care for needy children, to help feed the hungry, and to empower citizens. Gandhi believed this one – the spade – was the most important because it engages citizens directly in their democracy.

As you leave the auditorium tonight, each of you will be given a spade – the symbol of democracy at work. I chose it to remind you of the fundamental truth of what Gandhi taught. And also to give you the message that in the coming days, weeks, months and years, we are all going to have to dig a little deeper, and find it in our souls to work harder to make our great democracy stronger.

Gandhi began his work in South Africa, and I want to leave you with a thought about City Year South Africa and the importance of carrying on City Year’s international work. When I took a year’s leave from City Year 11 years ago and traveled the world with my wife Vanessa, I came to believe the idea of national service could work all over the world. City Year South Africa has demonstrated in a powerful way that City Year is based on universal human values. The organization and the model can be adapted to local cultures and needs, but the very core of City Year, what we stand for and believe, our essence, can work in other countries.

We are so blessed to have such strong leadership of City Year South Africa in our Co-Chairs, Rick Menell and Murphy Morobe, and our Executive Director, Teboho Mahuma.

I believe City Year can work in any country in the world. And I believe that it is essential that City Year become

a global institution and help to inspire and catalyze a global movement for service. That will not be done in the next weeks, months or even the next few years, but it needs to be done. We have to realize – and what is going on in the Middle East today is a stark reminder – that the fundamental challenge facing humanity in the 21st century is to recognize that at the end of the day, we all as human beings, are in this together. And we must find a way to understand and appreciate our differences, but also unite around our common humanity and our common interests. Otherwise, we put at risk our very survival on this planet.

I want to close my remarks with a challenge and a story.

The challenge is simple: Embrace the journey of rugged idealism. Cherish your ideals and the ideals of City Year, and fight tenaciously to live under their influence and put them into practice.

The story is one that happened right at the beginning of it all, on the second day of our first pilot program. We were on Thompson's Island for a four day retreat that was combination boot camp and summer camp. In that founding corps we had two hearing impaired young people – Winda Maldonado and Jack Lyons – thanks to our then recruitment director and current trustee, Kristen Atwood, who knew sign language and was determined to make the founding City Year corps as inclusive as possible.

We all wanted to make sure that Winda and Jack were fully included, but suddenly Jack came running over and started freaking out. He signed to Kristen that he lost his ring in the field. It had been given to him by his father, was his most precious possession, and he was completely distraught.

A few of us started searching for the ring. Eventually, all 50 corps members and ten staff joined the effort but no one could find the ring. Then someone came up with the bright idea that everyone get on our hands and knees, side by side and slowly crawl across the field as the best hope of finding Jack's ring. Finally as we got about three quarters of the way down the field, a 20 year old staff member, Mitch Berman, jumped up and yelled that he had found a ring and then he went like this. (Throws arm in the air). Everyone laughed and Jack came running over to Mitch and hugged him. It took the entire corps and staff working together to find that ring. Everyone got the message right away of what City Year was about.

I turned to Kristen and said, "City Year is surely blessed." I had a very strong feeling from that moment that the organization was going to work.

And City Year has been blessed. And I have been so deeply blessed to be a part of it. I will be eternally grateful for the privilege of being a member of the wonderful and special community that is City Year. Thank you all for your extraordinary dedication, commitment, idealism, friendship and love. I love you all and will miss you greatly. City Year will always be close to my heart. I am convinced that we haven't seen anything yet, and the best days are yet to come.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alka". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.