

Mrs. Gayathri Prahalds speech

Rev. Father Principal, Faculty of Loyola College, distinguished guests. My name is Gayatri Prahald and I am the wife of Dr. Prahald, who most of you know as CK. It is my honor and privilege to address this august gathering of an institution that was very dear to his heart.

Through the 40 years of our marriage, I remember many occasions when he has fondly recalled his interactions with the dedicated faculty that helped to influence and mold his thinking. During our visits to India, we made frequent trips to Chennai, and he made it a point to bring the children and me to Loyola College and show us his Physics lab. A memory that is etched in all of our minds is meeting Father Lawrence Sundaram who was the Principal when my husband was there. All of us were impressed with his amazing memory. He not only remembered my husband, but also his brother, his parents and his address on Giri Road. Father Sundaram was the one who wrote a recommendation for my husband's first job, an internship at Union Carbide, which launched his career in management.

A lot has been written about my husband as an outstanding teacher, a scholar, a thought leader and a fierce nationalist. But underlying all of these accomplishments was a wonderful human being who believed in sharing his dreams, his academic work, and most of all, his vision for the future. I believe that what made my husband special goes beyond any award or achievement. I feel that his genuine desire to help others, his ability to connect with people from all walks of life and his courage in facing challenges are his most endearing traits.

What meant the most to my husband was his profession as a teacher and his students. In his early years after graduating from IIM, he gave up a very lucrative job in industry to pursue an academic field. He knew he always had my support and always shared his rationale with me. He said that academia was the only field that gave you the opportunity to shape and influence young minds as well as leave your mark on industry and practice. Over the years, if he could make time stretch it was for his students. The door in his office was always open and if time ran out there was always a place at the dinner table at home. He believed that the students of today were the leaders of tomorrow and that any time spent with them was a privilege. Despite his hectic schedule, he always prepared his own lectures and graded all the student's papers. Even when he had a heart attack, he submitted the grades late but reviewed every student project himself.

I believe that my husband was a wonderful teacher to many who never sat in his class because he never stopped being a student. I know there are many in this audience who know him well and have seen firsthand his uncanny ability to connect with all kinds of people. One of his most admirable qualities was that he never talked down to anybody. He could walk with the presidents of countries and hold a meaningful conversation as well as get into the car in the airport and ask the chauffeur about his life and gauge economic trends. When students or colleagues asked him to review their writings he always helped them to improve on what they had written and made them feel good about themselves. He never hesitated to offer his help in taking good ideas forward and suggested the best journals for publication. He could go to the finest French restaurant and order the best combination of food and wine. Just as easily, he could sit on the floor with a weaver or farmer in the village and enjoy the simple food that was served and make his host feel on top of the world. The genius in him was to bring out the best in people, and they were drawn to him because they saw the sincerity of his intention.

My children and I were fortunate to have so many years with him and see that this spirit of collaboration was very much a part of who he was at home, not just in the classroom. I remember all the time when the children were growing up and his own academic career was taking wings. He

would always give us the papers he was writing and ask us for our comments. The only requirement was that we had to have a point of view and have a capability to defend it. He would listen intently and often refine his thoughts to incorporate points brought out in these discussions. It is this grounding during the formative years that gave the children tremendous insights and unique ways to handle challenges in their own lives. He shared his learning and experience with us yet did not demand that any of us follow in his line of work. What mattered to him was excellence in one's chosen field. He always told his children never to choose a career based on financial returns but to concentrate on being the best and being a positive influence in whatever they do.

I believe people listened to him because he did not preach without setting an example himself. He understood that change required more than good ideas; it required courage. Despite his own success, my husband was always touched deeply by the plight of the poor, and never stopped thinking of ways to change their lives. He did not believe that charity was the only answer. He knew that like everyone else the poor wanted to have choices and be treated with dignity. Most people who are researchers are inclined to ask "what is the next big idea? How can I get published in the most prestigious journal?" My husband asked a different question. His question was always, "who would be better off because of this idea?" and concentrated on those that could have the greatest impact. Eradicating poverty was the issue that he was the most passionate about, and his work on the BOP is the ultimate embodiment of his values.

It is therefore a great honor for us to be here and have The LIBA Center for Emerging India named after him. It takes me back to our very early years, where my husband and I spent hours discussing how we could give back and contribute toward making India a better place. Today, I think young people are even more fortunate because so much has been done and people understand that India is a place that can generate ideas that will impact the whole world. It is a point of great pride for all of us that my husband was a key driver in this transition during his lifetime.

It is very hard for me to speak about my husband in the past tense, - because from the time I first met him, he always represented the future – a future that stood on knowledge, learning, confidence and most of all, moral leadership. His dream was not for himself but for everyone to walk confidently off the beaten path and leave a legacy for others to follow. Death took away my husband, partner and best friend, but it cannot steal the legacy that he left as a teacher, the sound advice for success as a consultant and the unique vision that has guided generations of students.

As a family, we feel fortunate to have had him as a loving and devoted husband, father and a grandfather. When we count our blessings, we always count him multiple times. Going forward, I know all of us will walk in his light and not in his shadow.