



Davan Maharaj

Chancellor, if you were born in Palmyra 50 years or so ago and while growing up you had expressed the intention to a village elder, that when you do grow up, you might be interested in reporting news, you would have most likely drawn great rebuke. In Trinidadian villages up and down this country, a "newscarrier" was a character to be reviled and ridiculed. If only those same village elders could see him now!

Davan Maharaj would have acquired his taste for story-telling early on in his life. His paternal grandmother was a story-teller extraordinaire. It was she who infected him with the magical power of a story. It was she who wove the tales of honour, of bravery and courage and loyalty, drawn from the Ramayana, into his psyche in those early formative years. But such existential issues would not have been enough to produce a great storyteller. A story without a moral or social lesson is incomplete. It was his father, Sam, who filled in the finishing touches. Sam has had a long and difficult time in the trade union movement and Davan would have witnessed, first hand, his father's lifelong struggle to bring justice and a fair day's wage for a fair day's work to those who toiled in the sugarcane fields of Central and South Trinidad. It was Sam from whom the social consciousness came.

In the words of Sunity Maharaj, herself a journalist of no mean order:

"Davan is a born journalist. From the very beginning of his career as a reporter at the Express San Fernando bureau he would hold on to the smallest story and never let it go until he got justice for the person involved. He took personal responsibility for serving the public's right to know and, as a result, took wrong-doing, especially by public officials using public funds, personally.

"It was always the small story that led him into the big exclusives: the old pensioners who lost their savings became a major investigation into a pyramid scheme in which hundreds had been fleeced."

She goes on:

"Not only did Davan have the heart for justice, but he had the diligence for searching out the truth using investigative techniques that always respected the law and journalistic ethics.

"It was an unbeatable combination: the quick intelligence, the willingness to work hard, the thirst for justice, the insistence on holding public officials accountable and the sheer joy of breaking the story. Journalism keeps Davan so happy and engaged that I can't think of one day when he groused."

These were the ingredients that took Davan Maharaj to the top of his profession as an award-winning journalist.

He is currently the Managing Editor of the Los Angeles Times, an operation with a staff of over 700 and a budget of over 100 million United States dollars. This position was earned by rapid progress up the ranks from Staff Writer to Africa Bureau Chief, Assistant Foreign Editor, Deputy Business Editor and Business Editor. In so doing, he has received much recognition and numerous awards including the very prestigious Ernie Pyle award for human interest writing. This award emanated from a story that revealed the activities of an unscrupulous lawyer who preyed upon the elderly and dying and the lessons learnt from its

revelation led to changes in United States Law in the State of California.

*Chancellor, I call upon you to receive an award-winning journalist, this storyteller, the news-carrier from Palmyra and, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of The University of the West Indies, confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.*

*St. Augustine Campus
Saturday 27th October, 2012*