know that when we met that fourth and final time this December, a month before Omar passed away, the cancer had insidiously and silently spread across his body and he must have been in pain. Yet with such fortitude, gentleness and patience, he bent over to read Ten Little Dinosaurs with Pareesa, dutifully practised baa-baa-black-sheep again and again, sat cross-legged on the hard wooden floor to play roll-a-ball with her and very seriously discussed the noises that her new wooden farmyard animals might make. Pareesa recognised this kindred spirit immediately, and would often just walk up to Omar and hug his legs. It's sad to think that soon she will forget her beloved *phupa* and that special connection they had. Perhaps one day we will find it in our hearts to spin bedtime stories about a boy called Omar and his pet dinosaurs.



Mursi and Omar.

The setting of Omar's burial site, at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, fits what he would have wanted in more ways than one. Omar wanted a serene location, and Sleepy Hollow lies on the Hudson River, not too far from Manhattan, yet far from city noise and tucked away in nature. It is guarded on the north by Rockefeller State Park Reserve, on the south by Pocantico River, an unspoiled stream, and on the east by Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park. Omar wanted a place that people would like to visit - his site is next to a brook, with deer wandering around, and with picnic tables conveniently nearby, from where the laughter of his picnicking friends and family could easily emanate and waft over to his resting place. Omar was the very opposite of exclusive and he would be happy to know that Sleepy Hollow is entirely non-sectarian and non-profit. Omar loved stories, was a history buff, and would enjoy knowing that "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", penned by Washington Irving in 1819, is set in these very same grounds. The legend features a headless horseman, who makes nightly rides in quest of his head. So, the history of this cemetery is complete with a scary yet quirky tale, which too Omar would have appreciated.

To those who never had the good fortune of sharing such moments with Omar, he may indeed become a distant hazy memory or a nameless face in a grainy photo in a dusty family album. But we, his adopted second family, know that our memories of Omar will always be as vivid and alive as the man himself once was.

Note:

Omar Azfar was the, eldest son of Kamaluddin Azfar and Naheed Jafri Azfar from Karachi, Pakistan. He was the beloved husband of Mursaleena Islam and son-in-law of Anwarul and Zeenat Islam. Omar was a Professor of Economics at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. He held B.A. Honors from Balliol College, Oxford University in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) and a Ph.D. in Economics from Columbia University. He was the author of numerous research publications in Development Economics and the Economics of Corruption - he was working on a research paper, on police corruption and its impact on the lives of the poor, an issue he felt strongly about.

Omar passed away peacefully in Manhattan, New York, on January 21, 2009 at 5:30 a.m. Omar was diagnosed with bone cancer in May 2007 which later metastasised to the lungs. He endured months of tests, treatments and six surgeries with strength, courage, and good humour. Omar happily watched the Obama inauguration the day before he passed away. He was in good spirits, surrounded by friends and family, until the end. He is survived by his wife, grandmother, parents, brother, sister, nephew, and countless friends. ■