

TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO FILE:

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

THERAPIST: Good morning.

CLIENT: Good morning. How are you?

THERAPIST: I'm doing okay. Let's see, a quick thing about insurance. So Blue Cross seems to be paying up over the rate they said they would.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: You saw that too?

CLIENT: (pause) I don't know. I'll let you finish.

THERAPIST: Okay. So — I mean, I don't need to take any more than I'm taking. It's not exactly an error, I don't think, for various reasons. At least, I don't feel compelled to let them know. (pause) So, I mean, my thought was essentially just to credit you or write you a check.

[00:01:13]

CLIENT: That sounds great.

THERAPIST: Good.

CLIENT: Since I asked for it back, I can give it back.

THERAPIST: Okay.

CLIENT: The day before you called them — (pause) I don't know what the order was, but there is the day that we got the letter that (pause) denied the request. Then that day, I got a check from them.

THERAPIST: Hmmm.

CLIENT: For an amount that seemed over like what I had expected had they approved the request.

THERAPIST: Huh.

CLIENT: Which is why it wasn't clear to me that you had communicated with them at all and that there was an error, so that's what prompted me to call them the next day.

[00:02:08]

THERAPIST: Huh.

CLIENT: (pause) But it doesn't matter.

THERAPIST: Okay. Yeah, so I'll write you a check for what they've done so far and (pause) and I don't know if they'll — I guess I won't keep doing it if they approve more visits, but we'll wait and see. And can I just have like my bank send a check to your house? Is that okay?

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: Okay.

CLIENT: Or you can remove it from the check that I'm going to write you.

THERAPIST: I think you're actually ahead at this point.

CLIENT: Okay.

THERAPIST: I'll double check, but I think that's right.

[00:03:03]

CLIENT: That's a lot of money that they're giving you then. (pause) Okay, it doesn't matter.

THERAPIST: Okay.

CLIENT: (pause) So the party was really great. (pause) And my speech was really great.

THERAPIST: Good.

CLIENT: Can I read it to you?

THERAPIST: Of course.

CLIENT: (pause) I wanted to memorize it, but I didn't. (long pause) "I wanted to offer some thoughts about what a special person my dad is. So as any scientist knows, I'm sure most of you will certainly appreciate this.

[00:04:07]

After observing a system for a while, you can start to form a model to understand and explain its behavior. I will try to lay out a model to describe some of the unique qualities that make my dad who he is.

So when I was trying to get some ideas on how to separate this complex system into its component parts, I actually found myself drawing inspiration from dad himself. He's been building models for complex systems for most of his life. Ajuba [ph] tells stories of dad's constant tinkering, exploring and building from a young age. Just this morning without my prompting him, he told me about his attempts to build an electromagnet made out of a discarded nail and a wire when he was eight years old and a crystal radio, and this was long before there were kits for that.

[00:05:01]

This inquisitive spirit is captured by this undergrad thesis [inaudible at 00:05:05] for which he designed a model for an innovative harvester which he actually attempted to build. And from my understanding, most people didn't even finish their model much less attempt to build one.

The acclaim for his accomplishments and potential followed him wherever he went. He aced his entrance exams without much preparation, and this is an exam that students now take a year or two off to study for. He graduated at age 21 and was awarded a full assistantship to study in the US in 1978. He went onto to study the problem of non-uniformity in tobacco seedlings for his Master's thesis. His studies took him to the South to study coastal plains farming, and then back where he continued his winding road in graduate studies to the program in operations research.

[00:06:01]

His thesis was on establishing projection algorithms for specially-structured [inaudible at 00:06:05]. I have nothing to say about that. He was planting the seeds for an illustrious and successful career, and no doubt he loves his work deeply.

But most of what I want to talk about today is how my dad values relationships. Clearly he is a brilliant man who is a scholar at heart. But when you ask him about these times, you don't hear much about the fine aspects of his work. You hear about Southern hospitality, about his first date with my mom, his life-long fear of hiking and snakes, about his basketball games with mom's brothers, his involvement with the Indian students association. You hear about his wilderness walks and his Friday Chinese lunches with his colleagues and [inaudible] community.

