**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**KRISHNA SURISETTY**

Thank you all for taking the time and traveling all the way here to share this moment with us. I know I speak for Harshi and our family when I say your blessings and good wishes mean so much to us. Seeing everyone here, witnessing Harshi’s moment, has really made my day. While I am happy and excited to witness this achievement, I would like to provide some of my thoughts to you.

As some of you probably know, my wife, Sri and I have an emotional attachment to this city, as our wonderful daughter, Harshi was born, right here, in Charlotte, and thanks to Harshi... and of course to Sri... (**Wait for the laugh**), I became a father. You can imagine that being a first time dad was exciting and challenging, and while each dad’s experience is unique, the journey is same, and once started it **never** ends.

 About our daughter “Harshi” - In our family, it is just not a just name, it truly symbolizes **Life**. I am not sure what I did to deserve such a blessing, but I thank God every day for her. She is wonderful, loving, caring and forgiving.  Sri and I could not imagine our lives without her. We love her so much. A daughter is really a gift of love. I’ve heard it said that a daughter may outgrow your lap, but she will never outgrow your heart... and on top of that, she is a talented, graceful dancer.... which we are witnessing tonight... I couldn’t have asked for a more wonderful child!

When Harshi chooses to do something, she commits. Whether it’s being a good soccer player, a classical dancer, or a dedicated student, our daughter gives her all. To do well in both soccer and dance, one must be in condition, coordinated, and quick with one’s legs and feet. I see how hard she works at both and I know how tired those legs and feet should be, but thank goodness, our daughter has an amazing amount of **renewable energy**, (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**) ... we can credit her mother’s amazing, nutritious cooking for that!!! (**and wait for the laugh**) ... and she never ceases to astound us with her focus. Just to bring up some statistics, Harshi has so far given 65 dance performances and played more than 200 soccer games in the past few years. She has had to go through hurdles to reach this point, and **still**, she proudly hangs on to her boots and bells for as long as is necessary, to achieve her goals.

I remember when Harshi asked me, “Dad – will I be able to play soccer **and** continue my dance?” I just said **YES** boldly and proudly, but that night I could not hold my tears. It was a nightmare. I saw how hard she was working... how much both meant to her... even at such a young age. ... and wouldn’t you just know, after a year, she stunned us running on the field, playing for her school and club soccer teams, doing it **all**. She has **NOT** lost her agility or speed. As well, I see how versatile she is... moving her feet, wearing her dance bells, echoing the traditions of our culture. She has invested six months in dedicated dance classes, a great deal of commitment, and today, we cheer the results.

There are no accidents in life and coincidentally, tomorrow, August 11, is “Daughter’s Day”. To me, **EVERY DAY** is Daughter’s Day and today we get to start the celebration a little early.... I dedicate tonight to my sweetheart Harshi, and to the all of the daughters here, and whether you are sitting with us in the audience or performing, know that your families and friends are so proud of you!!

There are other people in my life who have my heart and who make special moments like these even more meaningful. To my **better** half… my wife, Sri, believe me, we **BOTH** know, without her, I am **nowhere**. Truly, I never expressed it, but this is what I really mean. My wife is the **key** nurturing our family and in particular, providing love and encouragement to Harshi throughout. Just saying “Thank you” is not enough, so maybe I will have to thank her in the best possible way.... touring cross-country....

And then there’s my little one, Vaibhav... He is the one who has **REALLY** enjoyed a lot during this summer. As we have been so busy with these preparations, he got plenty of time to play his computer games!! Vaibhav, you **KNOW** I’m just teasing you. He is the one who **really** keeps us light and smiling, even through Harshi’s hard work and practice. He is the one taking care of Harshi all the time. He supported her a lot throughout the process. He might be the younger brother, but his watchful eye and spirit keep us all going!!

I want to acknowledge Guru Radhika. She runs on her toes and keeps all the parts moving... literally... A teacher’s commitment is a key factor in a student’s dedication, and Guru Radhika has been singular in her focus while being such a positive influence on Harshi. You are an inspiration. I cannot imagine how you generate such energy to make events happen back to back. Every dance is unique. Every Arangetram stands by itself. It’s been twelve years since Harshi was introduced to you and the Bharatanatyam at the age of four. Since then, and until today, she has never stopped... she has never **WANTED** to stop, and that is a testament to **your** devotion to your students. I remember seven years ago when Harshi was in 2nd grade, she was awarded the Nrityam Scholarship for her consistent effort in Classical dancing.... that is proof of your great teaching. There are no simple words to describe you Radhika. You have been doing this for more than a decade. I wish that your legacy continues for many more.

It’s been said that “Dancing is creating sculpture that is visible for a moment,” but in that moment, our heritage, history, and colorful culture come alive. I am proud to have my daughter, Harshi, carry on the tradition of Bharatanatyam and on behalf of our family, thank you again for being here with us.