

A FUNERAL PARTY

Speeches, Songs, and Witness

A readable transcript edition

Prepared from the event transcript. Speaker names corrected for this edition.

Editorial Note

This edition converts a raw timestamped transcript into a readable record of the formal speeches and musical moments. False starts, audio artifacts, and most background chatter have been lightly removed. Song performances are noted as musical interludes rather than reproduced as lyric sheets. The open-floor “Another speaker” appearance is included as a note only, with no transcript, per instruction.

Contents

1. **Opening Invocation** — John Merz
2. **Listen** — Matte Chi
3. **Wear Sunscreen** — Pascale Sarva
4. **Musical Interlude** — Cecily Sanford
5. **Eulogy in the Register of the Limited Partner** — Alfred Steiner
6. **The Best Friend** — Tom Sanford
7. **Musical Interlude** — Cecily Sanford
8. **Open Floor: Reversals and Resurrection** — John Post Lee
9. **The Last Will and Testament** — Jessa Howe
10. **Symbolically Late, Meaningfully Alive** — Jay Freeman
11. **Open Floor Note** — Another speaker
12. **Closing Benediction** — John Merz

1. Opening Invocation

JOHN MERZ

Welcome to this space. This is the oldest of its kind institution in the neighborhood. It dates back to 1846. And if I was able, if we were able, to conjure the lives that came in here, there were births, there were deaths, tragedies, heartbreak, loss, joy. It would have been extraordinary. And I served here with Reverend John Burris, and Amol was also a friend when he came. And so what we're doing tonight here feels strange to me. On closer inspection, not so strange after all. We're gathered to speak of someone still living, or are we?

I should say, living after a manner. In terms we usually reserve for the dead, we live in what the Greeks call *chronos*, clock time, expiring time, the measured procession of moments. And in *chronos*, we are temporary, fleeting, and disappearing creatures. Because we live there, we often wait too long to say what matters. We speak our deepest appreciations retrospectively, and we offer our clearest words after the fact. There's something poignant in that, and perhaps even something desperate. As though we're always trying to outrun time by finally saying what should have been said much earlier.

But there's another word the Greeks used for time, *kairos*. Not measured time, but a full, ripe, fulfilled time. It is the moment in which past, present, and future gather together. It is the presence of the eternal in the midst of time. It's the deep present. That's when eternity presses into the ordinary. So perhaps tonight, this evening, we're walking more to *kairos* than *chronos*. The poet Rilke, wrestling with life and death, suggested that death is not merely the end of life, but it is something grown into, and it accompanies each of us, shaping us from within that relationship.

And so one might ask of Amol, is he a man alive preparing to die? Or is he a man already dead preparing to live? Though perhaps if we're honest, this is not true of him, but of all of us. We move between being and non-being, between what is passing away and what is coming into being. And within what we imagine to be our conscious minds, this reality, fragilely stitched between life and death, waking and sleeping, dread and hope, it can become too thin to bear the weight of its own assumptions. The architecture of our inner world is always in danger of collapse, even as we labor endlessly to build some shelter identity against the dark.

So tonight's not a eulogy, not really. And nor is it merely a celebration. It is something stranger and more human than either of those things alone. It is an attempt to speak now rather than later. To say now what we have to say. Where Amol has been or waiting with us, what traces they leave in the lives of others, even before their ending comes. Of course, as we speak in the language of *kairos*, it actually in some sense has come. For him and for us. And still, we make a new beginning here with each and every response as well.

So with gratitude, with affection, and with a certain serenity beneath joy, I invite our first speaker to come forward. Matt was a seventh-grade friend who went to Stuyvesant, who's a filmmaker, a teacher, and a creator. Please come forward. [applause]

2. Listen

MATTE CHI

I want you to listen. Yeah. That's the sound of all of us together in this space. We came to humanize. [singing] I was dancing when I was twelve. I was dancing when I was twelve. I was dancing when I was old. I was dancing when I was old. That's the sound of one man dreaming. House dancer, grave dancer, Billy Budd. Ahab, whose madness maddened. The steadfast Starbuck, who would steer caution. Ahab, beware Ahab. Amol, beware Amol. I mean, we're here to celebrate, right? Or to mourn, to memorialize. But there is not enough time to do everything that I would like to do to communicate just how I feel about an old friend, a steadfast friend, a sure friend.

But first, I'd like to read you a thank you. It is so good to see you. I've missed you, and I love you. And I, and I want you to take that away if anything today. I hope to see you again. You know, and so last night, I've been working on this eulogy, and, you know, I, I wanted to make it funny, entertaining for you, performative, make it something more than it needs to be, because, you know, I asked you to listen, and I wasn't listening to what was requested of me, right? My friend invited me to his funeral. He asked me to celebrate him.

