MEMORIAL SPEECH

FOR

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Today we are here to talk about a great man, Dr. Tissa Kappagoda. Your association with him will be one of the following: As a loving husband, devoted father, doting grandfather, compassionate brother, sincere friend or concerned relative; he may have been your boss, your professor/Mentor/teacher or your cardiologist/doctor. You may remember him most as a great scientist and an imaginative painter. I think I am qualified to talk on most of these because he meant so much to me. He was my Mentor, my roll model, my guide and conscience in my life. I miss him so much in all of those roles and especially as a good friend and a family member (I will tell at the end how he became my family member- I can see Volley and Aron open their eyes widely). I would talk to him every week at least 2-3 times. We would chat about science, politics and sports.

I met him for the first time in 1999 at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka while he was on sabbatical leave. The very first time I attended one of his lectures, I found it quite interesting. It was about cholesterol and heart disease. I still remember that day so clearly. The auditorium that could fit 500 people was packed to overflowing and I had to listen to his talk while sitting on the floor. I heard that the university hospital was in big trouble when he spoke since almost all the doctors attended his talks. After this lecture we had a brief discussion on his research and interestingly, he asked me whether I would like to meet him at his Kandy residence to continue the discussion. I was delighted and thrilled. Little did I realize at the time that was the turning point of my life. I went to his house and met two very nice ladies, his mother and his wife Mary. I continued my research interests with him while I was taking a human physiology class he taught, which is one of the most interesting courses I had ever been part of in my life. He had a passion for delivering knowledge through his own hands on experiences, rather than taking things from textbooks. After his sabbatical period, he came back to the USA, and we still communicated via email. When I requested that he be my PhD adviser, he was kind enough to accept that with very strict guidelines.

And so I joined his lab as a graduate student and got to know Dr. Kappagoda as my mentor. Believe me, he was one of the toughest professors; his demands and expectations were very high. The most significant thing was that he monitored his students 24/7, so you could not switch off your phone and go to bed or sneak off to Lake Tahoe to spend the weekend. He spent many nights in the lab teaching me experiments. He was a truly remarkable scientist with an adventurous spirit. His rigorous training and teaching methods empowered each of his students to hone their skills and nurture their talents. All of his students carry very high profiles today ranging from professors to Department chairs to Deans.

It is generally accepted that when one advances in age, one’s memory function declines. I have seen this with Kappagoda in a different way. He had a habit of forgetting his car keys and his ID all the time but when he would talk about science I was surprised with his memory. Last December, he gave me a call to discuss some scientific finding. During this discussion he asked me “Indika you remember when we did that high saturated fat feeding study, we observed around 15% reduction in endothelial function?” We did that study around 2002/2004 and honestly I cannot remember this… I did check my files after our conversation and yes it was 15%. (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) I may know where my car keys are… for now… but I should be remembering that fat feeding data!! (**And wait for the laugh**). You could ask him any questions related his research and he would give you the perfect answer no matter if the response was from a 1 y or 20 y old study. As a scientist, he achieved and surpassed many goals that only a handful of people in this planet have done.

I did some searching to look into his profile. He has published nearly 300 peer-reviewed articles, 500 abstracts in international research forums, nearly 20 books/book chapters and delivered many, **many** invited talks. His research articles have been cited 6980 times (as of March 20th) according to the Web of Sciences/Google scholar. The total amount of grants he received during his career is close to 10 million dollars. He has trained nearly 30 PhD/ postdoctoral fellows and has taught more than 10,000 students and fellows throughout his tenure. When amassing all of these features, he will easily rank in the top 5% of scientists in his field worldwide.

There is no dispute that he was a great professor/physician, but above all, he was a great human being, one who was able to read a person’s heart very well in all manner and meaning. He taught me three priceless things in my life: Profession, health, family and friends. He told me that I can mess around with first two and can get away with some losses, but he warned me to not to mess with my family and friends since they are irreplaceable. He took care of all these things very well in his life. His beloved wife Mary, his two daughters \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , their husbands and his three little princes – his grandsons, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are his living legacy. Most importantly this gathering is the witness of his success. He balanced his professional life with his family and friends.

I am going to end my talk with two stories. As you all know I got my PhD under his mentorship. But I also got my California drivers license without doing much because of him. I went to the driver’s test and the examiner asked me to drive the car towards the UCD hospital. I told him that he was taking me towards my work place, and then he asked where I worked. After I mentioned that it is in the cardiology department, he asked me whether I know Dr. Kappagoda. After I told him that he was my mentor I noticed he put his signature on the document. He told me that GOD sent Dr. Kappagoda to save his life. The story begins- he is driving through someone’s backyard—and ended up in UCD and after having chest pain, Drs suggested surgery based upon investigations. He was scared and found himself in Dr. Kappagoda’s care. He went through his program and followed his advice. He told me that he ran a 3k event after two years and was planning to run a 5k the following year.

The last story is about how I became a family member of Dr. Kappagoda. I am going to show you something that my daughter wrote when she was at kindergarten on Grandparent’s Day. She wrote, “I have lot of grandparents. My grandparents from Kuliyapitiya tell me stories. My grandparents from Kulrunegala feed me food. My grandparents from California give me presents”. Her grandparents from California were Dr. Kappagoda and his beloved wife Mary. This lovely family has given us so many things! I miss Dr. Kappagoda more than I can say. This great man will be in my heart forever! May he attain the ultimate peace Nibbana (according to the Buddhism). Thank you all.