

POTUS BARACK OBAMA VOICE OVER: For all of our outward success, Bruce and I both agree that the most important anchor over the years has been our families. We were lucky enough to find remarkable, strong, independent women to push us and challenge us and ground us, and call us out on our B.S...

[Electric guitar strumming plays]

Women who helped us become better versions of ourselves and forced us to continually re-examine our priorities. Michelle and Patti also gave us the single greatest gift of our lives; the chance to be fathers. To experience the joys and trials and profound humility of being husbands and dads.

[Electric guitar strumming plays underneath]

We spent some time trading notes about what wives and kids continue to teach us, what values we want to pass on, what examples we want to set and what kind of country we want to leave behind for them to inherit.

[Electric guitar strumming fades out]

[Bruce Springsteen play acoustic guitar softly]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: We're now dads.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And ah h-how did that change you? How m-much on the job training did you still have to do?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ooof.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Was there still a lot of stuff you had to work out before you kind of got to the point where you said, "Alright, this is the kind of dad I want to be?"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: The problem that I had was I didn't trust myself for a long, long, long time with someone else's feelings. All you have is faith to go on. If you take a baby step, you'll be able to take another one. Where did that faith come from? It comes out of the love in your life. My case: Patti was an enormous source of love in my life and a deep well of faith for me. Gave me the faith in myself to risk parts of myself that I'd never risked before and say, "Hey, I think I'm there at a place where I can... I can hold this down and let the chips fall where they may." If it all crumbles and comes apart and winds up in ruin, then that's what happened. You know? But if it doesn't, what if it doesn't? Then what am I going to do? *[laughs]* What if suddenly I find myself with a family and with a long standing love? Who... who am I then?"

All of these things came into question way before being a dad... You know Patti and I, we were just together and we were just loving... loving each other. That was... that was our business of the day: To build something. I'm... 35, 36 years old. That's getting up there, you know? And deep inside I want to have a family, and I felt like I got to be honest with her. I said, "Patti, I-I don't... I don't know if I can make this." And she said, "Well, we'll see."

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know? She says, "It's okay if we take it a day at a time." And so we did. I came home one night. I think I was away for a few days. And... I walked in the room, she said, "Oh! By the way, I'm pregnant." ... That's what it sounded like. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Crickets.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Crickets.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

[Bruce Springsteen play acoustic guitar softly]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And... we're on the bed. She tells me. I look away and she doesn't know exactly how I'm going to respond, but there's a mirror on the inside of the door and she says, "Hey, I just saw you smile." *[laughs]* That was it! Many smiles later here we sit, you know? *[laughs]* My boy about to be 30 years old.

[Bruce Springsteen play acoustic guitar softly]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It moves, man.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, well—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Your oldest— how old is she...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Malia is... Malia is 22.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: 22.

[Bruce Springsteen play acoustic guitar softly]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Sasha is 19. So, I meet Michelle uh, while I am working at a law firm for the summer. She's already a lawyer. She's younger but had gone straight through school. I'd taken my diversion into community organizing after college so... so I'm an older law student. I'm 28. She's 25. And she comes from a comp-completely orderly family and they had a big extended family beyond that. Michelle and I always talk about how part of the attraction that we had for each other, in addition to her being very attractive...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And funny and smart as a whip, was that in me she saw some things that had been missing in her childhood, which was adventure, the open road...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: A bunch of risk taking, uh traveling the world and... And so that appealed to her. I looked at her and her family and I thought, "Oh, you know, well they seem to know how to set this up." Right? I-I...I had a vision of...of wanting to make sure that my kids

