

ENDINGS

My Mother and I

BY SHRUTI JAIN

It's been a month since my mother passed away.

She suffered a traumatic death, after a simple hospitalization for acute bronchitis, which somehow led to an obstruction of her small intestines. She stayed there for two long, hard weeks, and passed away on January 26th 2018, when India celebrates its Republic Day.

As she was giving way to her final breaths, millions of Indians were celebrating. We all thought what a poignant way to go, she chose celebration in her death, as she had chosen celebrating her life when she was alive.

My mother was my friend, my confidante, my conscience, my strength and my courage. As friends, we had similar tastes in life. She was my shopping partner, she loved shopping and never bought anything in a singular quantity. A trait I inherited quite incorrigibly.

She not only encouraged, but passionately watched me dance and sing, with only adoration in her eyes. She watched me perform for the first time at the age of thirteen. She wasn't aware that I self-taught the dance. She was mesmerised. Being an artist, she recognised talent and passion, and she gave me the confidence to perform without fear and judgement.

She always encouraged me to dance. And I danced, I danced for her. I realised then, as I do now, that when I dance, I do it to see Mom's pride and love.

I feel the same when I sing. My voice trembles and I can't reach certain tone levels. But at her remembrance ceremony, I sang for the first time with a voice that was seamless. The tune flowed and everyone said, I sang from the soul. Probably because it was a song I sang to her every day in hospital. One that released her, and allowed me to process that the body departs but the soul is omnipresent.

She was my confidante. I told her, eventually, everything I experienced. We talked about life, marriage, sex, feminism, politics, religion, values, beliefs and Indian traditions and culture, and she answered all my queries. And in those moments, I thought she was cool. You were cool, Mom.

But it wasn't always such a lovely, memorable relationship, we went through many roller coaster rides, right Mom?

I spent my first twelve years wanting to be just like you. Your jewelry, your sarees, your cooking, your art and immense talent. At fifteen, I learnt, because of you, how to cook for a large number of people, something you and I were very proud of, weren't we Mom?

As a teenager though, I started to rebel and question your values, beliefs, your strict observations of life. Why shouldn't I drink, date, smoke, be a teenage girl that gets to experience everything needed. Why should I have the privilege of growing up with you, Mom, who doesn't see the western experience the way I do. These were hard years for us both, weren't they? As we both tried very hard to just try and accept each other.

Well, that feeling stayed until after I had my first child. I started re-connecting with you then, didn't I? That's when you became my friend, my confidante. You were there for me every step of the

way. No matter how much I had rebelled earlier, you stayed by my side. I know we felt anger towards each other. But we both managed, somehow, to experience that anger with each other. Whenever you visited we fought with heart and gusto, but love always won.

You became the woman who always had the answers. You helped me through my abortions.

You stayed by my side in my decisions, informing me of your thoughts and beliefs, yet allowing me to make my own choices. You stayed by my side through all my relationship troubles, in parenting concerns, never telling me what to do, but just guiding, gently. You stayed by my side till the end, proud that I was a psychotherapist (in training) pursuing my doctorate!

You were so proud. I did make you proud, Mom, didn't I?

You were my conscience. I grew up to be a woman as strong minded as you and when I made my decisions, you accepted me no matter what, as they always differed, our choices. We agreed to disagree, and they were important moments in my life. Because they taught me to have the courage to be myself, and stand up to you, Mom, the person I looked up to the most.

You were there unconditionally!

You were my conscience because it didn't matter whether you agreed or not, what mattered was that you knew what I was thinking and doing and that was enough for me!

You were, and will remain, my strength and courage.

Recently, I made a promise to have 'the courage to be myself'. Because I saw, in the last few years of your life, you found the courage to be you.

You found peace and contentment in knowing what life had to offer. All the ups and downs, all the disappointments and happiness, all the sadness and anger, all the obstacles and erratic journeys, you accepted them for what they were. You found peace in being with them. You found the courage to be.

Now, I feel I have come full circle: in wanting to be like you again Mom, I want the courage to be me.

Thank you, Mom, for showing and guiding me once again in finding the way to connect with myself and my courage.

Thank you for showing me that once you are at peace with what is thrown at you in life, upon your departure, the ability to let go of this world and embrace the next becomes that much easier.

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