NEELIMA

Description

(Neelima is my daughter, and two years younger to her is my son Aditya. Both of them are married and settled with their kids. This article is a brief portrait of Neelimaâ??s budding days.)

It was a summer day where the dayâ??s temperature could climb to a sweltering 40 degrees Celsius mark in our town. I sat on the steps not to know what to make out of my waiting. The steps led to the famous missionary hospital in the town. My wife got admitted to the delivery of our first child.

Clean, silent, and forebodingly dark the hospital building carried an eeriness of its own. Itâ?? almost six in the morning and I find no hint of any activity. From where I sat, I could see one or two nurses moving hurriedly in and out of the wards.

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Mani and I got married three years ago. She was twenty and into her final year of graduation. And Iâ??m twenty-four, struggling to complete my post-graduation. We stayed at Vijayawada. It is a small town; a peaceful, happy place to live in; Iâ??m speaking about a time in 1985.

To speak about our town, it all looked like a big set in a silent movie era. Traffic was easy; roads were empty but for few scooters and far fewer cars. No autos, the regular common man mobility was on cycle rickshaws. People moved in small groups engaged in animated discussions, swinging their free hands majestically.

Communications system was scanty, telephones unheard of. TVâ??s havenâ??t yet made its entry into the households. Black and white movies and transistor radios were only sources of entertainment. But only few could afford them. Owning a bicycle was a luxury then.

On a beaming summer Sunday, in this silent movie era town, tucked deeply in one of the faintly lit hospital wards, Mani and I welcomed our first child Neelima. It was midsummer of 1985.

The shimmer of yellow heat arrived too early that morning. Nothing else to do, bored, I surveyed the buildings and surroundings of the hospital still wearing the blackness of the night. Lazily I walked towards the maternity ward where Mani was wheeled the night before when doctors felt the labor began.

The previous night Maniâ??s parents and my father gathered near the hospital, with an anticipation of the first grandchild into our family. All of us waited for any news would trickle out. Excepting our tension-ridden eyes, wary bodies, a strange silence descended along the hospital corridors, nothing had changed the whole night. Everyone left leaving me to wait by myself and to keep vigil of Mani and the unborn child.

Next day early in the morning I saw a nurse walking hurriedly out of the ward towards me. I couldnâ??t notice a clue on her face for any piece of information. Although alert in tension I could make out the way she blurted out â??itâ??s a girl.â?? But I was happy she was sure that Iâ??m the biological

recipient of the news.

For reasons, I couldnâ??t explain myself; I dreamt that my first child should be a girl. And I would call her Neelima. Now I received the news of the baby girl. I just closed my eyes for a moment to allow the joy to sink deep inside me. I could sense a smile on my lips and ease in my body.

Itâ??s summer, and holiday time for our school where my father busy planning fresh construction works and annual repairs. Late 80â??s were the days of no telephones, and city buses were only means of transport. Slowly I walked out of the hospital I reached for my moped. I mentally resolved my dad would be the first to receive the news.

I owned a travel companion, one small rickety moped. It carried a brand name too: â??Suvega.â?? You can imagine the vehicle as a crude motorized version of a bicycle. It came fitted with a clutch and a small 50cc motor. To start the engine, I have to shove it hard for a distance or keep the scooter steady on its stands and peddle as hard as I could until engine wakes up by sending out gusty black smoke.

It appears funny to picture myself during my early days after marriage my wife and me riding on that vintage model. I used to drop her at college, pick her up after college hours. The only entertainment available then was watching a movie in a theatre. And we enjoyed the jolly rides together on our traffic less, narrow, bumpy roads of our town to reach the theatre.

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I rushed to my dad; he was busy on that Sunday morning giving instructions to workers. As soon as I conveyed the news a prideful smile appeared on his serious face. I knew he too wished a girl to chirp loudly in our spacious house. Iâ??m aware though; he was not the type that he would demonstrate his affection by a hug or even mere shaking a hand. Despite, I noticed softness filled in his face and could make out how pleased he was about the arrival his first granddaughter.

Am I excited or delighted I wasnâ??t sure about them? Mani and I werenâ??t grown up enough to weigh the implications of having a child between us. Iâ??m twenty-four, and Mani, yet to celebrate her twenty-first birthday. Though we had the support of our parents, I had my apprehensions about my parenting capacities.

The name â??Neelimaâ?? had a special fascination for me. It would sound odd that as a teenager I fancied if I have a daughter I will name her â??Neelima.â?? There was nothing to say why I grew attracted by that name, but it stuck me if itâ??s daughter her name should be â??Neelima.â?? My wife never objected for that, or my parents questioned why I chose the name. My little Neelima was born on May 19^{th,} 1985.

Neelima was dear fair little thing born with a chubby face, small mouth with thick black hair. She never cried and slept all night. She kept everyone comfortable with her well-adjusted babyâ??s behavior, or it could be because of my wifeâ??s effective mothering skills.

