

**TRANSCRIPT OF EULOGY
BY CASSANDRA CHEW
AT THE FUNERAL OF THE LATE MR LEE KUAN YEW
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UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE AUDITORIUM**

1 I did not know Mr Lee Kuan Yew personally for most of my life. We met while I was on two assignments as a journalist - documenting his life at home and collecting photographs for a picture book for his 90th birthday.

2 I met him up close six times, for meetings and interviews, from July 2011. Most were large, formal meetings at the Istana. Naturally I was on my best behaviour.

3 After all, this was the man who had led Singapore to independence, triumphed over his opponents in a storied political career spanning over 60 years, and transformed a sleepy colonial outpost into a bustling metropolis. And there he was, in person.

4 I didn't dare to say a word to him until my editor made me lead one of the interviews. He thought Mr Lee would enjoy the interaction with a younger Singaporean.

5 I was so nervous I could hear my heart pounding before the meeting, and actually felt a headache coming on. I braced myself to be peppered with questions on whether I was married, when I planned to have children or whether I spoke Mandarin often enough – questions Mr Lee, as you know, was known to ask young Singaporeans he met.

6 But there was none of that during the 80-minute interview, which was focused on the beginnings of his political career. There was no room for nervousness either.

7 He came in, sat down, and asked, "Who's going to start?" And with that, the interview began. As always, Mr Lee was focused on the task at hand.

8 Over time, I gained more glimpses of what he was like as a person. For instance, it was a thrill for me to learn from his oral history that he once failed an art exam in primary school. But that was of course a small blemish on his distinguished academic record.

9 I also learned that in his later years he craved his late mother's gado-gado and mee siam, which thankfully, his sister, Madam Monica Lee, could replicate.

10 I made at least eight visits to 38 Oxley Road, where I went into all the rooms. But the only time I saw him at home was during our 20-minute photo shoot which began in his study, where he spent most of his time while at home.

11 He was in good spirits that day, dressed in a white, short-sleeved shirt, dark trousers and his trademark sports shoes. It looked as if he had been going through his email at his desk, which also had newspapers, magazines, binders of papers and stationery, all neatly arranged.

12 It was clear that even at home, his focus was on his work. It didn't matter to him that his furniture was more than 60 years old and outdated. They served their purpose and that was all that mattered. That was how he lived his life: very simply and frugally, and always putting the country first and his own creature comforts second.

13 We moved to the living room, which was also a very private space because it was where the late Mrs Lee was remembered. Her photographs were displayed in two rows above her urn, and I was told Mr Lee would gaze at them daily as he had his meals.

14 I could feel how much Mr Lee missed his late wife. She was his partner, his anchor, for more than 63 years.

15 The last set of photos we took at his home are my favourite. Seated on a chair by a wooden table on the verandah, Mr Lee flashed a bright smile. They turned out to be the best photos on the reel.

16 No one knows about this, but to thank him for the photo shoot that day, I had prepared two chocolate cupcakes after learning how much he enjoyed chocolate. I even got the bakery to label each cupcake so he'd know exactly what kind of chocolate cupcake it was. But, on the day, I was far too excited and dropped the box before I could present them to Mr Lee.

17 I had been reflecting on what I was learning about Mr Lee, as a person and founder of independent Singapore, and had just begun to understand just how much he and his family had sacrificed to ensure Singapore's success. I realised how much I had taken for granted, and how much more I had to thank him for.

18 To me, Mr Lee had transformed from an elderly statesman who our textbooks say did a lot for us but didn't quite seem relevant to my daily life, to a man for whom I developed a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. So much of Singapore began to make sense to me now that I had seen the world through his eyes.

19 I decided to try to express my thanks again, and wrote him a Thank You card. I had so much to say, but did not know how to say it, and ended up writing four simple lines. A few weeks later, I received a reply. True to his personality, his response was brief and to the point. "Thank you", he wrote, and signed off as "LKY". I was thrilled to have heard back from him, but a little sad that I did not convey what I felt in my heart.

20 This is my last chance. Mr Lee, thank you for everything. Some days I cannot believe how fortunate I am to have been born a Singaporean. We don't have everything, but we have more than most, because of your lifelong labour. On behalf of young Singaporeans everywhere, I'd like to say: thank you.