Why would he do that? Why would he need to do that? There's a lot of things going on at this show, but I want you to see beyond all that. He's a friend that I've known for almost forty years now. He's been there for me when I had nothing, when I lost everything, when I had no home, my family broken, and he's always been there for me. And he's asking me to speak, to celebrate him. And so Amol, wherever you are, I want you to listen. I want you to know that I love you. I'm proud of you. You have been loved. You are loved. You will always be loved.

And so

3. Wear Sunscreen

PASCALE SARVA

Your hearts open what you're about to hear, what you're about to experience, and I hope that you will remember it, and you will remember each other and celebrate everything you all have experienced here. Wear sunscreen. If I could offer you only one tip for the future, sunscreen would be it. The long-term benefits of sunscreen have been proven by scientists, whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own limited experience. I will dispense this advice now. Enjoy the power and beauty of your youth, foreverlasting.

You will not understand the power and beauty of your youth until they have faded. But trust me, in twenty years you'll look back at photos of yourself and recall in a way you can't grasp how much possibility lay before you and how fabulous you really looked. You are not as fat as you imagine. Don't worry about the future. Or worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra solution by chewing gum. The real troubles in your life are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blindsides you at four PM on a Tuesday.

Do one thing every day that scares you. Many roads lead to Rome. In Spanish, te hacen falta los huevos. Be terrified. Save. Don't be reckless with other people's hearts. Don't put up with people who are reckless with yours. Floss. Don't waste your time on jealousy. Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind. The race is long and in the end, it's only with yourself. Remember the compliments you receive. Forget the insults. If you succeed in doing this, please tell me how. Keep your old love letters. Throw away your old bank statements.

Stretch. Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life. The most interesting people I know didn't know at twenty-two what they wanted to do with their lives. Some of the most interesting forty-year-olds I know [coughing] get plenty confused. Be kind to your knees. You'll miss them when they're gone. Maybe you'll marry, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll have children, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll divorce at forty. Maybe you'll dance on your seventy-fifth wedding anniversary. Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much, or berate yourself either.

Your choices are half chance and are everybody else's too. Enjoy your body, use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it, or what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own. Or own. Dance, even if you have [coughing] to do it alone in your living room. Read the directions, even if you don't follow them. Don't read beauty magazines. They will make you look like what you aren't. Get to know your parents. Beyond their specific likes and dislikes, they are your best link to your past and the people most likely to stick by you in the future.

Understand that friends come and go, but if they're precious to you, you should hold on to them. Work hard to bridge gaps in geography and lifestyle, because the older you get, the more you need the same people over and over again. Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard. Live in Northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft. Travel. Accept certain inalienable truths. Prices will rise. Politicians will blabber. You too will get old. And when you do, you'll fantasize that when you were young, prices were reasonable, politicians were noble, and children respected their elders.

Respect your elders. Don't expect anyone else to support you. Maybe you'll have a trust fund. Maybe you'll have a wealthy spouse. But you never know when wealth might run out. Don't invest too much in your hair. By the time you're thirty it will look eight-five. Be careful whose advice you buy, but be patient with those who supply it. Advice is a form of nostalgia. Dispensing it is a way of fishing the past from the disposal, wiping it off, painting over the ugly parts, and recycling it for one other's growth. Trust me on this one.

Thank you.

4. Musical Interlude

CECILY SANFORD

Cecily Sanford performed a song: 'The More You Ignore Me, the Closer I Get.' The performance is noted here as music rather than transcribed as lyrics.

5. Eulogy in the Register of the Limited Partner

ALFRED STEINER

Friends, family, and limited partners. I'm Alfred Steiner. I'm all friend here for twenty years. I haven't known Amol this as long as many of you, but my official Amol friend score was still one of the highest scores when it was last We are gathered here today to mourn Amol Sarva, husband, father, philosopher, serial entrepreneur. Amol was predeceased by five whizzing companies before hindsight. A native of Queens, Amol's parents of Indian immigrants survived Stuyvesant and Stanford, double-majored in philosophy and economics at Columbia, then earned a PhD in philosophy from Stanford.

Despite all that academic success, he was destined to be an entrepreneur. Virgin Mobile USA, Peek, Halo Neuroscience, Knotel, Knotel, and his swan song, ironically occasionally, Life Extension Ventures. Amol and I met during the days of Peek, a cheap, no-nonsense mobile device for email. Did you know that Peek actually got the Gadget of the Year from Time in two thousand and eight? It was just before people discovered black berries. Amol and I-- Halo Neuroscience sold a pair of headphones that ran two milliamps of electrical current through your motor cortex, so you could mar-- get marginally better at free throws.

