

An Ode to "Aai"



I had wanted to do this for a while & now finally closer to Aai's birthday (October 6) this year-2017...here's my 2nd tribute to her. Infact, she is such an integral part of my being....that I miss her every moment even though she passed away 7 yrs ago.

Am wondering though, as to why this would be of interest to the readers? The answer lies in the fact that even you may have someone you love so dearly & have not told them yet. If not, do so now...before it's too late! Also, Dr. Mohini Devi Vyas is an icon in Ujjain. People in the city- young & old, rich & poor...all remember her "Midas Touch" in her work- perfect diagnosis, immaculate treatment & cure.

My first tribute to her was initiating & institutionalising ` "UDAAN" Scholarship- A tribute to Late Dr. Mohini D. Vyas' at St. Mary's Convent School for a couple of all-rounder girl students entering Class X.

" Background :

"When you educate a girl, you educate a whole family". It's the 21st century- an age of apps and gizmos. But even today, we have many small towns and villages in India, where differential treatment is experienced between male and female siblings within the same family. Boys are encouraged to take risks and girls are deprived of learning. The only way to bring in a sustainable change is by providing education to girls.

Late Dr. Vyas, fondly known as "Aai" by her family & "Vyas Bai" by her patients, painstakingly completed her education with distinction and also ensured that her siblings were educated in spite of no financial support. She managed to make a mark for herself in an age where formal education was not encouraged for young girls. She became the first lady doctor (LMP from Calcutta) in the family in Rajasthan.

Along with academic excellence, she was an ardent sports follower, and won many trophies and medals. By virtue of being a gynaecologist, she was able to mould tender minds and thus became a role model, not only in her family but also in Ujjain. She was a pillar of strength, courage, moral values, "Can Do" attitude, self confidence, hard work, helping the needy and exhibited righteousness at all times. She passed on these values to all those who were part of her life, in more ways than one."

My respect, affection, love & gratitude for her is so immense, that it seems our relationship may have been from earlier births & not just this one!

Most of the kids in our family (father's side) were delivered by her including me & my elder sister. She was a doctor par excellence...more importantly a very good human being. Infact, most of my classmates in St. Mary's Convent were also delivered by her.

If I have known of anyone so far at close quarters whose life was laden with challenges & struggles, it was hers. In those days, she became a child widow at the age of 10...so the society was anything but kind to her.

Dealing with this unfortunate truth of her life, she returned to my grandpa's house & decided to study & educate herself to lead a life of dignity. She was so determined, that she converted this setback into an inspiration to help herself & the entire family.

She was as human as any one of us---she suffered, had plenty of ups & downs in life, was vulnerable but after each blow...she gathered herself back up stronger & more determined.

Though I was born in Madhya Pradesh in Ujjain...my father's family had some Maharashtrian influence after Aai was posted there in the Govt. Hospital. Hence, we called my bua, "Aai". She was "choti Aai" & the eldest bua

was called "badi Aai". She also served in Ratlam, Bhind etc. My grandfather lived with her after he retired from service.

Now that I live in Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, in Marathi, Aai is strictly used to address "Mother". She was my mother in so many ways since I spent more time with her than my parents as a child. Even now, my mom calls me a true reflection of hers with respect to personality & thinking ☺.

I had a special bond with her—stayed with her from when I was in Class VII upto Class XII (6 yrs). My sister stayed with her too for 4 years before that when my Grandpa was alive. Later on, when I moved in, it was just the 2 of us.

She had a set routine from morning 5 a.m when she attended to household chores, made tiffin for me, pooja etc. until the house help, cook (maids) came in. Infact, she learnt to cook only to make tiffin for me & for all the 6 years, I had a standard tiffin- 2 Parathas with lime pickle (made by another bua too who also lived in Ujjain). My gang of girls who became my closest friends in school till now, initially made fun of me...since they brought variety of dishes in their tiffin box ; later they wanted to trade theirs with mine. I think they fell for the "parathas made with so much love". We talk about it even now when we meet. Post 9 a.m, she would examine patients at home till late evening, attended to guests who came in during the day. She would eagerly wait for me to return from school by 2:45 p.m.

If she was not busy, she would be sitting by me, while I ate lunch. Sometimes, I would go back to school for games practise whether I was participating or the House Captain. It was taxing since home was on Mahakal Road & school in Rishi Nagar---"Bhatsuar" was my travel partner/vehicle. I would finally return by 7 p.m, just in time for dinner.... There was one highlight about dinner for all the years that I stayed with Aai...she would get me to eat with her in the same "Thali"...she would share whatever was there...whether it was a feast or even something little ☺. It gave me a newfound sense of belonging & food has never tasted the same again.

I often think if she subscribed to the saying, "The family that eats together stays together." I don't remember anyone else having this privilege with her.

