**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

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00:00 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: Downtown Washington Rotary, Tuesday October 28th lunchtime talk. President Vann, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you most warmly for the great honour you've done me, and the great pleasure, of inviting me as your guest today. Not only because you must be the premier club but because of all the memories it brings back for me of the help we've received in many, many countries from Rotary. And I also have a great admiration for the spirit that animates Rotary and that leads you to do so much in so many ﬁelds of human need and service.

1:01: I think that the subject that I am due to talk about is disability - the meaning of disability. I would like to try and confront disability and see what we can ﬁnd out about its meaning, not only to us, as members of the human family, not only to those upon whom it falls, but to the purpose, the common purpose that we all have in building up a more liveable, equitable, peaceful and just world. By way of introduction, perhaps you would allow me to be personal for one moment and to explain how I came to be involved, as a layman, in this area of work? Having served throughout the War and having been so fortunate and blessed as to have come through it, I felt - like I think everybody else who had been fortunate enough to come through it - that we had a duty to those who had not come through, to try and work to see that a world war would never be fought again. I had the haziest ideas of how one might do that. All I could grasp was that, in addition to remaining militarily strong, anyway strong enough to make certain that another Hitler would never march across the countries of our world, that the key to peace really lies in the human heart, in our attitude.  And so I was groping for some sort of campaign or cause to join - some great worldwide campaign - which of course I never found. But instead I suddenly found myself face to face with this old man, dying of cancer, whom the hospital couldn't take. And I thought it would be easy to place him elsewhere, as I had been asked to do, but I couldn't. So I took him into my own home and nursed him until he died, thinking that was just an interlude. And of course I hadn't the faintest idea what to do - I had had no contact with people who were ill, let alone people who were dying. But I hung on to one thing I had been taught in the Air Force, and that is, when you don't know what to do, look as if you have got the whole situation completely under control. And that's about all I did.

4:23: It wasn't a temporary interlude as I had anticipated. The old man, Arthur, opened for me a door onto a world that, until that moment, I never knew existed, and that is the world of disabled people - and in particular, young disabled people. They, at that time in the late 40's - and I have to say, still today - in nearly every country of the world to some extent, were living in old persons' hospitals and homes. Active in mind but disabled in body, they were living amongst the very old and the senile, and so the desperate struggle then was to ﬁnd anything you possibly could to get them into a young environment where they could begin to fulﬁl their potential.  And again, having a house, a home then, that was full of nearly 25 disabled people of different ages, and no regular staff to help, I had to do something, and like most Englishmen when they can't see the next step, I formed a committee. And so ever since then we have been run by committees in our 205 homes - or approximately that - spread across 40 different countries, of which there are six in this country and our national foundation here in Washington with Mary Brown - welcome, Mary - as our Chairman.

6:25: Now disability: if we look at the term disability, what does it mean? We usually think of it as indicating somebody who is disabled, either in body or in mind. But in fact the term means much more than that. It means an impairment of any of our faculties, whether physical, mental or emotional. Now that means that if I, for instance - and I don't deny it - turn out to have a severe personality defect, which makes me unable to deal with a normal social situation, for instance if you found that, once at a microphone, I was unable ever to bring my talk to a conclusion, you would say - I don't know what you'd say - but you would indicate I was not a very normal person. Somebody who is unemployed is disabled - he has no means of fulﬁlling his potential. I am trying to make the point that the borderline between disability and its opposite, whatever that is, is a very ﬁne one. We all have our shortcomings, we all have aspects of our personality that make us not a complete, integrated human being, and we should be very careful before we draw this distinction between the disabled and others. The very fact that we use the term disabled, which we do, suggests that we are putting disabled people into a separate category, as if they were somehow different from the rest of us - they are not, not fundamentally. A disabled person, and this is the beginning of everything that we need to know in the ﬁeld of disability - a disabled person is above everything else a person. He is an individual, unique, a member of the one human family, destined for the same eternal end, and with all the hopes, the fears, the ambitions that each one of us has, and whatever we do for him or her, must be related to him or her as an individual person.  We should not think in terms of absolute, ideal solutions - there aren't any. Each solution is only ideal relative to the individual person, and of course in helping him we must do, we must help, in a way that upholds his human dignity.

