



ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

Liz Carpenter

BA '42, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY TO LADYBIRD JOHNSON, AUTHOR OF *RUFFLES AND FLOURISHES*, ABOUT HER FIVE YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE, AND *START WITH A LAUGH*, A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF WRITING SPEECHES DURING HER WHITE HOUSE YEARS AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

TO ME, BEING ABLE TO USE YOUR TIME, hopefully profitably, doing what you want to do, and finding happiness in it, is success. I think the keys to success are sharing and having a generous heart and a sense of humor. Another trait of successful people is that they are aware — they have inquiring minds. And finally, people who are successful are committed to taking risks and to walking through open doors. If you don't trust yourself to take a risk, you're likely to be left out of greater success.

As for me, I've always found joy in words. I was fortunate that I grew up in a family of words — my mother quoted poetry often and read to us frequently. Words enabled me to go to Washington in 1942. Fresh from The University of Texas, I got a job there in a small news bureau covering Franklin Roosevelt. Then Mrs. Roosevelt invited me to her press conferences. She was the first First Lady to have regular press conferences, and she embraced some of the women reformers who were out of New York, giving exposure to their issues like abolishing child labor and establishing unemployment compensation. They were strong women. So I had the advantage of being exposed to strong women and women who shared.

There's an old quote from the women's movement: "Men are made anxious by failure. Women are made anxious by success." I think women have gotten much braver since the start of the women's movement in this country, and it thrills me that now we are not so anxious with success. We now help each other achieve it.

On the topic of leadership, I never thought in terms of wanting to be a leader — I wasn't that self-important. I wanted to be an achiever. I wanted to be proud of what I was doing.

Growing up in my era, the term "leader" was not used much for women, but "achiever" was, and I was achieving when I became the editor of the high school paper. And then at The University of Texas I was the first woman to run for vice president of the student body, and I won. So these achievements strengthened me and strengthened my public voice.

Also, Texas has influenced me — I'm a sixth-generation Texan, and I think that gives me confidence. Texas gives you nerve and gall because of the wide-open spaces. And it's not just me: there were a lot of strong women in the movement in the early 1970s, like Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem, who were yelling for the states to elect more women. Well, it was Texas that ended up electing more women. That's when Kay Bailey Hutchison, Sarah Weddington, Sissy Farenthold — all of them — were first elected. From then on, instead of being critical of Texas women, they took lessons from what they called "those remarkable Texas women."

It's very self-serving to say you are a success, but in my own mind, I'm happy, and I am an achiever, and I still have outlets for my talents. What makes me feel successful now is that I'm 84 years old and still earning my own living. Nobody is taking care of me. I definitely don't want to go to a rest home and be surrounded by people in God's waiting room. I want to keep on writing as long as I can and sell my words. I'd like to live for a very long time because I want to see how things turn out. I just hope I can remember it all!

Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, is an Austin entrepreneur (Babble Soft) and writer.