

EULOGY BY LEE HSIEN YANG AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF MRS LEE KUAN YEW,  
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One of the earliest photos of my happy childhood shows me at Frasers Hill, a chubby cheerful toddler taking my first tentative steps. Mama is hovering in the background, ready to catch me if needed, and yet allowing me to find my own feet. She played this role in raising Loong, Ling and me: always there for us if needed but helping us become strong independent individuals.

I also have wonderful memories of the many idyllic family holidays at Cameron Highlands when we would stay at Cluny Lodge, a guest house perched on a scenic knoll. I remember the brisk invigorating air, long walks on the golf course, playing in the mountain streams. In the evenings we would toast marshmallows and listen to stories around the fireplace.

In August 1965, when I was not yet 8, our family holiday at Cameron Highlands was suddenly cut short. A crisis I did not then comprehend was unfolding and Mama swiftly bundled us down the hill to Kuala Lumpur and then to Singapore. It was only much later that I came to understand the historic significance of that abrupt interruption. I have not returned to Cameron Highlands since, wishing to preserve untouched my happy memories.

Although Mama encouraged all her three children to strive for academic excellence, I never felt pressured. Perhaps, it is because I was the youngest child. In fact Mama would sometimes tease me as having the “youngest child syndrome”.

Mama supported my numerous extra curricular interests, including swimming, canoeing, the military band, the Singapore Youth Orchestra. Mama often said she is a worrier by nature. Luckily her worries about these interfering with my academic achievement were completely unfounded.

Mama loved music. She encouraged Loong and me to play the recorder when we were little, moving up to the clarinet in secondary school. We shared a love of classical music. Her favorite was Bach; she also enjoyed Mozart, Hadyn, Vivaldi. She continued to enjoy music into old age. In hospital after her stroke, she asked for her MP3 player. We

would like to think the music was a comfort to her.

She also enjoyed popular singers of her time: Doris Day, in particular Que Sera Sera, Vera Lynn, Bing Crosby, The Black and White Minstrels and Danny Kaye. I remember Danny Kaye's charming song about Tubby the Tuba entitled "Be Yourself". Tubby dreamed of being a different musical instrument but concluded it was best to be himself. In many ways, this represented Mama, in modern IT jargon, WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get. Her genuineness and sincerity left a deep impression.

When I went away to University, Mama and I would correspond regularly. She was good at reading between the lines, and before long noticed the frequency Fern was being mentioned in my letters. They arranged to meet for tea on the lawn in front of Sri Temasek; I am sure there was mutual trepidation. Thankfully Mama and Fern hit it off very well, and, although Fern was competitive enough to learn to knit so that I would not only wear my mother's hand knitted jumpers, they had a warm relationship with many common interests besides knitting.

Soon after we married in 1981, Fern and I started receiving hints that grandchildren were due. These messages began quite subtly, but by 1984, when I was attending Staff College in Camberley and Fern was working as a young lawyer in the City of London, Mama wrote to say " I can understand your wanting a year or even two to run in your marriage, but it really is about time you got on with starting a family!"

Mama was thrilled when she first heard news of Fern's pregnancy and proceeded to knit numerous baby booties in anticipation. Mama knitted baby blue, white, lemon and peppermint green booties only, but no pink. She must have been prescient. Our firstborn, Shengwu, was a boy! We still have those booties today.

The following year, in 1986, Fern delivered our second baby, yet another boy, Huanwu. Mama rushed to the hospital obviously thrilled and delighted, declaring "Thank goodness it's a boy. If the baby had been a tiger girl, just think what difficulty we would have had marrying a tiger girl off!".

Our third son was born a decade after the first two, and is much younger than all Mama's other grandchildren. When Shaowu arrived in 1995, Mama was already 74 and had given up hope of any more grandchildren. In corporate parlance, Shaowu was an

unexpected bonus issue. Shaowu was greeted with great delight and she pronounced that she now had one granddaughter and six grandsons; that there was a Chinese saying about a moon and seven stars, so all we needed to do was to produce another grandson to complete her family! Sadly, neither Fern nor Ho Ching obliged.

Shaowu has the privilege of being both the youngest son, and the youngest grandson. Nai Nai (as he called his grandmother) was always pleased to see him and loved to be with him. She called him "Shao Shao", and the two got on remarkably well despite the 75 years age gap. She would invite him to outings to the zoo, the night safari, or just to play at the Istana grounds. They both enjoyed these times immensely.

Mama kept a collection of wooden tops, and would sometimes loan them to Shao. If he forgot to return them the next time he saw her, she would chide him. She did this to inculcate a sense of responsibility. Every year, Shaowu would attend the National Day Parade with her. His spirited participation gave her much pleasure.

Mama made sure the family got together regularly. In 1990, when I was still in the army, I decided to go parachuting. Neither Fern nor Mama thought much of this idea but I proceeded nonetheless. When we then did not show up for our regular Sunday family lunch, Fern received a call from Mama asking if the grandchildren were sick. Fern then explained that I had sprained my ankle parachuting. I soon received a call from Papa summoning me to SGH to have my injury fully investigated, only to discover Mama's intuition as usual was spot on and I had indeed broken my ankle.

In October 2003, soon after Papa's 80th birthday, sadly, Mama suffered her first stroke. This stroke left her much weaker and fragile. That she was less mobile and could not do many things for herself was a source of tremendous frustration for her. Although Papa had been accustomed to being looked after by his mother during his childhood and youth, and by Mama after they got married, they now reversed roles. From the outset, Papa helped, cajoled and encouraged her in her rehabilitation. He continued to care for her with an infinite amount of patience, love, kindness and good humour. He adjusted his routine to accommodate her changing circumstances and physical condition. His abiding love, devotion and care must have been a great comfort to her, and an inspiration to Fern and me on how marriage is a life long partnership, through good health and illness.

When we married in 1981, Papa wrote Fern and me a letter with advice on

marriage. Of his relationship with Mama he said "... we have never allowed the other to feel abandoned and alone in any moment of crises. Quite the contrary, we have faced all major crisis in our lives together, sharing our fears and hopes, and our subsequent grief or exultation. These moments of crises have bonded us closer together. With the years, the number of special ties which we two share have increased. Some of them we share with the children." Papa has lived this love and commitment throughout these last difficult years.

Fern and I, our three sons, Shengwu, Huanwu and Shaowu miss Mama dearly. We will cherish her memory.