9:46 This means, as I see it, that society needs to provide a very wide range of differing housing options, or living options if you like, for disabled people - the whole wide range of differing facilities, so that each person can choose which he or her likes – he or she likes. The end, the objective, the purpose that we are aiming at, is often deﬁned as independence, but I don't think that is quite right, because as human beings none of us can ever be completely independent - we always each day depend to some extent upon each other. I would rather see the goal deﬁned as freedom. Freedom for each person to choose the particular kind of life that he or she wants. With freedom goes responsibility, and responsibility is the essential mark of a human being. And we should aim, in giving people freedom, to build up their sense of responsibility, so that they can in the fullest sense be responsible for the whole of their lives.

11:22: Our little work - in the homes that bear my name - occupy just one small point on this wide spectrum of differing living facilities - a ladder, I like to look upon it, with different rungs - ours is just one small rung. We are trying to provide a home, in the sense that I mean it, in the English sense, a home that is like your own home, where ﬁrst you offer security so that the person can feel this is my home - my home in which I can lead the life that I want and contribute to the well-being and development of the other members of the family. It has to be a home that belongs to the community, that is ﬁnanced and run and helped by the community so that those who live in it are integrated, not isolated. And every single one of our homes, beginning with that ﬁrst in 1948, is completely funded locally. Even in the poorest countries, even in the middle of the civil war in Nigeria, where we had at that time ﬁve homes - those homes that were in the middle of the ﬁghting were totally protected and looked after by their own committees in a way that I shall never forget. It indicates how when there is a personal link, how when we are dealing with people, not problems, the human being will not walk away from his responsibilities. I have never known a home, in our 33 years of existence, give up. They always felt responsible for the disabled people in the home. And those disabled people, the residents we call them, share in decision-making. It is not We the management, You the residents, it is one team, one family.

13:39: May I look for a moment at what it means to a young person to become suddenly severely disabled? Perhaps this afternoon, crossing the road, diving into a pool that is too shallow and breaking your neck. We see disabled people, cheerful, purposeful, normal. But perhaps we overlook the struggle, the inner struggle that they've been through. I think ﬁrst disability brings with it a sense of loss, of mourning. You mourn, for what you've lost, in the same way - similar way - to the way you mourn for somebody close whom you've lost. You have, after all, lost an essential part of your being. And that may last throughout a whole lifetime, deep down inside the person. But it is soon replaced by something different, something that I can only call a revolt. You rebel against what has happened – ‘why me?’. ‘Why to me, just at the moment that I'm on the threshold of life, and everybody else is going their way?’. That inner revolt may take many forms - withdrawal, or it may take the form of anger, against anybody, the doctor, the nurse, one's wife. It isn't against them, it's against what has happened. The one thing in helping them that we must never do is to ignore it, to pretend it isn't there. Somehow, we've got to help that person work his way out of it, by establishing a close, warm, meaningful relationship in which he feels secure to say anything he likes, knowing he won't be judged. And if we can do that, and give that person time, then I think we can help him overcome that rebellion and rebuild his life.

15:57: There are many stories - and I haven't time this morning - of people almost totally disabled, who have yet led the most meaningful, purposeful, valuable lives, and that is what we should be aiming to help them do. But to bring the matter of disability to the international level, may I say that, in the disabled person I see symbolized, by virtue of his relative helplessness, the almost total helplessness of the absolutely poor, in the poorer part of the world. And I see the greatest threat to our future security and peace, the gap between the very poor and richer. Until we put that right we cannot hope for a peaceful, let alone a just, world. And if we are to do anything about it, I think two ﬁrst things are needed. The ﬁrst is that we see it in human terms, not in numerical or economic terms - we see it in human terms and understand what it means to those people, because the totally poor, if you ever met them, can do nothing for themselves but wait. Secondly, we need a commitment. We need a national, collective commitment, to determine that we are going to solve this highly complex and difﬁcult problem, but upon which in my opinion the future of our human family, to a large extent, depends. If you ask how, I would only say, step by step. One little step leads we know not where, as it did for me. And any little thing that we do to make life more liveable for another person, whether the other side of the world or here, is building peace. I'd just like to thank you very much for this opportunity of speaking to you and sharing this luncheon with you. Thank you.

18:34 to 18:46: [applause from audience]

18.47 Chairperson of meeting: Captain, we do have a minute or two if you would be willing to accept one or two questions

18:54 GLC: Yeah, I was afraid I'd overrun my time.

18:55 Chairperson of meeting: Well, we could probably take one, not more than two. Gib are you...?

18:59 Gib: Why, I was thinking...time. It's three.

Chairperson of meeting:              [Oh!]

19:03 Chairperson of meeting: Alright, do we have a question?

19:06 Over here, Ed Fenwick.

19:09 Ed Fenwick: Are you able to return some of these people to...[inaudible].

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