were in a place of love and I liked the idea of... not necessarily a big family, but...but a... ah extended family. Like there was...there was a community of people—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Very nice—yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Who were all part of their lives, right? And Michelle's family was very much like that. And Michelle, she wasn't shy. You know pretty early on she just says, "Look, I really value my career but the thing I really want to be is a mom..."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oooh.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know? And I really care deeply about family." That very first summer that we were together, I thought to myself, "This is somebody I could see spending my life with." It didn't mean it was gonna be...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, that I'd have the wherewithal to go ahead and commit. And so when I come back, ah I'm graduating from law school, I live in her apartment, which is upstairs from her parent's apartment. Her father had died in the interim. He had some health issues. I had flown back and...and been with her during that time. And... I think from her perspective she maybe saw that I'm not a guy who was going to be afraid to be there for her when she needed it. So by the time we get there— Look, once you come back to a city and you've moved in in *her* place, now the clock has to be ticking 'cause it's like well—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You were there. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "What are you doing here?" And I did not have a big panic about it. There was a part of me and this goes back to our earlier conversation about just being a man in a culture that says, in comedies, in television, in popular culture, it's always like, "Man, you're gonna get—"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Of course. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "They got their hooks in yet."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "You gotta try to wriggle free and are you ready to—"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I'm surprised you didn't have a bigger issue with that given your history.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Your familial history. I really am—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah! I was under no illusions that the family life I would have would be one in which... I could sit back and just be the lord of the manor...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And... have her doting on me—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, from the top I knew that wasn't going to happen with Patti—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Fixing my meals and... Yeah. I...That just was not going to be...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: An option.

[Muted electric guitar plays under]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I found, with Patti, she was trying to define for me a broader sense of maleness and of masculinity — a freer sense of it. And that...that scared me.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That... I've met someone who can change me.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Mmmm.

[Muted electric guitar plays under]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And who can assist me in changing myself. That's a great influence to allow into your life. But you realize that if you don't do that, you are not going to have a full life, you know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah— no—

[Muted electric guitar fades out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It's a catch 22.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Maybe because in my family it was my mother and my grandmother who were the adult figures that I both relied on most and respected most that it was natural for me to see women as my equals, as my friends, as my partners in work...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Or play, and it also meant that the kind of relationship where a woman is just batting her eyes at me and telling me how wonderful I am... I'd get bored. Right?

Or I just couldn't take that seriously because well that certainly wasn't who my grandmother was and that wasn't who my mother was. Ah, uh I expected to be challenged. I expected to be questioned. Uh and my... the women I found most interesting, most attractive were women who interested me because of how they thought. I'm not saying I wasn't paying attention to how they looked, but—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Sure.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: The-Their ability to make me laugh, their ability to make me see something I hadn't seen before, ah their ability to force me into asking questions about who I was and what I wanted...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What I expected. All that was something I naturally gravitated towards. And I... I don't know. I liked the idea of having something kind of hard.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Hey, very similar to ah Mizz.... my red-headed gal here.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, absolutely.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Patti went with a lot of guys...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yes.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And she left a lot of broken hearts.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: A lot of broken hearts out there.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: In...in in in her trail.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And I was... I was around. *[laughs]* I said, "Damn, she's living like I live." In the ways she was approaching her relationships and she didn't like to get tied down. She didn't want— She had the leash, you know? *[laughs]* And..And that I found... I found that attractive about her...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And I found that like... "You know what? I-I need somebody with that kind of power."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: This is somebody who is my equal and that I am always going to think highly of and e-e-even when I'm mad...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Even when we're in an argument I'm going to say, "Yeah, but she's something." You know? She's—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Period. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Period. Full stop, right? Because— Because to me, at least, if you didn't have that, then you wouldn't weather the storms. If you're going to have a family, if you aren't choosing a partner who you had confidence is going to pass on strength and values and common sense and smart to your kids...

And when I looked at Michelle I could say she was sui generis. I didn't know anybody like her. I thought even if the marriage didn't work out I would always admire and respect her, and so having been with her I would have...I would never regret that. So we— You know yeah, I asked her to marry me at... that, that summer when...when I had moved in. And—

[Electric guitar strumming fades in]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And how old were you then?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: So I was 31. And so then... um we had this nice stretch of about three years...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Where she was doing her thing in her career. I was doing mine. And then we started trying to have kids. Took a while. Michelle had a couple miscarriages...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Ooh.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And we had to kind of work at it. And when Malia was finally born, we were more than ready to be parents, right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oooh.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Because there had been this six year stretch in which...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I got ya.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Probably for about half of it, we'd been trying, so...so there was no surprise to it. There was no, "Are you sure?" But I had no doubt the minute I saw that little creature...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* Oh, man.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: With those big eyes looking up at me, I said, "My goodness. I will do anything for you."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* I know.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And when the second one came, when Sasha showed up, I felt the exact same way, you know, and the love of being a father was not something I had to work on...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* Oh no, that's implicit.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It was physical, it was emotional, spiritual, you know... The attachment to my children I felt entirely and completely. And I...and I thought to myself, "Okay. If the baseline is unconditional love. I've got that."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It's something I hadn't... We had an incident where Patti was a few months pregnant. She had some bleeding. So, we go to the doctors, go in the office. I'm standing there and suddenly I realize, "There isn't anything I wouldn't do in the world, right now, if somebody says there's a lion in the hall can you please go and get him out *[laughs]* of the

