

SPEECH GIVEN BY MONIKA MEI AT MEMORIAL SERVICE 24th January 2014

Thank you all for coming to help us celebrate Prof. Mei's life, and to share our grief at his passing.

To many of you he is known as Prof. Mei, to me he is Benny, the inspiring husband with whom I shared nearly 50 unforgettable years.

I can still vividly picture the first time I saw him standing under a tree in a camping site on the Spanish Costa Brava in the Summer of 1966. A handsome young man wearing bright red swimming trunks who had hitched hiked from London. His smile was dazzling. We spent days on the beach, swam, walked on the hills, danced at night, he was a terrific dancer, we always laughed, we communicated through sign language and drawings because my English was poor and Benny's French was pretty non-existent. A special warm bond developed. We fell in love.

I moved to London that Autumn, met his many friends and soon realised how much people loved his magnetic company, and his charismatic personality. In our early years together, we would spend many weekends with friends on Hampstead Heath, exploring, setting our picnic blanket, climbing trees, taking photos and laughing, always laughing.

Benny came from a humble family. He worked hard. He took various part time jobs from window cleaner to waiter to help pay his rent and living cost. One such part time job still makes me smile today – Benny became a cook, he did not really know how to cook, but he somehow managed to get an evening job in a prestigious restaurant in Belsize Park making Chinese salads! I am sure that it was his positivity, his smile, his charisma and a handful of beansprouts that convinced the restaurant owners to hire him. When he saw my disbelief he reminded me that with positive thinking nothing is impossible.

He also worked full time in a physics laboratory, and on Saturdays worked at Collets Chinese Bookshop opposite the British Museum. As a young couple we talked at length on how much we wanted to promote his homeland in the West and our first company - East Asia Books and Arts was born. It started by us renting a small office on the 4th floor in Soho's red light district with no more than a dozen books on the floor. We struggled, compiled reading lists and posted these to universities in the UK and across the world. Our first order arrived from France to the value of £1.20 for a book entitled 'Elementary Chinese Part I'. Slowly we received more orders. We moved from Soho's office to our first shop in Camden. From these rather inauspicious beginnings, Benny's vision began to grow into the success which it is today.

Benny enjoyed lengthy talks with his good friend Ted. They would discuss ideology, the world turmoil of that era, politics, philosophy, cosmic energies, and life. I can still today hear their exciting and passionate discussions. They began writing a book on philosophy to piece together their ideas. On more than one occasion Ted would miss his last underground train. Benny always said that one day he would go back to that book, continue writing, and publish it.

Benny was delighted and proud with our 3 children Li, Don and Han. He was a wonderful loving caring fun father and the guiding light who continuously encouraged the family and brought the best out in us all.. My younger sister Catherine reminded me a few days ago of words Benny had told her 44 years ago when she was in London ' I want to leave this planet with my imprint'. He certainly did that. Benny was my soul mate, he was my rock that helped me through bad patches .I will miss him terribly but take comfort that I was lucky enough to share so many years with such a happy, such a fulfilled, such a charismatic, and such an enlightened man. The sound of his laughter will never leave me. Farewell darling Benny may your light and inspiration live on.