

**EULOGY BY MINISTER MENTOR AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF MRS LEE
KUAN YEW, MANDAI CREMATORIUM, 6 OCTOBER 2010**

The last farewell to my wife

Ancient peoples developed and ritualised mourning practices to express the shared grief of family and friends, and together show not fear or distaste for death, but respect for the dead one; and to give comfort to the living who will miss the deceased. I recall the ritual mourning when my maternal grandmother died some 75 years ago. For five nights the family would gather to sing her praises and wail and mourn at her departure, led by a practised professional mourner. Such rituals are no longer observed. My family's sorrow is to be expressed in personal tributes to the matriarch of our family.

In October 2003 when she had her first stroke, we had a strong intimation of our mortality.

My wife and I have been together since 1947 for more than three quarters of our lives. My grief at her passing cannot be expressed in words. But today, when recounting our lives together, I would like to celebrate her life.

In our quiet moments, we would revisit our lives and times together. We had been most fortunate. At critical turning points in our lives, fortune favoured us.

As a young man with an interrupted education at Raffles College, and no steady job or profession, her parents did not look upon me as a desirable son-in-law. But she had faith in me. We had committed ourselves to each other.

In February 1952, our first son Hsien Loong was born. She took maternity leave for a year. That February, I was asked by John Laycock, the Senior Partner, to take up the case of the Postal and Telecommunications

Uniformed Staff Union, the postmen's union. They were negotiating with the government for better terms and conditions of service. Negotiations were deadlocked and they decided to go on strike. It was a battle for public support. I was able to put across the reasonableness of their case through the press and radio. After a fortnight, they won concessions from the government. Choo, who was at home on maternity leave, pencilled through my draft statements, making them simple and clear.

Over the years, she influenced my writing style. Now I write in short sentences, in the active voice. We gradually influenced each other's ways and habits as we adjusted and accommodated each other. We knew that we could not stay starry-eyed lovers all our lives; that life was an on-going challenge with new problems to resolve and manage.

We had two more children, Wei Ling in 1955 and Hsien Yang in 1957. She brought them up to be well-behaved, polite, considerate and never to throw their weight as the prime minister's children. As a lawyer, she earned enough, to free me from worries about the future of our children.

She saw the price I paid for not having mastered Mandarin when I was young. We decided to send all three children to Chinese kindergarten and schools. She made sure they learned English and Malay well at home. Her nurturing has equipped them for life in a multi-lingual region.

We never argued over the upbringing of our children, nor over financial matters. Our earnings and assets were jointly held. We were each other's confidant.

She had simple pleasures. We would walk around the Istana gardens in the evening, and I hit golf balls to relax. Later, when we had grandchildren, she would take them to feed the fish and the swans in the Istana ponds. Then we would swim. She was interested in her surroundings, for instance, that many bird varieties were pushed out by mynahs and crows eating

up the insects and vegetation. She discovered the curator of the gardens had cleared wild grasses and swing fogged for mosquitoes, killing off insects they fed on. She stopped this and the bird varieties returned. She surrounded the swimming pool with free flowering scented flowers and derived great pleasure smelling them as she swam. She knew each flower by its popular and botanical names. She had an enormous capacity for words.

She helped me draft the Constitution of the PAP. For the inaugural meeting at Victoria Memorial Hall on 4 November 1954, she gathered the wives of the founder members to sew rosettes for those who were going on stage. In my first election for Tanjong Pagar, our home in Oxley Road, became the HQ to assign cars provided by my supporters to ferry voters to the polling booth. She warned me that I could not trust my new found associates, the left-wing trade unionists led by Lim Chin Siong. She was furious that he never sent their high school student helpers to canvass for me in Tanjong Pagar, yet demanded the use of cars provided by my supporters to ferry my Tanjong Pagar voters. She had an uncanny ability to read the character of a person. She would sometimes warn me to be careful of certain persons; often, she turned out to be right.

When we were about to join Malaysia, she told me that we would not succeed because the UMNO Malay leaders had such different lifestyles and because their politics were communally-based, on race and religion. I replied that we had to make it work as there was no better choice. But she was right. We were asked to leave Malaysia before two years.

When separation was imminent, Eddie Barker, as Law Minister, drew up the draft legislation for the separation. But he did not include an undertaking by the Federation Government to guarantee the observance of the two water agreements between the PUB and the Johor state government. I asked Choo to include this. She drafted the undertaking as part of the constitutional amendment of the Federation of Malaysia Constitution itself. She

was precise and meticulous in her choice of words. The amendment statute was annexed to the Separation Agreement, which we then registered with the United Nations.