building for now... there is a bear... there was nothing I wouldn't have done to have Patti and the baby be alright...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It was—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Visceral.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: It was visceral. And it was my first acquaintanceship with unconditional love. There was a fear— I felt a fearless love for the first time in my life. First time in my life. I didn't— I never knew I'd be capable of even feeling that.

[Quiet keys fades in and play underneath]

All I want to do right now is be the man that my wife and Evan was just born first... and my son needs.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You just didn't want to disappoint them.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You don't want to disappoint them—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And the idea of disappointing...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Your family and and not... not being there and doing right, you just... you couldn't...I could not abide. I thought, "Ugh, this would... this would be..."

[Quiet keys play underneath]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And I think that was the question, "Am I capable of not disappointing?"

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I wasn't sure. You're never completely sure I suppose...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: But after the children were born and you start to find the resources that you have inside you that you didn't know they were there... That is a gift you get from your children and from your wife. You—your acknowledgment of a new self. And the realization of your manhood. It was hu—huge. You know, I woke up. I felt as someone, not necessarily someone different, but someone so much further down the road than I thought maybe I'd ever get.

[Quiet keys play and fade out]

[AD BREAK]

[Piano chords play]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: This is one place where I do think the idea of what it means to be a man changed in a real way. By the time I had Malia, it wasn't just that I was completely absorbed and fascinated in love with this bundle of joy and this woman who had gone through everything *[laughs]* to give me this joy. There was I think a sense that, oh dad should want to spend time with their kids and should want to—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm. Ideally. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Burp 'em and change diapers.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: An—And I took the night shift.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So did I. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Because I was the night owl.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So was I. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And there'd be some breast milk in the freezer.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I had a set of instructions and midnight...and two o'clock in the morning I'd be patting them on the back...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And feeding 'em and—

[Piano chords play underneath]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I loved all of that—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And putting 'em on my laps and they're staring up at you and I'm reading to 'em and talking to 'em—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, I used to love going to—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Playing music for 'em.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I think the joys of that were something that, you know, in the same way that...for a long time men couldn't see the delivery, right? I mean like that was like taboo.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah...they wouldn't let you in.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I-I completely loved that and the timing was good because Malia was born. She's a fourth of July baby.

[Piano chords fade out]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Wow.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: The state legislature was out. I was already in the state legislature at that time. The law school was out. I was teaching law at the time. I could put my law practice on hold. So, I just had all this time to just wallow in it.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's good.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And then Sasha was born. She was a summer baby, same kind of thing. Now here here... here's the one thing I— I had to wrestle with and and Michelle challenged me with. And and the challenge of fatherhood for *me* was the nature of my work was exhausting, all absorbing and often took me out of town. The emotion... emotional investment in fatherhood was never hard for me. There's nothing I enjoyed more than just hanging out with my kids. Listening to them as they ge-got older, started having their own little insights and the discovery of the world...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]* The reacquaintance with wonder that they provide. Looking at a leaf...or a snail...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Or asking questions about why this and why that—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Sure.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: All that stuff. Eh ah... loved children's books, loved children's movies. Eh ah...I was all in.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: The only thing I didn't love, you know, children's pizza—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I always thought it was a little bit... *[laughs]* We used to... They like that lil'... Those little flat cheese pizzas that don't have anything on them. But...but what I was going to say though is eventually it wasn't summer. And eventually, I've got to go down to Springfield, Illinois, a three-hour drive for the state legislature. And when I get back, I've got town hall meetings I've got to do—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I've got... And then eventually I'm running for office and then you know..I'm gone for five days at a time. And from Michelle's perspective, in which family was not just a matter of love, was not just a matter of being present when you are there, but was a matter of no *physically* being present because you've made choices and organized your life so that you can be with your family more.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right. So you had your children... let me say, young in your work life.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Alright, I had my children relatively late in my work life.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You we—You were sufficiently well established that you could set your own terms—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Absolutely, I—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You'd be like if I don't want to tour right now I don't have to tour.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I had already gone to the top of the hill and over the other side. You know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I was like... I had a certain kind of success I wasn't going to have again and didn't expect to have it again, wasn't pursuing to have it again. I was happy now, I'm going to be a working, playing musician, and I had all that out of the way *really* before Patti and I got together, you know?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: That's interesting. Yeah, no that makes sense.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, so I was at a point in the life where the relationship and the family had really become a-a priority and I could give myself to it because of where I was.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And also, you're a musician— Musicians create their own schedule if you've had a certain amount of success.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You get up when you want to. You go in the studio when you want to. You put your record out when you want to. You go where you want to go. You come home when you want to come home. You can say, "I'm going to go away for three days, I'm going to go away for three months." But if you know, when I go away for three months it's bad when I come back.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: When I go...when I go away for three days, it's okay when I come back. I better start going away for three days!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: It's a better— It's the better choice.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: We figured out things like, “Well, whenever you’re away for more than three weeks, that’s bad.” Now for a touring musician, that’s not much. But all we knew was that when we passed a certain point it wasn’t good for our relationship.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Mhmm.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: We started...whoops... split into other and separate lives. Anything that’s going to keep—add to my stability I want as a part of my life. The things that are destabilizing my life I don’t want those as a part of my life now because they will poison me.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And they will poison my beautiful love here, you know? And so we slowly figured all this out together.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And you know through making some mistakes...And you’re king on the road. Everybody just wants to say, “Yes!”