Those were the days Iâ??m sharpening my skills as a photographer. I started becoming aware of colors and shapes, places and spaces. And I decided to let me focus my camera and take a few shots every day my little girl. Though it was very difficult to photograph the babies as they canâ??t keep themselves calm and still. For the next four years, Neelima was my dedicated â??modelâ?? with her thousands of charms, cheers, and smiles.

Nothing I missed in her daily routine. She climbed into her tub for a bath, cuddling her fluffy toys, crawling around the house, when fed, when she was sleeping, hugging her mother tight. Her sweet way of saying she is motherâ??s baby. I could capture every mood of hers: perfect and lively. I developed a sort of bond when I spent adorable time being with her. I would enjoy along with my camera a class of babyish aspects of hers every day.

The first shade of Neelimaâ??s hard to please character had emerged when she was supposed to go to school. Though we managed a private school ourselves; my wife insisted she goto a different school, concerned, that she may get pampered by class-teachers. My father objected saw no reason why she canâ??t have better learning experiences in our school as capable as any other child.

Once she reached four, she got admitted to a nearby school not far away from our own. A couple of months in her new school she was constantly whining, red-faced, never showed any interest in her work. Complaints and avoiding had become a part of her evening feedback to her mother. In no way, the â??otherâ?? school attracted her, or she never found it an interesting place to spend her schooling days.

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Iâ??m a teacher myself with ideas of my own how a classroom has to create spaces for learning, love, and compassion. It is presumed when a child feels unhappy in a classroom source of unhappiness, perhaps, is a bad teacher stepping into that classroom. As for me, I had clarity and concluded there isnâ??t much to infer about Neelimaâ??s reluctance to go to school. She outright rejected the school and I a â??father teacherâ?? could very well understand her plight.

It took three years of dilly-dallying to change the school. I wouldnâ??t want to experiment anymore the precious formative years of my daughter anywhere else. I spoke to one of our teachers of the third standard about my predicament. She assured me that Neelima would be fine in her class and promised she would see her academic interests taken care of.

As soon as I shifted her to our school, under my management, I saw an impressive change in her behavior and creative likings. Thanks to her caring class-teacher she started complimenting in all academic activities. She became a spirited girl altogether. I could see her as the happiest person to be with. Every day I found her, most of her time doing her school assignments on her own. Grudges, whining, complaints disappeared altogether.

She packed her day with lots of activities. For the next six years, until she had completed her high school final exams, I saw she grew up like a hurricane. She became sociable, an athlete, and a yoga expert. She was in the choir group, never missed a chance to show her dancing expertise in all dance forms â?? classical and modern. Her books well kept; handwriting immaculate and marks decent. And all without seeking any help from anyone and forgetting her parents are the ones who owned the school.

Sadly my father wasnâ??t there to guide and enjoy the Neelimaâ??s many talents. He died in the same year she joined our school.

Ours was a huge campus with thousands of students. I hardly found time to spot Neelima in the campus or playgrounds. She never sought any privileged treatment from anyone at school. She had her lunch under the shade of many trees that spread in our campus along with her classmates. She played with them, took crowded school bus rides. My wife or I never interfered when teachers punished her for

negligence or uncharacteristic behavior. She enjoyed all her school days as she wanted it â?? carefree and independent.

I followed a notion I would never send my children to stay in hostels. After completing her school finals, I advised Neelima to go to a local college for her intermediate. And followed by four-year graduation in a computer course in an Engineering college ten minutesâ?? drive from my home.

As soon as Neelimaâ??s completed her post-graduation at a UK university, providentially, I got her married to a well-settled, well-educated Krishna working in the US. During the same time, I saw myself mired in some of the toughest trial periods of my life.

My wife Mani diagnosed with second stage breast cancer, and financial setbacks raised their ugly demands. To manage the medical regimen, chemo treatments and supervising the arrangement to my daughterâ??s marriage had been very tough to handle. My mind constantly rattled by financial worries of the day, worries of tomorrow. I wished things would settle after my daughterâ??s marriage. But I never knew the years that followed I would see a big plunge in my life.

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Looking back now, I ruminatively question myself. â??Did I bring my children up in the way I hoped and dreamed about them? As a father, Iâ??m glad they are enjoying their individual lives comfortable enough. Sitting alone, left to myself after my wifeâ??s death, a few questions unsettle me. â??Will both my children uphold and validate their journey along with my wife and me as companionable, enriching and filled with fondest memories?â??I want to know, â??Do both of them feel right about many decisions I have takenâ???

Whatever their assessments and interpretations of me as a father; they perhaps, may conclude that I had not given them a fairy tale life. But I saw them as angels when they played in my lap. Today, as I scroll their old photographs down on my monitor; all grown up and settled, I would wonder recollecting my old memories, â??How lovely are my two angles.â??

Category

1. Uncategorized

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Author
eswarnadipalli