

**Jim Nathan's Speech at the  
Junior Achievement Recognition Ceremony, May 5, 2010**  
*He was inducted in Lee County Business Hall of Fame*

We are here tonight to support the goals of Junior Achievement — a worldwide partnership between the business community, educators and volunteers — all working *together* to *inspire* young people to dream big and reach their potential.

In our midst are JA students from elementary through high school who have stepped forward to learn and grow through the JA curriculum. They have been aided by teachers and volunteers who have made a difference in their lives. These volunteers are providing gifts to the students through their time and efforts; so too the students are providing gifts to the volunteers and teachers.

My comments tonight focus on gifts that surround us ... some gifts we fully recognize and acknowledge while others are gifts that we may never fully unwrap or ever open.

In early 2006, I was asked by Joyce Ramay, who is with us this evening, to share a few words at the memorial service for her husband Haneef Ramay. I was clearly honored but had no idea how much that experience would impact my life. You see, Haneef was the closest I had ever come to a modern day Gandhi. Unfortunately, it was only after his passing that I began to fully embrace what knowing him truly meant. I had been with Haneef a number of times prior to his death. I was aware that he had been a leader in the Pakistani Parliament. I knew he was a voice of peace. I knew I was in the presence of someone special.

But it was only *after* Haneef's death that I had a chance to more fully understand. Through the power of the Internet I did a web search which showed that ... like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi ... Haneef Ramay had been imprisoned for speaking out as a voice of peace, as a voice of reason.

People in power were fearful of such voices. I saw the depth of love that many Pakistanis had for Haneef and began to grasp the courage it took for him to return to Pakistan after 9/11 trying once again to serve as a voice of peace ... a voice of reason. I learned of his visits to Caux, Switzerland, as part of international efforts to unite the peoples of the world to live in peace and mutual respect. I also learned of his history as a calligrapher and an artist.

Two other speakers at Haneef's service, Reverend Wayne Robinson of All Faiths Unitarian Congregation, and Abdul'Haq Muhammed, executive director of the Quality of Life Center, are here tonight. Following my memorial comments, Mr. Muhammed shared what has become for me a life altering observation. He said, "Jim told us about a special gift we had in our community. That gift was Haneef Ramay. Jim's comments make me realize how little I knew about Haneef. Haneef was a well wrapped gift that I never fully opened."

*Gifts come wrapped in infinite styles, shapes, bows and colors. Gifts are all around us.*

Each of us might be surprised at the extent of the gifts we have been exposed to but have only partially or never fully opened. This room is filled with gift givers including many who have given “gifts” to me along my journey. My dad spent fifty years fighting serious illnesses but he always had time for others. He did so with humor while never complaining about his daunting health challenges. He could not walk from here to the door without being winded; he spent years in and out of hospitals. Nevertheless, along his life’s path he mentored me and many young people in business offering life long lessons ... gifts ... that helped immeasurably.

In this room tonight are others who fit that description ... faced with serious, complex long-term illnesses and yet who find time to help others. Our special honoree, Tom Uhler, has battled devastating cancer while always exhibiting humor and bright cheer. His strong willingness to live and his desire to do good things for others far overshadow his health challenges.

Also here tonight is Sharon Akin, who has devoted years of her life counseling individuals and families dealing with life threatening illnesses. Sharon has battled her own personal horrendous health challenges while always making an effort to be out in the community and once again helping counsel others. Neither Sharon nor Tom fought their battles alone. They were blessed with loving spouses and close friends who cried with them and supported them. Special gifts ... gifts opened; gifts shared.

With us tonight are business mentors who, like the JA volunteers and like my dad, carved out time to help nurture and grow others. John Gadd, President of Lee Memorial for 26 years, devoted much of his career providing mentorship for many including Jon Cecil and me. Jon Cecil started as a food service trainee and is today considered one of our nation’s top human resource officers. John Gadd and Jon Cecil are gift givers who help others identify, grow and pursue career passions.

Junior Achievement assists young people by providing basic business skills. This room is filled with entrepreneurs with strong business skills; some in non-traditional business roles. Rev. Israel Suarez and his wife, Ruthie, took a religious ministry and turned it into the Nations Association, an organization helping people of all ages learn to help themselves not only with food and clothing but more importantly by fostering self dignity and assistance in seeking employment. Abdul’Haq Muhammed of Quality of Life Center uses his entrepreneurial skills to help children through tutorial and developmental assistance while also offering parenting skills. Cliff Smith, President of United Way, shares his passion of helping others by leading one of the most highly respected United Way agencies in the nation.

The economic challenges of our community require that they each use the basic concepts of Junior Achievement by applying highly creative entrepreneurial skills in order to survive, thrive and succeed. They always find time to serve others; they are true gifts to our community.

Also here this evening, are individuals who converted challenging, devastating, tragic events in their lives into gifts of service to others. This is true for each of the three individuals who participated in the video we just saw. Donna Giannuzzi's family was unable to help finance her education. She received a scholarship ... a gift ... to go to nursing school. Today Donna is the chief nursing officer for Lee Memorial Health System. She never forgot her roots. Donna opened her gift fully and has used it repeatedly to help others.

Joe Catti, President of FineMark Bank, and his wife Jo Ann, have devoted their adult lives to volunteering and helping others after receiving the gift of life when their daughter had complications at birth and was saved in a neonatal intensive care unit. John and Ellen Sheppard dealt with one of the most devastating losses anyone could ever imagine with the death of a son many years ago. They have become visible faces of volunteerism and philanthropy in our community. Donna, Jo Ann, Joe, Ellen and Johnny could not have known they were being given gifts at the darkest moments of their challenges; however, they ultimately chose to look deep inside their oddly wrapped packages. They opened them fully and have each become special gifts that keep on giving.

This November, Karen and I will have been married forty years. In our early dating years, Karen would often say I seemed to have dark clouds hanging over me. Karen, a special gift, helped blow away those dark clouds by believing in me, supporting me and at times mentoring me by holding mirrors in front of me. In tough times, she has propped me up and pushed me out of the house encouraging me to stay focused on doing what was right for our community.

This room, this community, this world are full of gifts. Sometimes we see them and choose to open them fully. Quite frequently, we are blind to the gifts nearby or we only partially open them. Through our life journey we have an opportunity to learn and grow from these gifts including opportunities to mentor and help others. Junior Achievement volunteers do just that by providing guidance, support and gifts with no strings attached. For you Junior Achievement students, this is a special night. Each of you has a chance to realize that as hard as you have worked to achieve your JA goals, you too have received some special gifts and an opportunity to grow from and to share those gifts.

For each of us this evening, I hope we won't have to wait for a memorial service and an Internet search to learn just how little we may have unwrapped a very special gift. I thank the JA selection committee for helping me unwrap a few more gifts. Thank you for a fabulous evening of gift giving.

*Peace be with each of you.*