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And you’re not king at home.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: No, “how can I do this for you?”—

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: “What can I do to make you happier? What can I give? Oh ohh wha... My house! Here, take my house! My Girl—Take my girlfriend!” You know... *[laughs]* It’s just like everybody’s, “What can I possibly give to you the man who writes the songs that the whole world sings?” *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So you're out there and you're going, "Ah, ah eh this isn't so bad...I mean what you know." But, when you come back you are not king.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You are the chauffeur! You are the short order cook in the morning you know. And the thing is you've got to be at the place in your life where... and you love it.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What you're saying about... your schedule though and and where you were in your career, that is a difference. Because essentially we have kids and within the span of two or three years I am suddenly being catapulted— I mean look Sasha was, when I ran for the U.S. Senate, Sasha is only 3 years old.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Wow.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: When I'm sworn in as a U.S. Senator, Sasha is 4 and Malia is 8. Something like that. Three years later, I'm President of the United States, and in the interim for a year and a half I've been on the road not for three week spans but for...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Big chunks of time.

[Electric guitar strumming underneath]

[Campaign Archival Footage of Senator Obama addressing a crowd: "Look, look at all of you. Look at all of you! (cheers) Goodness]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And it was hard.

[Campaign Archival Footage of President Obama addressing a crowd: We got a couple more guys down here... This is the life blood of this campaign. You know, volunteers like you guys coming in...]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, the burden I-I put on Michelle was enormous.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

[Electric guitar strumming underneath]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Because she was still— Look it wasn't even as if I was working for money that would allow her to take a break. She was still working, initially full-time and then part-time when I started running for President. Here's you know, smart and accomplished woman who has her own career that she now has to adjust to my... my-my crazy ambitions.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I'm missing the girls terribly. The first six months of me running for President I was miserable because I was missing that family bad. And we got through that only by virtue of Michelle's heroic ability to manage everything back home and the incredible gift of my daughters loving their daddy anyway.

[Electric guitar strumming fades out]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What I didn't anticipate was the fact that I get to spend much more time with my kids once I'm President.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Because now, I'm living above the store.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I have a 30-second commute. And so I just set up ah ah a rule: I'm having dinner with my crew at 6:30 every night unless I'm, you know, traveling. Ah, but my travel schedule..was.. is very different now because people come to see you.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And... so unless I was overseas, I'm gon' be home at 6:30 for dinner.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I'm going to be sitting there and I'm going to be entirely absorbed with stories about the annoying boys and the weird teacher and the drama in the cafeteria, reading Harry Potter and tucking them in and listening to whatever music they're now listening to—

[Guitar strumming plays under]

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And that actually was my lifeline. Right? In, in an occupation in which I'm dealing daily with mayhem, chaos, crisis, death, destruction...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: God bless...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Natural disasters, right? And...and so I always say that the degree to which Michelle and those girls sacrificed and lifted me up kept me going...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

[Guitar strumming plays under]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Prevented me from either getting cynical or despairing. Reminded me why I was doing what I was doing and...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And spurred me on because this...It better be worth it, what I accomplished, this job, this work...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Is worth the time that I've spent away from them and..and the birthday parties or the soccer games or the whatever that I've missed. You know, eh ah that better...that better count.

