

Who Am I?

Category: Healing

written by Annesha Dey | August 5, 2021

"I'll see you soon, Dadai," I enunciated for the third time on the video chat.

He still can't hear me.

Before I could repeat myself, tears swelled up in my grandfather's cavernous eyes as he peered at me through the tiny screen. The screen that was somehow meant to bridge the immense distance between myself and my grandpa in Kolkata, India. I sighed, my heart wrenching at the sight.

"Don't cry, Dadai," I said gently, though I knew he still could not hear me. I glanced at his ear, where his glistening white hair brushed against the pale wrinkles on his cheek. Disappointed at the sight of his hearing aid already clinging to his ear, I pulled out my laptop and began typing.

W-H-O A-M I?

I turned the camera to face the size 75 font on my laptop screen, and watched his eyes light up as a soft smile crept onto his face. I immediately reciprocated the smile as he said my name with joy.

He remembers me today.

With Alzheimer's, "healing" is a temporary fix. Every day is different. When my grandfather was diagnosed, I quickly learned that in his mind, I alternated between a stranger and a granddaughter daily. As each video chat call rings, all I can do is hope that my face is one he recognizes when he picks up.

The truth is, I lied to my grandfather that day. I still don't know when I'll see him again or if he will be the same person he used to be, radiating his youth even in old age and strutting the bustling streets of India with more confidence than anyone I'd ever seen. As COVID tormented international travel during the pandemic, our interactions were reduced to brief phone calls regarding ambiguous topics neither of us cared much for.

I long for the hot summer days in India when we would sit on the brightly colored sheets my grandma had sewed, multiplication tables sprawled across his too-firm bed. Since I was a little girl, he had bought me educational workbooks about every subject there was. The last book he bought me was three years ago, for my 10th grade chemistry class. He insisted I use the same textbook he had bought for my father so many years before, even though it was completely different from my American school's curriculum. "Chemistry is chemistry," he'd said. That was a few months before he was diagnosed. I wonder if he remembers the book.

Some days my grandfather has momentary improvements, but it feels like, after

every step forward, he takes three steps backwards.

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