[00:07:01]

You don't hear about how it was stressful that I was born hours before his Ph.D. defense. You hear about how he went to the hospital gift store to buy a hair barrette for his baby daughter, and how he passed out chocolate cigars to members of his defense committee after it was over.

So as most of you in this room have experienced, my dad as an incredibly devoted person. To experience his devotion is akin to being carried, not because he takes over or assumes the responsibility or does it for you, but because of the force of his single-minded focus and whole-hearted devotion to you and the task at hand really has a way of encompassing you. He takes it on as if it were his own, and he takes you on as if you were his own. And I'm not only talking about a devotion to things that are [inaudible at 00:07:52]. I'm talking about scrubbing down the trash cans in our local temple every time he goes. Tutoring high schoolers in Tom's River.

[00:08:02]

I'm also talking about building a gorgeous wooden personalized temple for each member of mom's family, and a deeply special and important part of his life, hosting his [ph] weekly book club of 10 or so which is now in its 11th year. And the devotion part comes in his insisting on maintaining an elaborate tea serving ritual, and he doesn't even drink tea anymore.

And that's the thing. There isn't a lot of separation between mine and yours for him. He has a way of interacting with the world without a whole lot of duality. There's not me, you, self, other. Similarly, there's not a whole lot of happy or sad, angry or calm, frustration or fluidity. He has his share of extreme emotions, but actually he brings a good dose of equanimity to his life. In this sense, dad's way is the middle way. In its great diversity — adversity, excuse me — dad has time after time found a way to find freedom and peace.

[00:09:10]

These are all nice words about his free state of mind, but dad is a man of action. His freedom is really borne out of a lot of discipline. His day is a series of artful practices. The daily artful practice of meditation. The daily practice of reading The New York Times aloud to his dad. They both have a voracious appetite for reading. The artful practice of a disciplined work-out routine followed by the artful practice of a hot tub soak. The artful practice of preparing the morning oatmeal with the right proportion of raisins, nuts and dates. The artful practice of just about 35 physical therapy exercises for his back, neck and knees and this is just in the morning. There are 20 more at night. There is also the daily artful and loving practice of being with, caring for and learning from his father. While this world brings out some of his most tender moments, he also uses discipline to gain freedom in this practice too.

[00:10:11]

He [ph] gets no slack in doing his 35 physical therapy exercises, taking his daily walk or not eating too many sweets, and dad always keeps his best interest in mind. This is not an easy thing for a caregiver. Not a day goes by when dad doesn't acknowledge how much he [ph] has given him and how grateful he is to be together with him.

So what's it actually like to spend time with him? Well, all of you in this room know this just as well as me. You actually spend a lot of the time laughing. He makes you smile and he really sees the humor and joy, the ups and downs, the littles and the bigs. He brings a childlike glee to the simplest things, like learning a new technique for pomegranate seed extraction, digging a hole for our new fig tree. He loves digging holes.

[00:11:04]

Worrying about releasing mail-order ladybugs in his garden while he was sick with [inaudible at 00:11:08] in the hospital. And the big one, taking the time, resources and energy to ensure that each member of his family can and does prepare these two new innovative dishes for Thanksgiving [inaudible at 00:11:23].

He approaches each experience as if it were the first time with a fresh look. So you spend a lot of time laughing and you spend a lot of time playing, learning how to solve problems. His curiosity and awe for the natural world abounds, and his deep intuition for how things and people work makes it really rewarding to go to him with a problem. You learn how to go through adversity. You learn how to treat others and importantly, you learn how to care for and be kind and compassionate for yourself as well.

[00:12:03]

So finally, you can't acknowledge this great man without also acknowledging an extraordinary woman. The spirit, generosity, devotion, support and humor of my mom have helped bring out the essences of my dad, and my dad has done the same for the extraordinary qualities of my mom. So here's to both of you, and may your individual strengths continue to be in service of each other and your community.

