



Catherine Rukmini Kumar

Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD)

Chancellor, to say that Catherine Rukmini Kumar has blazed a trail for female executives only tells parts of her story. The parts associated with her very many outstanding accomplishments. Those parts are more than sufficient to acknowledge, honour and celebrate but in the deeper telling of her story can be found the details to inspire.

She is the second of nine children of Ranjit Kumar who was a major figure in national development. He was born in India, raised and educated in London and migrated to Trinidad while still a young man. As a civil engineer, he was responsible for the plan, design and construction of Wrightson Road, Trinidad's first dual carriageway built in the 1940s on newly reclaimed land. An active politician, he served on the Constitutional Reform Committee in 1947, on the Legislative Council from 1946-1956 and as a Butlerite with the famous trade unionist, Tubal Uriah Butler. He made an impact culturally by being the first to introduce Indian films to Trinidad and Guyana. He and his wife raised all their children to strive for excellence and independence alongside a strong belief in ethics. This picture illustrates the platform from which Catherine Kumar would launch her trailblazing record.

She attended St Joseph's Convent in Port of Spain and co-credits the school and her parents, for the strong moral compass she developed which, even in the roughest seas, would facilitate navigation of the right if not always the easy way forward. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Management Studies in 1974 from the University of The West Indies, became a Chartered Accountant in 1980 and a Fellow of Certified and Corporate Accountants in 1984. She also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Computer Systems and Design.

Through persistent application of herself to whatever challenge lay before her, she would begin to go where no woman had gone before. And far from simply being the first female to hold a particular post, she would perform with distinction and humility. She credits two additional elements with fuelling her successes. The mental stimulation and encouragement she received at the University of the West Indies remains highly valued, as is the advice of

successful male executives to “network more”. That prompt would spark an epiphany as she purposefully built strong networks via business NGOs. More CEOs came to know her and to appreciate that she was highly competent, focused and visionary.

This was a turning point that would lead to breaking the glass ceiling.

She was:

- The first female Senior Executive in the local subsidiary of a large international insurance company*
- The first female Inspector of Banks and Inspector of Financial Institutions of the Financial Supervision Unit of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago*
- First female Chief Executive of a major local bank*
- First female Chair of the Banking Association of Trinidad and Tobago*
- First female President of the American Chamber of Commerce*

The magnitude of these achievements, the true extent of her pioneering can be glimpsed in the observation that Ms Kumar was often the only female sitting in the Board Room.

Recognition would come in leading or performing a prominent role in regional and international trade missions.

Fully accepting her civic responsibilities, both in her private interactions and in her many public speaking engagements, Ms. Kumar selflessly mentors other women to pursue their dreams and encourages them to achieve academic success while holding fast to principled conduct. She is proud of having accomplished much while also managing a family and being involved in several nation-building efforts. Prominent among those efforts was serving as Project Manager for the first political debate held by the Debates Commission for the 2010 General Elections in Trinidad and Tobago and again for the Tobago House of Assembly Elections and Local Government Elections in 2013.

Chancellor, for outstanding corporate achievements, stellar mentorship to a generation of executives and especially female executives, and for selfless national service, I present Catherine Kumar, and ask that by the authority vested in you by the Senate and Council of The University of The West Indies, you confer on her the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.

St. Augustine Campus

October 2014