Amol tested early prototypes of that device on me. Basically, a resistor and a pair of wires and a nine-volt battery. I didn't get any better at free throws, but as Amol attest, it did improve my mood significantly. Knotel was Amol's first unicorn, a price-for-office company once valued at one point six billion dollars. Medieval bestiaries tell us that unicorn hunters lured their game into traps baited with fair ladies. In this case, the fair lady was, was fair, Howard Lutnick, who is now Secretary of Commerce. After losing Knotel to Lutnick, Amol founded the venture capital firm Life Extension, for people who plan.

He was convinced he could save humanity and the Earth, even though he couldn't save Knotel from Howard Lutnick. Let me use this moment to give thanks to Amol, his family, Morrissey, Robitaille, sous vide, skiing in Davos, and of course, his second home in the Rockies, where he would go on s--summer weekends when he wasn't traveling. I traveled with Amol extensively, Miami, Tokyo, Saint Barth, Burning Man, Iceland. Given all this experience, it's actually surprising to me that Amol made it this long. At Burning Man, he fell asleep in a post-party in a hundred-degree sun.

In Iceland, he nearly froze to death before stumbling on an emergency shelter. As a philosopher, Amol knew what Socrates said in the Phaedo. "Those who practice philosophy in the right way are training for dying, and they fear death least of men-- least of all men." Amol took that line seriously. While the rest of us were out there doom scrolling and eating kale, Amol was out here living the Platonic ideal and training every day like the rest of us was the big X. Some men are born posthumously. Amol Sarva, my friends, was one of those men.

Amol is survived by his investors and by Howard Lutnick, whose life has exceeded Amol's by at least fifteen years. Our next eulogist will be Tom.

6. The Best Friend

TOM SANFORD

Hi. Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to remember and mourn, but also to celebrate the first forty-nine years of Amol Sarva's remarkable life. My name is Tom Sanford, and while there are undoubtedly a few people here who've known Amol longer than I have, I think I deserve the honor of batting cleanup in this, ceremony, and getting the honor of finally eulogizing this great man. I've been lucky enough to consider myself to be his, to be his, perhaps my greatest and best friend for three decades now. Now, I'm not a great orator at all.

He's, he's a great orator, but I will do my best to sum the examples of-- the best examples of the Western canon. Pericles' celebration of the Athenian democracy as touted by Thucydides. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Howard Stern's eulogy of the Rolling-- Rolling Stones. All of these combined, and I believe they were all part of the curriculum, the, the Literature and Madness curriculum at Columbia University back in nineteen ninety-four, the year I met Amol. I say I believe they were all part of the Lit Hum curriculum because I honestly don't entirely remember.

I'm pretty sure I didn't read any of them or any of those three texts. Because in Literature and Madness, just like in so many other aspects of my life, Amol never failed to supply the support I needed to focus on my most important work. And that work was excellence in life. Amol did work in IDDO, which often really meant talking about art and drinking many beers I met Amol on a beautiful late summer day in 1994. It was the first day of orientation at Columbia University. As Amol often tells the story, I was wearing a ridiculous hat.

and not this one. [laughter] And I gathered a group of hung-- sorry, thirsty young freshmen to drink forty ounces of forty ounces of malt liquor on the steps in front of Alma Mater. As a freshman, we both lived on the same floor, John Jay Nine. So that afternoon, Amol and I shared what would become the first of many forty ounces on that step, or those steps. Amol entered my life that day, and like every group he enters, every conversation he joins, he affects it profoundly. My way of thinking, my understanding of the world were permanently altered by Amol.

Every one of you here undoubtedly knows, Amol's remarkable ambition, his hunger for new experiences, his willingness to meet impossible challenges head-on, his relentless drive to change the world around him. I learned ambition from watching Amol. I learned, to follow through from watching Amol. To him, no idea is too big. No, no idea is too absurd or too ambitious. Amol approaches life as it's art-- his life as if it's art, and that has been a huge influence on me and on my work. It-- the influence of Amol just cannot be overstated.

Now, I could recount any number of madcap [laughter] art shows or rooftop installations we built together. Does anyone remember the LIC wall F NYC sign that we built on Pearson Street, the Pearson Street building Amol, rented for his early 20s? Any you guys remember that thing? anyway, you could see it on the Queens-bound seven train as it emerged from the tunnels approaching Court, Court Square at PS1. It stayed there for at least a decade, spanning our late 20s

and early 30s. honestly, I think thinking back on it now, that was probably my most viewed piece of art, and it was a collaboration with the guy who's laying in the box right there.