[Guitar strumming plays fades out]

[AD BREAK]

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: What do you think you learn being just a dad? We talked a little bit about being a husband but...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I know it was tough being President, but let me explain to you how hard it is making an album. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Making an album is pretty hard.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I'm making a dumb joke.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Listen, making an album—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: I had you for a minute though. I had you going for a minute!

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Making an album is...is pretty hard!

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: But it does seem a little more fun sometimes.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* I think so.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: A little more fun. The ah...What— What did you learn from being a dad?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: From being a dad... Ah, so the hardest thing that I had to learn how to do was to be still. I had some habits I wouldn't give up. Old musician habits. Partly it was the schedule I liked to keep. I liked to stay up till three or four in the morning, get up at twelve in the afternoon.

And for the first several years of our children, Patti was kind of... she kind of letting me do it. I was picking up, 'cause the kids were still babies so I was taking the night shift...

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: If they cried at night or something happened at night I was awake. And I would... And so when the morning came around, the late morning came around, she kind of pick up... But as the kids grew older, there was a lot more morning work than there was night work.

BOTH: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: And I was kind of enjoying that. And she just came over to me and she says, "You know, you don't have to get up. But if you don't, you're going to miss it." I said, "What do you mean?"

"Well, the kids are at their best in the morning, that's when they're the most beautiful. It's when they have reawakened from a night of dreams. They're at their most gorgeous at that moment in the morning and you're never gonna see it." Okay, I'm thinking I don't want to miss that. *[laughs]* You know?

So I said, "What am I going to do?" She says, "You're going to make breakfast." I said, "I don't know how to do anything. *[laughs]* I only know how to strum that freaking box." *[laughs]* Try to put me any place else and I'm no good to anybody. She said, "Well, you're gonna learn." I got pretty good at it. I got pretty good at eggs. I got pretty good at.... Like I said, I became a pretty

good short order cook. If— I could get a job at one point anywhere at any dinner from say from six to noon and I'd be alright.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* You know... And uh... And she was right about the children. If I saw them in the morning, it was almost like I had seen them for the entire day. And if I missed them in the morning, you could never quite make up for it for some reason. That was presentness.

One, I was not my father, I didn't have to chase that ghost or worry about that anymore. That was a part of my past. Ah two, be present in this world wherever you are at any given moment. Be present in their lives. I used to think like... if somebody interrupted me while I was writing, "What the— holy smokes! Do you know the great thoughts I'm thinking right now?"

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: *[laughs]* "This might've been the greatest American song, ever."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* "It could've been!"

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "Had you not walked in here."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: "I'm being— that's right! I'm being...I'm being ah." So I... that's where I started, alright?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]* And where I ended up was I realized, "Oh wait, wait... songs, yeah yeah. A good song is there forever. Music is there in my life forever. Children— gone."

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: They grow up.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: So, those were the... those were initial things I picked up from fatherhood.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Yeah, man.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: What about yourself? What's...what's the biggest lesson you learned from becoming a parent?

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know... Michelle figured out much earlier than I did that kids are like plants. They need sun, soil, water, but some of 'em are oaks, some of 'em are pines, some of 'em are willows and some are bamboo and...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Those seeds of who they are and the pace and ways in which they're gonna unfold are just uniquely theirs. I think I had a notion with Malia and Sasha there was sort of a way of doing things, and what, you know, Michelle figured out earlier than I did but I also ended up learning, was each one is just magical in their own ways. They—A branch is going to sprout when it's going to sprout. *[laughs]* And a flower is going to pop when it's going to pop.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And... You just...ah roll with that unfolding, that unfurling of who they are being comfortable just discovering them as opposed to feeling as if you've got— as if... as if it's a project, right? And sometimes you watch, there's a term now, "helicopter parents" right?

