

Raw Remembrances: Memories of My Father on the Banks of My Mind

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(Translated from Tibetan by Kati Fitzgerald)

You. In the crevices of my memories, always the unvanishing ruler of the brown grasslands and black tents. From the banks of my memories, again and again arises the brown *gyabri*¹ that has never moved; in the depths of my memories, magnificent like Mount Meru, abiding with a dignity of mind. You. The only flower abiding with ease in the middle of the vast grasslands. You. The nomad's vestige. You. A nomadic family's life-giving tree. You. A household's hereditary pillar. I desire to be always unseparated from you, forever unsplit from you.

But this impermanent life is like dew on the grass – who knows when this knot of life, over which we are powerless, might come unwound?

One snowy winter's day, I arrived at the threshold of my school for the first time. My father had put me on the back of our family's old horse named Tselo and brought me to school that one time. That was the first time he brought me to school and also the last.

My late father, he really loved to steep Chinese tea in hot water. When he or we siblings would go to the market, we would buy many different kinds of tea and bring them home. Tea was his favorite pastime,

¹ Principal mountain of a settlement

and I think that he was very talented at distinguishing the flavors and qualities of tea. He usually wanted to stay cozily at home, adding fuel to keep the hearth continuously burning. His home was always warm – a *mani* wheel in his right hand and mani beads in his left hand, there he would be reciting mantras. In general, my father was the kind of person who enjoyed learning new information and about changes to modern life, maybe because he often enjoyed watching the news. Additionally, his favorite of all was the famous Tibetan musician, Dubhe, also known as the Blue Cuckoo of the Snowlands. He collected so many of Dubhe's cassettes.

In general, although he was a trustworthy man who did not talk or gossip much, just like the proverb says, *there are no trees without knots in the entire forest, there is no man in the world without faults* - he had a short temper. Just like it is said that *a short temper will destroy a man and a short² mountain pass will destroy a horse*, his short temper, whether going or staying, caused him to perform whatever tasks and at whatever distance without laziness and in a rush. Was it due to his busy and hasty personality? Whatever the case, his nature was that he was always busily running around.

In general, no matter what stage of developmental change people are in, the reality is that everyone is searching for a method for improving one's livelihood and innovating one's necessities. Assessing the customs of the pastoral areas, my father was among the best at making handmade items such as prayer flag poles, stakes, tie ropes, various wooden pegs, saddles, bits, halters, leads, slingshots, ceremonial arrows, chests, and

² aka steep

many other kinds of necessary items. Therefore, often, when it was time for the *latse* (mountaintop cairn) offerings, I witnessed many people requesting him to make ceremonial arrows and, in the summer, requesting him to make many of the items needed for the black tents. I also witnessed him making such items many times myself.

My father loved to joke around with the neighborhood kids. Sometimes his jokes were too rough for some children, and they would be unable to take it and would cry. I also cried a few times. My aunt, my mother's sister, was a little talkative, and once my father told me that I wasn't their child but actually the daughter of my aunt and that I was given to my father and mother when I was little. That time I cried. I'm not sure of the reason why. Maybe because out of all my aunts, she talked the most.

My father had one special skill – he was able to heal the illnesses and broken bones of animals such as horses, yaks and sheep. Although he was not a professional doctor, he became proficient from life experience and training. He was resourceful in many different skillful methods of inducing healing. Therefore, you wouldn't be wrong to call him a doctor. Likewise, he had no insignificant familiarity with human joints, etc. When there was an increase in the number of horse racing competition programs, father would have no free time, and it became obvious that he had become renowned. Many people came searching for him, and some even brought their horses right to our door. Others drove cars and came to pick him up. Sometimes he would need to leave for a few days at a time in order to provide continuous treatment. What's notable is that he didn't take payment for his medical treatments. When I was small, he provided free treatment, but later he made a condition that if he treated

an animal from the household, they would need to offer an appropriate number of animals as *tsethar* (vow never to kill the animal). He and many others found this arrangement to be very positive. I believe that he viewed this as the greatest accomplishment of his life.

Once in the household of my neighbor Uncle Tamdrin Kyab, their *yaru*³ was struck with an abscess of the brain that causes irregular behavior, so they asked my father to look at the animal. At that time, the *yaru* was in the corral making circles around one point. My father had a few people hold down the *yaru*, and then he used a needle to extract some blood from the unafflicted eye socket and then inserted it into the other eye. After a few days, the *yaru*'s illness had completely resolved. This is really an amazing and special technique, and I think that this kind of important knowledge is both necessary and practical.

Because I was given the opportunity to embark on my primary and secondary education with the support of my siblings and the wisdom of my parents, my memories of time spent in the companionship of my father and mother are rare. During the summer and winter holidays, I would mostly be accompanied by my mother, so although we lived together in one home, I was less familiar with my father than with my mother. Although my memory doesn't appear with certainty, my parents told me that when I was small, I slept with my mother, and sometimes when my father would say, "Come here and sleep with me," I would not only not accept it but also run away, and when he forced me, I would cry in his arms. That's what they say, but what remains on the banks of my memory is that my father used to tell me *Sripa Gaypo* stories about a spoiled man and a cunning wife, etc.

³ *Yaru* refers both bull and cow yaks in their second year of life.

When I was small, like other kids, my greatest dream was to have a bike. Not only that, but even though I think I never asked my parents for any little thing while growing up, for the sake of this dream, I asked my father a few times. “Please buy me a bike like the other kids have,” I requested. I sometimes asked with sincerity and sometimes jokingly, trying all sorts of ways to express my desire, but no matter what I did, that dream never came to reality. And now it has become impossible to be realized.

In general, many of the allocations doled out by fate are inevitable in nature - we are powerless like a prayer flag blown about by the wind. Today, while forcing myself to hold back hideous lamentations and my tears of suffering wash over me like waves, I collect all these blurry memories that include you. Although this is not really for you, but rather for my own purposes, you are still the ruler of my memories. My affectionate memories are filled with you. You were the forebearer of this conditioned body of mine and the benefactor of enormously powerful love. Therefore, don't be sad. I stash away the innumerable tokens of love you have given to me, and, in this note, promise from the very depths of my heart never to throw away the gift of opportunity you have given me.

In this saṃsāric world,
by the power of karma and merit,
we gathered for this one lifetime,
which was this girl's fortunate karma.