

A Daughter Remembers

My mother is probably not going to live. Having written the line myself, I still stare at the cold black letters on the cold white screen, in a detached manner, as if it is not going to happen to me. But I can't afford to do that. I must accept the fact that although my near-about ninety years old Mum has put up a tremendous fight against multiple illnesses and complications, she is probably not going to win this time. We are desperately begging to Allah to make her well again.

Meanwhile, perhaps I should do what my mother might have liked. She would have wanted us to remember and celebrate her life when she was still around.

Whenever we talk or write about a woman in our society, we tend to begin by saying what a wonderful mother, wife, daughter she had been. As if a woman's identity is defined by her relationships with the other people in her life- as if she can't be remembered and admired for just being her own self. Because that's what my mother is, over and above being a wife, mother and grandmother, she is "herself", and it is this individual I am going to miss the most.

Mrs. Muquddesa A. Qasem, wife of Late A. Qasem FCA, First President of ICAB, and mother of Shakil, Sohail and Sanjida Kasem is a social worker and writer. She is an Alumna of Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata and Institute of Social Welfare, University of Dhaka. She lived and studied in many places, along with her father, and later, with her husband. She had many interesting experiences while pursuing her studies, the most notable one being the lone girl candidate appearing in the Matriculation examination from a Boys' School with special permission.

I did not realise it earlier, but now I understand that my mother lived way ahead of her time. Despite having a brilliant academic career, she took a break from her studies after graduation, to raise her two sons (I came much later). She went back to University to complete her Masters in Social Welfare in 1959 (their batch is the first). I still can't imagine what prompted her to take up this challenging new subject, leaving the safe path of choosing any of the traditional and perhaps easier subjects available.

However, this choice had a profound impact on the way she lived her life afterwards. As part of their studies, she and her friends did medical social work in hospitals, which involved working with disabled children and counselling young mothers for post-natal depression (this was in the late fifties!). She raised her boys with the help of Dr. Benjamin Spock's book, and later sent them to the first Montessori School in Dhaka. Years later, when I showed inclination of being left-handed, she did not force me to switch, which was a bold decision in the late sixties. Mother was our first teacher. And I remember that my reading table was placed in front of an open window, to allow me to raise my eyes from the book, see the open space and think freely.

I am lucky to have been raised by parents who did not care about gender stereotypes. In our household, it was normal for the boys to help in domestic chores, and for the girls to learn computer programming and driving. Our Mother's surname is Akhtar, our Father's surname is Qasem. All three of us siblings carry our mother's surname in the beginning of our name and our father's surname in the end.

Having lived a part of her youth in the British era, Mother had an interest in western things, especially their etiquette and manners. She hosted formal dinners at home for foreign guests, regularly subscribed Woman's Weekly, and designed interesting pieces of furniture from catalogues. She read all kinds of books. In our bookshelf, Bertrand Russell, Somerset Maugham and Dostoyevsky happily co-existed with Earl Stanley Gardener, Emile Zola and Georgette Heyer.

At the same time, she had a deep rooted respect for the Bengali culture, literature and way of life. Both my parents maintained very close ties with our extended family, and we are indeed blessed to have had relatives who stood by us whenever we had needed them. My mother was a deeply religious person, and studied Islam in great depth.

Mother loved to cook- both continental and traditional. Every year, she made jam, jelly and pickles, and sent bottles to the houses of relatives and friends. She also cooked a special traditional vegetarian dish with raw jackfruit and multiple other vegetables. This used to be a very elaborate affair, and she did it only once a year.

Mother had an interest in crafts throughout her life, and spent considerable time and effort to learn new things. She could expertly knit, sew, stitch, do batik and tie-



dye, paint on pottery and make artificial flowers. She could also sing a little, and I remember that she used to sing a Tagore song as a lullaby, "Amar shokol dukher prodip," instead of the popular "Aye Aye Chand Mama"!

The Liberation War of 1971 was a very important phase in our lives. My Mother's only brother had gone to War, sometimes some of his friends (one of them was the fruit vendor turned guerrilla, the famous Tyeb Ali) came to our house to meet my mother and share some news about him. Mother collected newspaper clippings about the war in her scrap book, and subsequently donated her collection to the Liberation War Museum. After the War, we were privileged to have received a visit by the celebrated author Maitreyi Devi at our house. Many of us don't probably know that she rendered great support to our freedom fighters. Mother later contributed an article in her magazine "Nabajatak." And later, after the War was over, for years together, she used to visit the Special Home of Disabled Freedom Fighters in Mohammadpur, on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. That was her way of remembering and honouring the War Heroes.

