

Walking Dad Home

My father passed away on 1/14/2021.

He was a man of kindness, intelligence, and vision. He was a man with respect, integrity, and tolerance.

Father was a family man first and foremost. Growing up on a farm, my father was the only child amongst his siblings to go to college. His elder brothers farmed but encouraged him to pursue an education. He became an aeronautical engineer and never forgot he owed his good fortune to his family. He mailed his entire monthly salary of ¥56 home while we lived on my mother's salary of equal amount. When our meat supply was rationed, Dad went fishing to get protein for my teen brother and me, always cheerfully claimed that he loved fishing, even on a frozen lake. He biked four hours a day between home and work. "My father was a farmer upon the Carrick border, O, and carefully he bred me in decency and order, O"
- Robert Burns.

Father was strict. He started teaching me Chinese calligraphy when I was five years old. Dad used to say, "your handwriting should represent who you are – neat, disciplined, and with a sense of quiet elegance". That was exactly who he was. He had the best handwriting I have ever seen. Dad sat with me for 30 minutes every day to practice – starting from grinding an inkstick in an inkstone, holding a brush with elbow in 90 degrees, to learning the techniques of the artful expression. Today I admire and appreciate good penmanship without judgement. When I was in third grade, Dad gave me 10 seconds to figure out a math problem in my head. Otherwise, my hands would be met with the spank from a wooden ruler, as it was common in China in those days. But I now can count four or more cards in a hand of blackjack within seconds. Thanks, Dad!

Father was fair. When my brother and I got into fights as kids, we were both punished (kneeling on a washboard). Dad's rationale - one was punished for instigating a fight and the other for responding. He taught us fighting was never a solution nor an excuse.

Father was an advocate for gender equality. In feudal China, especially in the rural area where Dad grew up, girls were inferior to boys. Girls who were married were considered spilled water – worthless to their families. While I was treated unfairly by Dad's relatives in his hometown, my father never made me feel I was less than my brother. He always told me girls were just as capable as boys. I never knew who Dad favored more between my brother and me, and he taught me that I could accomplish anything I wanted to if I worked hard enough.

Father fostered an environment of learning and passion. Growing up, Dad strategically chose three programs to watch on TV – world news, domestic and world travel, and sports (soccer and volleyball). Every night at 7pm, we were allotted thirty minutes to watch world news. Although that was not a very interesting program for me to watch as a teenager, I now tune in to the Nightly News at 6:30pm each day. And I love travel – exploring culture and connecting with the locals. While I no longer watch soccer, I feel the same excitement and joy watching football, baseball, basketball, and other sports. And Dad loved Kobe and the Lakers!

Father was a gifted artist – a talented violin player and a creative carpenter. I remember him playing his violin on the balcony at night during the time music was forbidden in China. I used to climb up on the shelf where the violin was and admire the worn-out bow. Although I cannot remember any of the music Dad played, the image of him playing it is still vivid. He made the furniture in our house – out of necessity and because he was simply talented. I wish I had saved some of it.

Father was a visionary. Having lived through the Chinese Cultural Revolution and watching his prime years being wasted, he persistently encouraged my brother and me to "escape" China. At age 20, I left home to come to America with only \$100 in my pocket. Today, I am living "The American Dream". Father gave me the tools and taught me how to "fish".

My father was a man with respect, integrity, tolerance, and grace. He never responded to rudeness with anger but with patience and tolerance. He forgave others who were unkind and never spoke ill of them. I still sometimes have a hard time holding my tongue. That comes from the “rooster” in me – a birth right my father did not intend to give me.

He was a father. Even during his last days, he was doing what he did the best – being my father. He taught me how to care for him – something I had not done before in my life – providing end of life care for a loved one. He accepted my request that he and Mom stay in my home. He compliantly took the medications I gave him and ate the food I prepared for him. I got him a call button so he can call for help when needed. Working in the next room, I heard the alarm go off and rushed to his side. “Dad, Dad, are you okay?”. He laughed and said, “Oh, this is fun!” Then he kept pressing the button for the next 10 minutes, and each time I rushed over... I did not mind. Both of us laughed. At night, the alarm never went off. Many times, when I got up to check on him, I found him lying there with his eyes open. When he saw me, he asked for water. When I said, “Dad, just press the button whenever you need anything.” He would respond, “I am good; go back to sleep.”

My last days with Dad was a gift. I am grateful we were by his side whispering that we would take him to his hometown as he took his last breath. It was a privilege and honor to walk Dad home. Who he was, now I am. I am humbled and proud to be my father’s daughter in this life.

Dad, thank you for being my father. I know you are watching and protecting me while I still have time to become.

***Before I Was Myself, You Made Me, Me
(Author Unknown)***

*Before I was myself you made me, me
With love and patience, discipline and tears
Then bit by bit stepped back to set me free*

*Allowing me to sail upon my sea
Though well within the headlands of your fears
Before I was myself you made me, me*

*With dreams enough of what I was to be
And hopes that would be sculpted by the years
Then bit by bit stepped back to set me free*

*Relinquishing your powers gradually
To let me shape myself among my peers
Before I was myself you made me, me*

*And being good and wise, you gracefully
As dancers when the last sweet cadence nears
Bit by bit stepped back to set me free*

*For love inspires learning naturally
The mind assents to what the heart reveres
And so it was through love you made me, me
By slowly stepping back to set me free*