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Which...But that idea of, "Okay, I approach this the way I would approach some powerpoint *[laughs]*, you know, ah project I've got to check every box—"

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: "I gotta be... you know, this is when my kid's has to be doing this."

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: “And this is when they...” You know, thinking of it more as just throw a bunch of stuff at them, be with ‘em, play with ‘em, teach ‘em values. Ah you know...We we... We were good about saying to the girls things like, “Ww-We’re not going to sweat you on your grades...”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: “But we are going to sweat you on, did you put in some effort?”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Absolutely.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Right? “We’re not going to... We’re not going to give you a hard time about making a mistake, but we will give you a hard time if you’re lying about making a mistake...”

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Or... “If you mistreated somebody...” Right? Eh, so you know you put some guardrails around...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Them in terms of values, but otherwise... And I think this was particularly important because they were growing up in the White House, they had more than enough expectations and eyeballs on ‘em.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Jesus. *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: You know, Secret Service following them around...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh my god. At that age too.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: I mean I remember— Look, we'd go... Ah when... Malia or Sasha would have a playdate, Secret Service had to go to the house of the person they were visiting—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh man.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And check everything out

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: *[laughs]*

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And the poor parents, you know. So we'd have to make friends with the parents and say, "Listen, sorry about the intrusion." And when they went to the mall or to the movies, you know, they've got somebody—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Oh boy.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: Walking behind—

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: They handled it with such grace.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: They did! And so, given all that, the last thing I wanted to do was to make them feel as if they have to be something.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: As opposed to just being themselves. I still measure myself...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: Mhmm.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And I still fall back on a lot of those attitudes about what does it mean to be a man...

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: That's right.

POTUS BARACK OBAMA: And if I had a son, I suspect I would have been tougher on him in some ways and I'm wondering for you with your boys, how conscious you had to be.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: You know, I'd learn the great word in my house was "No." We— we— "We don't go outside of our comfort zone. We don't talk about our feelings in this way. Ah we don't cry over these things." And I realized at a very young age, I had taught my oldest son to say no to the things... the things that he needed. And he was quite young, I remember I came to him... he might have been 8 or 9, he was still pretty young.

But I remember going into his room one day and saying, "Evan... I think I've taught you a very bad lesson, and I would like to apologize to you for doing that. I think I've taught you to not need me because I've been afraid of what that meant as your, as your father. And that's something I really... need to apologize you for and I need to tell you I need you. I need you so badly in my life. So, so dearly as my son...that I would like to try to connect with you in a way that...that that that I hadn't been doing. You know?" And I realized that was gonna take a lot of work.

And so when I was working, instead of thinking, "Oh, I'm so busy now thinking great thoughts I don't want to be disturbed..."

[Electric guitar strumming fades in]

I stopped any time he came in or any of the children came into my room. I stopped working. The only way to teach them that "no" wasn't the answer was for me to start saying, "Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes." Over and over and over again.

[Electric guitar strumming plays and fades out]

[Credits music fades in]

ANNA HOLMES: Renegades: Born in the U.S.A. is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio: Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes, Mukta Mohan, and Joe Paulsen are executive producers. Carolyn Lipka and Adam Sachs are consulting producers.

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Transcriptions by David Rodriguez.

Special thanks to Rachael Garcia, the Dustlight development and operations coordinator.

Daniel Ek, Dawn Ostroff and Courtney Holt are executive producers for Spotify.

Gimlet and Lydia Polgreen are consulting producers. Music Supervision by Search Party Music.

From the Great State of New Jersey, special thanks to: Jon Landau, Thom Zimny, Rob Lebet, Rob DeMartin, and Barbara Carr.

We also want to thank: Adrienne Gerard, Marilyn Laverty, Tracy Nurse, Greg Linn and Betsy Whitney.

And a special thanks to Patti Scialfa for her encouragement and inspiration. And to Evan, Jess and Sam Springsteen.

From the District of Columbia, thanks to: Kristina Schake, MacKenzie Smith, Katie Hill, Eric Schultz, Caroline Adler Morales, Merone Hailemeskel, Alex Platkin, Kristin Bartoloni and Cody Keenan.

And a special thanks to Michelle, Malia and Sasha Obama.

This is Renegades: Born in the USA.

[Credits music fades out]

– End of Episode –