Mother had a deep interest in social work, in various stages of her life. She was active in organising Mukul Fouj, a youth movement, in our locality, was a Member of the Governing Body of Purana Paltan Girls' College, and a Member of Executive Committee of Human Development Foundation. But her main area of interest was probably medical social work. She was closely associated with the Diabetic Association and its founder the legendary Prof. Dr. Ibrahim.

In her later years, she almost fully concentrated on the issues of the elderly people, through her association with the Bangladesh Institute for the Aged and Institute of Geriatric Medicine. She regularly wrote articles on the social and health issues of the elderly, advocated their issues in various forums, started a small subsidised shop for the elderly, and most importantly, introduced an annual Award called "Momotamoyee" (the Caring One), for acknowledging and honouring the loving care of daughters and daughters-in-law towards the elderly ones in their families.

After saying all this, one must acknowledge that Mother had her faults. While my Father was tactful and suave, Mother, in her days, had a fiery temper and a sharp tongue. It must have hurt many people at different times, and on her behalf, I beg apology for

that. It might be a small consolation for them to know that her own children were also not spared. I remember that some years ago, I cooked some "Shorshe Ilish" with Mother's instructions. She tasted it and said it was good. I said, "It's not as good as yours". She said rightaway, "How can you expect to reach my level at your first attempt? I said it was good...by your standards." Only a couple of days ago, when she was almost unconscious, I tried to wake her up by asking a question that I know she hates, "Which one of your children do you love most?" I didn't expect an answer, but she said very feebly, "Equally." I pressed a bit more, "Shouldn't you love me a little more, after all I am the youngest, your only daughter, and hang around you more than anyone else?" She shook her head, meaning "No."

That's my Mother— strong, ethical, unbiased and fearless! May Allah keep her that way till her last breath.

By Akhtar Sanjida Kasem

Photo courtesy: Akhtar Sanjida Kasem

The article originally appeared on social media on 24 June, 2017. Muquddesa A Qasem passed away in the early hours of Eid Day, 26 June, 2017. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

Tips to treat your dry skin right

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helps repair the damaged cells in our skin and locks the moisture in. After the process of moisturising is complete, healthy new cells begin to form and the natural exfoliation of skin begins.

Many believe that face care is very important and often tends to avoid the dryness appearing in the rest of the body. To acquire excellent skin, it is important to concentrate on every dry part of our body. A few areas that dry easily are the elbows, hands, knees and feet. These are the places that require a lot of moisture.

Elbows- They are the most used and exposed parts of our skin since we use them to lean on tables and also bend for various reasons. Due to all this movement done by them, they turn thick and dry if not properly moisturised. They sometimes discolour and become scaly. To get smooth elbows, cleanse through the area with mild soap and water and then apply any moisturiser of your choice.

Hands- Our hands are always exposed since without them our daily activities will remain undone. Apparently, the skin of our hands is much thinner than the skin of our face. During dry season, palms begin to dry, white lines are visible in the flap between our fingers and skin feels tight. Excessive hand washing with strong hand-wash soaps and hot water steals the moisture away. This deprives the skin of producing its natural moisture since the protective layer is damaged.

Knees - The skin of knees is similar to elbows since knees are used for a lot of bending. Our knees can also discolour and turn into thick, scaly layer if it is left without proper moisturising. To maintain healthy knees, the first step is to clean it and then moisturise.

Our feet are usually very dry since they have no oil glands so the natural moisture comes from our sweat glands. Even when this skin is dry, it can be more harmed by getting exposed to hot showers and dry weather. Extreme dry feet can lead to painful cracks around the heels of the feet. A good way to prevent this is to scrape the dry skin with pedicure instruments and moisturising.

The skin is the most important part of our outer looks since flaky white skin does not look attractive. Proper care of the skin gives soft, hydrated and more elastic skin. Moisturising helps create smooth skin which makes us look younger and fresh. The best time to apply moisturisers is after long showers and shaving since the skin is already damp. This sort of moisture helps pull in the creams easily. Everyone should cleanse and moisturise their skin to get healthy, smooth and hydrated skin.

By Rimjhim Huda