

Happy Father's Day!

Category: Regrets/No Regrets

written by Neeta Nayak | June 18, 2024

I awoke from a deep sleep today—Sunday, June 16—with a sudden urge to call my dad, nearly 10,000 miles away in India, and wish him Happy Father's Day. A second later, I remembered that he'd passed away almost 15 years ago.

Was he in a "better place," as everyone assured me he was when he died at age 69 of metastatic prostate cancer? Could I call him there, as I'd done for years after I left India in my early 20s?

As I lay in my bed, his larger-than-life presence felt like it was still with me. I longed to hear his voice, infused with humor, one more time. I had a heart-wrenching moment of regret that I hadn't called him often enough, even though we used to speak every Sunday.

Father's Day was not a thing in India when I was growing up. My memories of India from the 1970s and 1980s include celebrating Diwali, Dussehra, etc. But the modern India of today celebrates Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc.

After I moved to the U.S., I made sure to have an extra-lengthy conversation with my dad on Father's Day. I had appreciated the new-found occasion to celebrate him.

This year, I wondered what I could do to honor his memory. Dad had been a general surgeon at a time when there were hardly any subspecialists in India; he was expected to care for a ruptured appendix one moment, a gangrenous limb the next, and then a young woman with fourth-degree burns inflicted by in-laws furious about her paltry dowry. I remember him chuckling, "I've gotten to be the jack of all trades [surgeries] and the master of some!"

I desperately missed his sense of humor—and his writing skill. He used to help me with speaking and writing competitions; we'd peruse snippets from magazines and newspapers and find quotes from famous authors and presidents. English was not our first language, and we would refer often to the dictionary and thesaurus. It used to feel like we were making a giant pot of stew together—putting in a pinch of this and a drop of that until the results were perfect.

We loved writing together. I regretted having not done a single project with him since I'd left India. Had he regretted that loss, too?

I wondered what he'd have wanted for this Father's Day. Perhaps such a stew? We couldn't make it together, so I had to write this story alone, while imagining how he might have contributed to it. In addition, I sent a gift to Pulse, becoming a first-time Pulse supporter.

I know my dad—even though he's in a better place and I'm not, he'd be smiling with joy!

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