

**What I learnt at JHFC: Dr. Bhavani Thuraisingham's Guest of Honor Speech at the 2018 JHFC Glitz and Glamor Gala in Toronto on October 20, 2018.**

Thank you for inviting me to be the guest of honor at the JHFC (Jaffna Holy Family Convent) Canada 2018 Glitz and Glamor Gala. I am most honored, humbled and very pleased to be with you tonight.

I was at JHFC from 1959 to 1964, K-G6. Those were the best years of my life. I still remember my first day at school as a four-year-old being introduced to the primary school principal Sr. Assumpta. We had moved to Jaffna from Colombo the previous week and it was a new environment for me. Sr. Assumpta prayed with me and that helped. I learnt so much at JHFC and credit my academic achievements to the excellent education I receive there especially in Arithmetic and Mathematics. I had so many motivating teachers at JHFC including the following: Ms Santiapillai for Kindergarten, Ms Francesca (aka Gnanapragasam) for Grade 1 for just 2 months before I was promoted to Grade 2 and was taught first by Ms Yogam and then Sr. Innocentia. Sr. Innocentia was also my class teacher for Grade 3. Then I had Ms Chellapa for Grade 4, Ms Benjamin for Grade 5 and Sr. Florence for Grade 6. Ms Mathuram (aka Mathuram teacher) who is here with us today was my Mathematics teacher for Grade 6. She is the one who got me started in Mathematics. We also had Sr. Sylvaria (aka Sr. Pushpam) as our lower school principal and much later in 1972 while having lunch with my mother and me at our home while I was studying Maths and Physics at university and home for the holidays in November, it was Sr. Sylvaria who encouraged me to do Computer Science. Sr. Sylvaria was truly a visionary. I cannot forget the Irish nuns who made us so accomplished, especially Mother Columbanus my piano teacher and Mother Josephine our upper school principal. I thank all my teachers for the outstanding education I received and the good habits they taught me.

In addition to academics, what I learnt at JHFC over 50 years ago is still helping me and they include a strong work ethic, self-discipline, focus. For example, as soon as I got home from school in a rickshaw, I would have tea, go out to play, then finish all my homework, have dinner, do extra studies and finally pray before bed. Now, in 2018, as soon as I get home from work, have tea, go to the gym, finish all the mandatory work I have to do, have dinner, watch one hour of TV and then do some extra work such as reading a research paper or solving a research problem, and finally meditate/pray before bed.

JHFC also taught me to work together as a team and support one another. In addition, our teachers made sure that we had equal opportunities just like the boys our age did. I was also trained in public speaking by the JHFC nuns. These good traits are still helping me. For example, I am known as a great mentor and a team player among my colleagues. Also, in recent years I have been a strong supporter of Women in Computer Science and given motivational talks at various events to girls and women and encourage them to get an education so that they can enrich their minds and be financially independent. Because of the grounding I got at JHFC, public speaking including giving keynote addresses has become second nature to me now. Without the influence of JHFC, I could not have done all this.

I would like to end this speech by encouraging the girls to get into Computer Science especially fields like Data Science and Cyber Security. There is a huge demand for trained professionals in this high paying field and it is ideal for a woman. This is because for many jobs you don't have to be at the office or university or need expensive equipment. You can work from home and at the same time be there for your children. All you need is your laptop and highspeed connection. Usually you will have to go to the office only when you have to attend meetings or talk to students or do teaching. It is also intellectually extremely stimulating, especially learning and developing new technologies to help humanity. More importantly you can be financially independent which I believe is a must for every woman.

Finally, I thank all those who have helped me including my late parents – I am sure they would be so happy to hear me give this speech as your guest of honor, my sisters who have supported me in various ways, my son who has been so motivating for me – ever since he was born I have wanted to be a role model for him, and most of all my husband who has supported me in my education and in my career for the past 43+ years. Once again thank you very much for this great honor. May God continue to bless JHFC.. May God also bless all the JHFC students both past and present so that they lead enriched, happy and holy lives.