

Memories of my father

Where are you, Abbu? It has been almost seven months we are looking for you. I have been looking for you for such a long time but you don't even come in my dreams these days. Why did you leave me so abruptly and without saying anything? I still remember the day when he told me once, "Don't waste your life on unnecessary things, try to embrace your problems and solve them. Indeed, you're born to conquer this world."

My father, Syed Faizul Hussaini, grandson of the renowned Urdu poet of Bangladesh, Syed Sharfuddin Sharf Al-Hossaini, was diagnosed with COVID-19 on 20 September, 2020. He fought like a warrior for 18 long days after he was diagnosed, but finally lost the battle on Thursday, 8 October, at 6:15PM. He was among the 12,000 plus people who couldn't win against COVID.

Over the course of 18 days, my family and I witnessed my father's fight for survival, which taught me valuable lessons. I felt compelled to share my increasing awareness of my loss with others. It's difficult to write about one's own grief, but because death is an inevitable part of life, my words might be of interest to others.

His health kept on deteriorating from the



third day he was admitted in the hospital. His lung had a 76 percent infection. He was then put on high flow oxygen, and later, he took his last breath on a BiPAP.

I'm still struggling to understand the real cause of his departure from all of us. I have been grieving for the past seven months, ever since my father passed away. Others have been mourning my father's death as well, but none of them are aware of my pain. None of them are aware of the specific ways in which we were linked. My father and I had a one-of-a-kind friendship, which has left me with a lonely sorrow.

I feel like the universe has treated me badly. And there's nothing one can say to me that will make me feel better or make my suffering go away. Although

the Internet is awash with "good stories" about fathers, I'm left scratching my head, wondering what went wrong?

I was not prepared to lose him. I didn't realise what had happened back then. But then, after that day, I never saw that familiar face again. After that day, a lot of things changed. I had to 'grow up' quickly. I had to be 'mature' about everything. I had to pretend to be strong when I was falling apart. And all of this was exhausting for me. From taking care of myself to taking care of my siblings, I lost myself.

I don't have the luxury of saying, "my dad will take care of it" every time I mess up. To me, sometimes it feels as if the world took away my life support before I even learnt how to breathe properly. I have been hiding my weakness for so long that they're now just a part of me.

I came across thousands of stories in these past seven months. Here, this one's for everyone who lost someone due to COVID. This one's for the brave heart that you're. This one's for all the times when you tried to fill in your dad's shoes even if your feet were too small. This is for you for being strong.

You've come a long way. And on most

days, it doesn't pinch you as much. But then, there are days like these where you just think how different things would be if dad were with you. How different it all could've been. How simpler things could've been.

You could've remained a child, for longer.

You could've lived your life, a little more.

You could've done so much more, you're a little warrior.

My father and I didn't get to talk about many things. However, I do have the opportunity to discuss them with others and to write about them. When I know that people are listening, seeing, and knowing me, I remember how much my father and I belonged to each other. I can depend on that as I depend on the rhythms of the natural world. When my mother, sister, and all those who are grieving my dad in their own particular way feel pulled toward despair, I can tell them what he would say: Don't waste your life on unnecessary things, try to embrace your problems and solve them. Indeed, you're born to conquer this world.

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Photo courtesy: Faizan Hossaini

LIFE AS IT IS

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Daydreaming about holidays

If you are like me, someone who jumps at the idea of exploring a new place, but have not travelled in the last one year, you will understand my plight. On some days, I so want to catch a flight and visit another state or country, inhale the air of a new place, and try a new cuisine.

A year without a 'vacay' has not been easy, but when endless hardship and suffering stemming from a pandemic continue to affect so many millions every day, planning a holiday is not a priority. However, on lazy afternoons, I daydream about happy times of the future when we can travel far and wide, when I will not have to wear a mask or remind myself to practice social distancing in public places.

I have not been on an airplane in more than a year. While flying was something I never eagerly looked forward to, in these days, I wish to catch a plane and swoosh to a holiday destination. I have kind of forgotten what it is like to go through security checkpoints, answer an immigration police



officer's questions, walk fast through a big airport to reach the boarding gate, or to decide what to pack and what to wear on the journey.



The last time I breathed in that crisp, stress-relieving ocean breeze was in the summer of 2019. I think I will go to the beach when life becomes normal. I will close my eyes and inhale the salty air which magically calms my nerves. I will relax under a beach umbrella, sip a cool drink, and hear waves crashing on to the shore, one wave after another, without a pause, relentlessly.

I might even decide to spend an evening on the beach and watch a comma of a moon hanging from the indigo sky. A smattering of stars dancing around it!

Perhaps, I will choose a bustling city as my first holiday destination in more than a year. When good days return, the empty



streets of megalopolises will once again be cacophonous, like the good old days. The sounds of siren, honking, construction, commuters talking on the phone, tourists chattering, cyclists whizzing by, street performers singing, birds chirping everything together will re-create the urban ensemble big cities were always known for. The eerily empty streets of once-buzzing American metropolises now sing songs of loneliness; heartache reverberates through the cities' steel and glass structures.

Or should I visit a mountain range? Three nights in a tranquil mountain town far from the madding crowd will be absolutely refreshing. From atop a mountain, I will feel

closer to the heaven. I will gaze at the distant horizon and realise all over again that in this infinite universe, I am no more significant than a grain of sand. The bewildering realisation will leave me with a sense of humility. Standing on the mountain, I will appreciate the idea of life and how much it is worth living.

If I am alive to live such a happy day, I will tell myself, "I could have perished in the pandemic, like so many millions perished, but I had not. I could have lost so much, but I had not. Therefore, my Creator, please make me humble."

Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad