TWENTY- EIGHT YEARS AGO: A DAY TO REMEMBER

Description

To extract the details of lesser-known facts, which many are unaware of, and what has come about on the February2nd, I have to travel back twenty-eight years to 1990â??s; to recollect the details about my dadâ??s sudden collapse suffering cardiac arrest and later pronounced by our family doctor, â??Iâ??m sorry Eswar, he is no moreâ??, all striking when Iâ??m twenty-nine years, and my father fifty-six â?? too young for both of us. For my dad to pass away at such a young age, and me a novice to run such a huge educational institution started by my father: Kennedy High School.

For a twenty-nine-year-old in 90â??s, there isnâ??t much to speak about in terms of learning or entertainment. Excepting one government-sponsored TV channel in Black and white, there is hardly anything about to keep ourselves knowledgeable or engaged in any way. No multiple TV channels, no Smartphoneâ??s, no internet, no fancy cars or bikes, no A/C buses, no bookshops, no malls, no Inox theatres, no KFC, no pizzas, no curry points, no fancy restaurants, itâ??s like living in a Spielberg produced Movie, â??the Flintstonesâ??. A typical â??permit Rajâ?? reining in India.

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Sometime in the last week of January 1990; my mother fell sick and we are told she is to be operated and got her admitted to a local hospital and was operated on February 1st. My dad and I stayed at the hospital when the surgery was fixed and the next day my wife Mani is supposed to stay with her. The following day after the surgery everything went on to unfold as usual: My dad getting ready for the school, and I am preparing myself to assist him in the administrative urgencies that may come up at any point of the day. The day seemed to proceed in a predictable way with no hints of any ominous warrant.

This teen fixation has started when Iâ??m in my second year in college. I along with half-dozen schoolmates had got into this sneaky habit and have become freaky movieholics. One delightful policy of the college, we have learned was that every Saturday was an official holiday. The favorable fact, we have never informed our parents at home. Much during 70â??s and well up to mid-90â??s I can say that communication network in India was non â?? existent. Emboldened that there is no way any information would reach our homes from the college, for all of us raiding any cinema theatre for a Saturday morning show had become an unmissable ritual. Come Saturday any roguish movie would do to satisfy our teenage appetite. This irresistible habit â?? a movie on a weekend; went on to stay with me for the next two decades.

Somewhere in-between I have developed a fondness for English movies. As if to quench the cravings of â??Anglo- cinephilesâ?? we had in Vijayawada a dedicated theatre exclusively for English movies: The Leela Mahal. The running time for most of the English movies donâ??t go beyond ninety minutes, the theatre managers have come up with a special screening time: the 5.00 pm show. For young adults like me, it was an attractive, helpful alternative. The movie would be over by 6.30 pm by the time we would reach home it would be a safe time not to be irritatingly questioned by my parents. Or to avoid not to bump into the suspicious, â??where have beenâ?? prying eyes of my wife. Thus my explorative English movie pursuit continued for many years in a row.

Why Iâ??m recounting my movie-going obsession is to let you know how on February 2nd, 1990, when my dad suffered a fatal heart attack has some uncanny connection to the evening show I had been to on that particular day.

My mother came under the surgical scalpel on the first day of February 1990; she was on the operation table for more than three hours and later in intensive care for the rest of the day. My dad appeared a sort of restless, but outwardly he was careful not to confirm it on his facial contours. Given my happy-go-lucky type, I found myself moving around in a carefree manner hanging around the hospital corridors. Mani my wife taking care of kids at home.

Even in my harshest imagination I never expected the next day, February the 2nd would turn out to be an earth-shattering day in my life. Apart from my mother who was hospitalised and was operated on her left lower limb, and her needing to stay in the hospital the next seven days, I saw nothing remarkable to consider unusual on that day; my dad as he is ever faithful to his teaching responsibilities, I found him lecturing his students physics, chemistry, and mathematics subjects hour after hour; he is what he is on any given day: a teacher extraordinaire. The merits of his teaching virtues which I would be following, later, in my life after him. Bored, and restless, I thought, â??let me go for my 5.00pm showâ??. But I couldnâ??t as my wife was required to stay with my mother and I have to drive her to the hospital; I could only make myself free for next show timing at 7.00pm.

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On that day the movie was the â??Twilight Zone: The movieâ?•. I know it was a Steven Spielberg production; one of my favorite directors and his movies I never fail to watch. As I sat through the first half-an-hour into the movie, peculiarly, that had never happened to me in a decade as an active moviegoer; I became edgy and was not able to relish the goings-on, on the silver screen. The movie turned out to be an uninteresting stuff; not measuring up to the Steven Spielbergâ??s directorial reputation. Unable to sit any longer, I walked out of the theatre, again quite unusual to my movie-obsessed habit, I decided to drive back home in my then the great Indian signature car: the omnipresent â?? the Ambassador.

Something was amiss, the moment I drove into our school premises, situated at the far end of the town, where on the third floor I lived along with my two younger brothers. The large entrance gates, at the time of the late evening, are supposed to be locked shut were fully drawn open; the lone, most loyal Nepali watchman â??Bahadurâ?? was nowhere around. Barring a couple of lights kept alive on the ground floor office rooms the whole compound and the entire three floors enclosing nearly thirty classrooms were in semi-darkness. Before parking the car, looking for the watchman, I thought, taking note of dark shadows all-around the campus â??it shouldnâ??t be like thisâ??.

I havenâ??t yet switched off the engine, I notice the watchman, â??Bahadurâ?? running down from one of the staircases, even in darkness I could make out fear and alarm spread all over his face. Running towards me in one big jump, in his broken Telugu, could only voice, â??Sir, sirâ?? pointing his hand at the second-floor corridor. Not waiting for his further account I pulled myself out of the car and shot across to the second floor.

Zipping along the long dark corridor linking a row of classrooms, now empty and silent, I could figure out my dad somewhere in midway, shivering, and holding one of the window frames as if to take support. My mind is racing now confused with worrying possibilities. At that point it didnâ??t occur to me it might be perhaps a Heart-attack. Both I and my dad are chronic asthmatics; I guessed he might have been fighting a severe spell of asthma. I always carry in my pocket the inhaler. In the haste to

provide some relief, I pushed the inhaler into his mouth urging him to breathe deeply.

â??What happened the next sixty seconds is a spectacle of fateful unforgettable frames that have been permanently etched on my psyche. Since last twenty-eight years, every day the grim outlines of the incident would slide up and down like a power point presentation in deep layers of my mind, maybe, it would continue I assume -forever. So long as Iâ??m alive, I know Iâ??m trapped in the loop of those haunting visuals. My dadâ??s last living momentsâ?•.

I mistook his convulsions as to an asthmatic assault and I tried to steady him with an inhaler and trying to hold him not fall onto the floor. He attempted to speak but nothing came out of his mouth excepting a few inaudible escaping sounds, in the shadowed corridors I couldnâ??t see his face clearly. But he gripping the iron frame of the window tightly to make him stand steady made me wonder why he was doing it. To get some breathing relief during an asthmatic bout he is used to sitting and stretching his legs that were his normal posture. Now I see him holding the iron grill and the next moment, I notice he would let the grip go and fall back on me; alone, I have to muster all my strength to see he doesnâ??t drop hard right on the floor. Struggling with more than 100 Kgs, of his weight I slowly, carefully place him down on the floor. Darkness around, no one at home at the moment, I couldnâ??t make out what exactly happened to him. Cardiac arrest and death werenâ??t in my guessing then.

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To take him to the hospital, carrying my dad down to the car climbing down two floors I know I canâ??t manage alone so I ran out onto the road to see if I could gather any familiar persons to request to help my dad to the car. Luckily, I spotted two of my school bus drivers and all three of us managed to secure him in the back seat of my car. I drove straight to my family doctors hospital, the doctor, undisturbed, not in a hurry, walked towards my car glanced at my father lying in the back seat, checked his pulse and spoke to me in a whispering tone: two simple words, â??Iâ??m sorryâ??, he is no more.

Iâ??m twenty-nine years then, my mother in intensive care, my dad lifeless in the backseat of my car; honestly, the enormity of the tragedy didnâ??t really sink in. I called my two uncles elder to my dad before I reached my school premises back again.

The next day the whole campus is full of people, students, the parents, relatives, teachers, friends, neighbors, politicians, other schools heads, I never knew my dad is so popular. Standing aloof and stoical the concern before me was, who would inform my mother and how to bring her out of the intensive care and help perform her last tributes to her husband. The team of doctors who had operated her on the previous day solved my pathetic dilemma by bringing her on a gurney to our place. I remember my mother lying on stretcher silently unable to manage any body movements, bid her final homage before she was once again shifted to the hospital. As the eldest of the family, the next to shoulder the biggest school of our city, I stood there witnessing the lifeless body of my father on one side and helpless state of my mother on the other. These heartbreaking frames of reality I have stored in me for the last twenty-eight years and today Iâ??m taking this opportunity to go through them all again and to put them on paper.

In 90â??s the local burial places were rotten, untidy and outright dehumanizing. I was fixed not to have my dadâ??s body taken to such insulting, demeaning cemetery. Consulting the family elders, and local village heads I chose the school campus would be a befitting honor for my dad to be laid to rest; it was he who built and raised the school to such an eminence, who loved his school, and who has spent the last minutes of his breath in teaching. And I decided that his final resting place would be in his school - Kennedy High School.



My Fatherâ??s Memorial

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Even after twenty-eight years of my dadâ??s demise, I remained a pragmatic humanist, a skeptic but one doubt Iâ??m not able to shake. A deep tormenting, unanswered question about my peculiar hurry to get out of the movie; the unease I have experienced in the theatre on February 2nd, 1990; why I did I come out of the theatre? For over three and half decades I had been to hundreds of movies, sometimes most repulsive films, but never once I remember leaving the cinema hall midway snubbing the movie. But on February 2nd I deem it; â??perhaps it was because of an unknown spiritual call to go to attend to the most blessed responsibility as the eldest son to stay devotedly close by to my father in his penultimate moments. That is precisely what I carried out on that night; staying next to him holding him close, not to be left alone when the very life is ebbing out of himâ?•. On that evening I dashed out of the movie hall at the right time**,** for a right call**,** in right faith, for the right icon â?? my dear dad. I believe few would be as lucky as I am.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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