And it probably wasn't his most viewed piece of art. I mean, I've dedicated my entire life to art, every waking moment for thirty, forty years, and it's Amol who has a piece in the MoMA's collection. My God. [laughter] I mean, standing here eulogizing the man who's lying six feet away from me in this box, and who undoubtedly orchestrated this entire brilliantly strange, event, in order to, to engender kind things for us to say about him. it, uh... [laughter] Sorry, I'm getting emotional here. Anyway, so he, he orchestrated this thing in order to, have us say things publicly nice about him on his birthday, and quite honestly, it's working fabulously.

So no, I'm not gonna tell you about all the projects Amol helped me realize over the years, whether it be generously funding, funding them or literally staying up all night with me, helping me paint goldfish bowls to put goldfish in them in a Northbrook exhibition, which was to be up for one day, but we spent more time making it than it'd be on view. I'm not gonna tell you about the drunken graffiti runs we did around the city in college, or, Amol showing up to my art openings from all corners, all corners of the globe, from Brooklyn to Tokyo.

I'm not even gonna tell you, the truly hilar- hilarious stories from the life of baby Arden, the most maniacal and ambition-con-- ambitious coconspirator one could imagine. Instead, I'm gonna lie. I'm gonna give Amol exactly what I believe he wants here as I participate in what might be his most, or what is his most ambitious art project to date. I'm gonna tell you that Amol has been, with the possible exception of my wife, Alice, the most impactful person who ever entered my life. And if you know me, I sort of specialize in having powerful and impactful people in my life.

If you're a good friend of mine, you probably are one of those people. so for more than thirty years, Amol has been a spec-- a singular inspiration, my fiercest supporter, my best friend, and I, and a better friend I could ever have hoped for. He's challenged me over and over again to be more creative, more ambitious, and better than I would have been without him. So today, as he no doubt, no doubt is gleefully listening from the pine box over there, and I want to finally give him the flowers that he so clearly desires.

Thank you, Amol. You are the best friend I've ever known, a truly singular presence in my life, and an endless source of inspiration. I love you.

7. Musical Interlude

CECILY SANFORD

Cecily Sanford returned for a second musical interlude, performing 'You Raise Me Up.' The performance is noted here as music rather than transcribed as lyrics.

8. Open Floor: Reversals and Resurrection

JOHN POST LEE

forgive me for being a little bit nervous, but I'm gonna hold you shackle about this sometime. I reckon I... I can't even read my glasses there. I should put my reading glasses. how did the Episcopalian Church get its groove back? That's my, like, I come to learn, like, just the elegance of nineteenth century Episcopalian ceremony. I think we need that. But, there will be kind of a ceremonial ceremony in the basement. All the students should go down to the basement right now. I thought Amol was Hindu anyway, so. Now, I've always said, you know, Amol will probably, if he does get into heaven, and I always like to say, you know, about Christianity, only a Jew could make up a Christian believe it.

If he does get into heaven, he's gonna be the first Hindu Indian venture capitalist. Well, this is a tough room. I can't remind you of that line 'cause my actual speech... Are there any kids here? There was two brothers walking down the street. okay, not that line. There's all this stuff that's been said, and I, I just Google Amol. I knew a lot about him, but I shouldn't have. I knew a lot about him, but I can't even mention it tonight. All great stuff is there in the book. And, I knew-- I met him when Tom and I introduced as we worked on the Wesley Park campaign.

So I think obviously there's a whole section here for the lawyers, given that it's Amol's funeral. but Amol and I worked with Tom on the Wesley Park, another failed, entrepreneurial venture of our lives. what else is here? blah, blah, blah, blah. [laughter] I was gonna say, I'm older than Tom and Amol, but I like to say that my, my pajama is older than both of them. [audience laughing] That's just-- I was told that's Jewish stuff for shtick. [audience laughing] Thank you for coming. I'll be here all week. [audience laughing] my car's double-parked.

Actually, I valeted my car, but I found out there was no valet parking. That's true in Lakeview, anyway. [audience laughing] So, here's the part I'll try to stick to. It says, "The man keeps going, and every crater becomes a launching pad." And the thing is, we cannot bury Amol because he just keeps coming back. [audience laughing] He's digging his way out. There is no burying Amol. He said something to me during, you know, he had a reversal, and I had a reversal. I got-- I ran into him. We were having a drink, and I said, "Amol, I got fired from my internet company." It's true.