After her first stroke, she lost her left field of vision. This slowed down her reading. She learned to cope, reading with the help of a ruler. She swam every evening and kept fit. She continued to travel with me, and stayed active despite the stroke. She stayed in touch with her family and old friends. She listened to her collection of CDs, mostly classical, plus some golden oldies. She jocularly divided her life into “before stroke” and “after stroke”, like BC and AD.

She was friendly and considerate to all associated with her. She would banter with her WSOs (woman security officers) and correct their English grammar and pronunciation in a friendly and cheerful way. Her former WSOs visited her when she was at NNI. I thank them all. (Listed in [Appendix A](#))

Her second stroke on 12 May 2008 was more disabling. I encouraged and cheered her on, helped by a magnificent team of doctors, surgeons, therapists and nurses. (Listed in [Appendix B.](#))

Her nurses, WSOs and maids all grew fond of her because she was warm and considerate. When she coughed, she would take her small pillow to cover her mouth because she worried for them and did not want to infect them.

Her mind remained clear but her voice became weaker. When I kissed her on her cheek, she told me not to come too close to her in case I caught her pneumonia. I assured her that the doctors did not think that was likely because I was active. When given some peaches in hospital, she asked the maid to take one home for my lunch. I was at the centre of her life.

On 24 June 2008, a CT scan revealed another bleed again on the right side of her brain. There was not much more that medicine or surgery could do except to keep her comfortable.

I brought her home on 3 July 2008. The doctors expected her to last a few weeks. She lived till 2nd October, 2 years and 3 months. She remained lucid. They gave time for me and my children to come to terms with the inevitable. In the final few months, her faculties declined. She could not speak but her cognition remained. She looked forward to have me talk to her every evening.

Her last wish she shared with me was to enjoin our children to have our ashes placed together, as we were in life.

The last two years of her life were the most difficult. She was bed-ridden after small successive strokes; she could not speak but she was still cognisant. Every night she would wait for me to sit by her to tell her of my day's activities and to read her favourite poems. Then she would sleep.

I have precious memories of our 63 years together. Without her, I would be a different man, with a different life. She devoted herself to me and our children. She was always there when I needed her. She has lived a life full of warmth and meaning.

I should find solace at her 89 years of her life well lived. But at this moment of the final parting, my heart is heavy with sadness.

Minister Mentor's Private Office

Principal Private Secretary: Chee Hong Tat

Press Secretary: Yeong Yoon Ying

Personal Assistants: Wong Lin Hoe, Koh Kiang Chay, Lilian Ho

Security Officers and Woman Security Officers:

Alice Lim Siew Cheng, Alice Goh Siew Hiang, Catherine Tan Noi Keo, Goh Ai Hoon, Silver Ng Su Meng, Karen Ng Poh Ling, Mae Teo Siew Inn, Joey Leong Kai Mun, Joyce Chong Ai Lin, Jillian Phua, Teo Cheng Piau, Tan Yew Eng, Mervin Kwong Hoong Fai, Tong Ming Ming, Mok Suay Kheng, Angie Lee Ai Chern

Doctors:

- NNI: Dr Lee Kim En (Neurology), Dr Ivan Ng (Neurosurgery), Dr Francis Hui (Neuroradiology);
- TTSH: Dr Suresh Sahadevan (General Medicine), Dr Chin Jing Jih (Geriatric Medicine), Dr Karen Chua (Rehabilitation Medicine), Dr Kwek Tong Kiat (Anaesthesia); Thomas Lew (Anaesthesia)
- SGH: Prof Fong Kok Yong (Rheumatology); Dr A Balakrishnan (ENT)
- NDC: Dr Yuen Kwong Wing (Senior Consultant), Dr Marianne Ong (Consultant)

Nurses:

- TTSH: Wong Mui Peng, Ranbhir Kaur, Lily Ng, Tina Tng, Ten Siew Hwa, Heng Mui Chu, Lily Toh
- NNI: Tan IL Fan
- KTPH: Liu Xiao Yan
- SGH: Elaine Yek, Eileen Robert Jacob, Li Ying and Jacqueline Teo

Therapists:

- Physiotherapy: Susan Niam, Seah Wei Wei
- Occupational therapy: Chan Mei Leng, David Zhang
- Speech therapy: Leow Li Pyn, Sharon Wu

Masseurs:

Heng Li Hoong, Lynne Teo