She never had to remind me to study or do my homework. I would wake up at 4 a.m & study, as well as after dinner before retiring in the night....She was always happy with my efforts & results. Infact, she was so confident about my scores/results, that she never came to school ever for parents-teacher's meet. She had told my principal that if there was any complaint about me, they could write it & send it in a sealed envelope with me & she would deal with it appropriately. Aai had more faith in me than I had in myself then.

My mother ofcourse, came to the school once or twice a year to meet my teachers etc., whenever she visited Ujjain to meet me & the family.

Aai was extremely protective about me too...! She said it was a huge responsibility that she had to bring me up away from my parents. Though I studied in a co-education school (St. Mary's Convent), boys from my class were not allowed home even to wish me on my birthday (if it was on a holiday or Sunday). Girls were ofcourse okay, but she had to know their parents/families etc. to be let in the house. While I detested not being allowed to go out with friends for a movie or picnic...it is only now I understand what she meant by "responsibility" & how much she cared for my wellbeing.

Infact, I got her to do the most bizarre things while I stayed with her. If I wanted to see a particular movie, she would accompany me....we would go together after I returned from school & ate lunch. She had never seen movies in a theatre before that....! Then, she became a huge fan of Sridevi after watching movies like Nagina etc.

My dad got us a Black & White TV after my class X in 1989 & we both watched the famous serial Mahabharatha on DD on Sundays in the morning religiously. She narrated the stories to me post the show, so I could understand the nitty gritty of the epic.

I was the favourite news reader in the school assembly & also very good at elocution, debates etc. She would help me write the script & then get me to rehearse in front of her several times. I felt so confident since I knew she was always there for me.

I have no regrets in life , I don't believe in having regrets...however remorse over only 2 things.

Aai had wanted me to be a doctor...however, I told her & she knew seeing my state during dissections in Biology class etc. that I was not a Braveheart. I had a mind of my own & wanted to take up Social Sciences &

not do the usual Medicine/Engineering even though I studied Biology & Maths in Class XI & Class XII. She never told me, however I think she wanted to set up a clinic/hospital for me to manage after her if I had agreed to be a doctor. Did I disappoint you, Aai?

Secondly, after completing my schooling from Ujjain, I moved to Bhopal for undertaking Graduation & then to Mumbai for further studies...even though I kept going to meet her at the first available opportunity, I could never spend enough time & help her in her advancing old age.

She has done so much for so many people in the family & it does not matter what they did or did not do for her. My bond & relationship with her is special. I did not want to help or do things for her, because she had raised me or as payback or as my duty. I wanted to be there for her, without reason...am indebted to her for making me a human that I am today.

She had developed numerous health complications over the years, had to be hospitalised several times. My parents & I rushed each time while my bua who stayed in Ujjain & her family also took care & provided necessary help.

During the last Simhastha(Kumbh Mela), our house was bulldozed into half as part of the road widening process & suddenly Aai was in a state of shock & fell ill. Then on, she stayed with my bua & her family in Ujjain. Multiple requests by my parents & me over years even before this incident to move in with them were declined by her. She was firm---only Yamraj would take her away from the land of Lord Mahakal.

Everytime I would speak to her & ask her if I could come to meet her, she would discourage me saying she was not in her own house & had to adjust in a new environment at that age. She would urge me only to speak to her over the phone & keep updating her about my whereabouts & progress. She would tell all those who visited her in her new abode that she was extremely proud of me! Sometimes, she would tell me too 😊.

She believed that if she praised me in frontit would get to my head & I would become arrogant...So much simplicity in thoughts & concern. I guess this runs in the family...my father believes the same!

Once when I called her in February end of 2010, she strangely told me to come in end of March to meet her in person. She wanted to speak to me & share several things. I was excited, since after many years...she had herself asked me to visit her.

I don't know if it was premonition....she probably knew that her end was near! But she left us 20 days before the meeting date...she breathed her last on March 9, 2010 at about 5 a.m. Just the previous day on March 8, 2010- International Woman's Day, she was honoured by the city administration for her contribution to the city through her selfless service.

I could not meet her/see her even one last time! The cremation had taken place during the day & we could reach only late evening. I was heartbroken---what did she want to tell me 20 days later?

Even now, I have the 2 yellow buds (now dried) that were given to her as part of the felicitation ceremony which were by her bedside.

There is only one thing that I told her that I would not follow her on. In order to survive & fit into the traditional society at that time, she developed a very hard & fortified façade which made it difficult for people around her to reach her heart & know her innermost thoughts. For most people, she was a very strict disciplinarian, very tough, blunt person who always called a spade a spade. And here, she did not differentiate...whether it was family or outsiders. Except a very few fortunate family members like me, got to know the "warm hearted real Aai".

I have so many memories to cherish, that it feels she is always there with me! She is my guardian angel.

Happy Birthday, Aai 😊😊😊

