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Shibley Telhami Accepts Award at ATFP Fourth Annual Gala

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Thank you, Richard for this generous introduction. I am grateful to the board of the American Task Force on Palestine for this honor. I certainly know that there are many who are more deserving, including tonight in this hall.

No real achievement comes without the support of many. My wife Kathryn Hopps has been a constant source of inspiration and a true partner. My daughter Ruya and son Ramsey, of whom I am infinitely proud and from whom I always learn, have been enormously patient through demanding times. I also want to acknowledge my brother Hosam who is here tonight,

the youngest of my five close and supportive siblings.

There are dozens of people who have been there for me, many in this hall. But I would like tonight to salute the spirit of my mother and late father that has been a driving force for me, from the days I came to this great country as I turned 19, alone, with a one-way ticket, \$150, and broken English.

My mother, Terese, was a city girl, born in Haifa, who finished fourth grade but, as the 1948 war broke out found her family taking refuge in what was then a limited village on Mount Carmel. My father, Zeki, raised by a widowed mother, was one of the first two villagers to ever attend high school. He was determined to be the first to finish college and planned to attend the American University in Beirut when war imprisoned his dreams, limiting him to a life of a small village in which he rounded up children off the streets and offered free education, ultimately becoming, as the villagers called him "Al-Ustad," "the teacher."

Despite the dashed aspirations that war brought, the profound egalitarianism that my parents held was only reinforced. Instead of bitterness, there was openness. Our home knew no difference between Christian and Druze, Muslim and Jew. It was always about human beings--above politics or tribe. One must always defend what's rightfully theirs, but never at someone else's expense. Yes, for much of my childhood, I grew up with no running water or electricity with the biggest thrill being the donkey ride to the water well. But the values I was taught were in harmony with the spirit of the country that later adopted me.

When my parents let go of me, their eldest of six, to seek learning in the US, it was about enabling the dreams that they could not fulfill, and a belief that in America, the sky is the limit, regardless of color or creed.

So for me here tonight this is not really a personal honor as it is a celebration of what remains possible in this nation of ours, and an expression of our collective determination to help free the dreams and hopes of Arab and Jewish children, Palestinians and Israelis, from the shackles of violence, hatred, and occupation. May we soon celebrate the establishment of a free, democratic, Palestinian state, existing side by side with Israel, in peace and prosperity, where children's dreams can come true. Thank you very much.

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