And he said, it's been-- He just said, "I remember when you said it was so helpful," because I felt so bad at that point, and he just said something that was so... It always is great to have that kind of comment to kind of bring you back to reality. And I look back, that was a five or six-year job, and the greatest thing that ever happened to me honestly was getting fired from that company. so you never know what reversal is going to lead and what that means at the time. And when you've got an Amol, you can't bury him. And so it's weird to be here.

I don't know if I want to go back there. [audience laughing] This part is really creepy. [audience laughing] By the way, Ascension Week is like Ascension now, right? So this is like forty days, right? Is there anybody here? Anybody? [audience laughing] Right? It's August the fourteenth?

Imaginations. today, you know, Amol does for-- By the way, I've-- One of my biggest regrets as far as to being next to him is- [audience laughing] His sincerity is just overwhelming me right now. [audience laughing] I didn't expect him to be this sincere.

Anyway, so I just gotta love Amol that, he leaves behind... I think he has a hedge fund that's Sarva, Sarva, Sarva, and Sarva, and more Sarva. [audience laughing] You guys can handle that? And that's it. I'm out of here. Thank you. [applause]

9. The Last Will and Testament

JESSA HOWE

Good afternoon. My name is Jessa Howe, and I'm here representing Amol Sarva's first, but not last, will and testament. As counsel of record, duly retained and regrettably unpaid, [audience laughing] I submit the following funeral oration for a client who is, for all legally relevant purposes, alive, present, and actively judging my delivery. [audience laughing] The self-designated and self-adjourned decedent has made the following requests, attesting that he, Amol Sarva, being of sound mind, does make, publish, and declare the following simple holiday requests.

Initially, a copy of Howl by Allen Ginsberg, heavily annotated in the margins with statements such as, "Yes, this is me," [audience laughing] and "I will memorize this." [audience laughing] In addition, it's illustrated by several pages that appear to have been torn out in frustration. [audience laughing] Per the decedent's instructions, I'm required to read this thirty-minute poem in its entirety. [audience laughing] I will not be doing that. [audience laughing] Not due to a lack of respect for Mr. Baldwin, but due to the fact that this request was specifically excluded from being part of my role today.

Instead, I will read the decedent's demonstrated attention span and deliver only what he himself committed to memory. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." His annotations to the text indicate that this was the part he most identified with, [audience laughing] and as with the rest of the text, is hereby emotionally acknowledged, professionally admired, and practically unread. Second, a vintage question mark Amol's accomplishments in the field of telecommunications, this rhyme also serves as a legal notice that all individuals who fail to officially RSVP for this event are hereby redirected permanently to voicemail.

[laughter] And finally, a two dollar bill. Described in his own words as the only denomination that ever really understood me. [laughter] To be distributed to an attendee who demonstrates the most convincing sadness without making it about themselves, [laughter] causing a scene, or interrupting the line to the bar. I leave you with these requests and the words of Morrissey, "There is a light that never goes out." Well, maybe not never, but as a result of you in attendance today, certainly not today.

10. Symbolically Late, Meaningfully Alive

JAY FREEMAN

ladies and gentlemen, family, friends, investors who are still waiting for a return, [laughter] and people who accidentally wandered into the wrong event. [laughter] We're gathered here today to honor the late but clearly meaningfully still alive, Amol Mukarzel. Amol lived a full and remarkable life, not necessarily a calm one, but certainly a fully booked one. He bravely dedicated himself to impossible missions, reinventing cities, redefining workspaces, attending meetings about meetings, and explaining spirals to developers who still think he works in computers.

Amol believed in big ideas, very big ideas, sometimes so big that even a PowerPoint couldn't concentrate or contain them. He was a visionary, a disruptor, a man capable of using phrases like urban ecosystems and platinum synergy with complete sincerity. And yet, beneath the ambitious entrepreneur exterior was a deeply human soul, a generous spirit. Of course, no remembrance would be complete without mentioning Amol's legendary optimism. Most people, take a problem and think that looks difficult. Amol sees a problem and says, "Excellent, let's scale it." His hobbies included founding things, advising things, inventing things, and occasionally sleeping.

though today we mourn his symbolic passing, we take comfort in knowing that he will soon rise again, probably with a new business plan, three podcasts, and a redesigned website. [laughter] So let us say goodbye to Amol with sorrow. We meant it kindly. Thank you.

11. Open Floor Note

ANOTHER SPEAKER

Another speaker came forward during the open-floor portion. The appearance is noted in the event record, but the transcript is intentionally omitted from this edition.

12. Closing Benediction

JOHN MERZ

We've had a lot of wonderful offerings this evening, and keep continuing to celebrate. Let him come in. Let us ring the bells that still can manage. I guess you've heard it before. There is a crack in everything, and that's how the light gets in. Let us continue with the richness and geology of the dance.