THERAPIST: Wow.

CLIENT: [It's a nice speech]. (pause)

THERAPIST: You're such a loving and devoted daughter.

CLIENT: I needed to say those things, I guess. It came out — it came out pretty easily.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

[00:13:04]

CLIENT: I had a couple —

THERAPIST: And joyfully.

CLIENT: Yeah. I had a couple of sitting sessions where I just sort of like used him as the object of focus and (pause) then I just like wrote it on the day of the party. I had written down like little notes from each session, and I used my grandfather and my mom for a couple of the examples. (pause) I spent a lot of time going through his Master's and Ph.D. theses, but what I really wanted to look at was his harvester thesis as an undergrad.

[00:14:02]

It's very funny, but we couldn't find it. (long pause) There were aspects of the party that were similar to my wedding, for me, in that — (pause) Well, some parts were really different, like it was kind of night and day the way that I was like physically not experiencing any anxiety or (pause) tension. I mean, I was a little bit playing [inaudible at 00:15:02] in front of everybody. (pause)

[00:15:14]

Yeah, it was very fluid. But then like once all the people showed up, I found myself (pause) stretching myself thin right away socially, and in like my investment to like connecting with like every single person there. And it was exhausting and I felt — it was really similar to what happened at the wedding, but I had the perspective to sort of, I don't know, take a step back and — (pause) I don't know. Like spent a lot of time with the same people instead of moving from group to group to group for hours which is what feels natural to me. And it also made a lot of sense that I was so tired after essentially like four days of this because I was so tired just after one day of it.

[00:16:25]

THERAPIST: That does make a certain kind of sense.

CLIENT: It does, but it wasn't obvious.

THERAPIST: Yeah. No, I understand. It just sounds like you worked very hard. I mean, happily, but —

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: — but hard.

CLIENT: Yeah. I don't know why other people don't work hard or like why it doesn't tire them out. Most people don't float the way that I do. (pause) I mean, one extreme is Jeremy who had people coming up to him all evening, and he was like sort of in the same general area the whole time. That's how he's comfortable.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: And like doesn't really feel compelled to approach other people. But my parents are both social butterflies and move from group to group.

[00:17:27]

They don't seem to be exhausted from it. (pause) I think I work very hard and I like give myself a lot.

THERAPIST: And your sort of goal or intention is to connect with everybody there.

CLIENT: Mmmm-hmmm. (pause) Yeah, like in the best, most focused way that I can. (pause) So I guess I'm like always thinking about what's going on in other people's lives, like what I can ask them about. (pause)

[00:18:34]

And people really like want to talk. It's not like I'm imposing myself. Like everybody else doesn't feel compelled to be — to go around the room and talk to everybody because they're only a few people who know every person. So they're like really happy to like engage in a deep meaningful conversation. But to do that like 25 times. (pause)

THERAPIST: I don't think it's solely because there are only a few people who could be talking to everyone that you're one of the only people who is.

[00:19:31]

That may be part of it. (pause) Though I don't know what it is, I think there probably is something important to how it matters to you to really connect with everybody there.

CLIENT: Mmmm-hmmm.

THERAPIST: [There might be multiple reasons for it but it seems important]. (pause)

CLIENT: One is that I feel (pause) like I need to show my devotion and interest. That like people need to be reminded. (long pause)

[00:20:38]

And I'm not going to like approach someone and be like — they're like "How are you?" and I'm like "I'm great, how are you?" "Great. I like what you're wearing" or something that doesn't take that much energy.

THERAPIST: Right. "How was the trip in?"

CLIENT: Right. Like I show up and I'm like "How is blah blah blah's blah?"

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: Like "Whatever happened to" —

THERAPIST: "How is your son doing at college?"

CLIENT: Not even that. Like "Whatever happened to your son's basketball coach thing?"

THERAPIST: Uh huh.

CLIENT: Or like —

THERAPIST: Like a very specific reference to a previous conversation.

CLIENT: Yeah. Or often people — people were also coming up to me a lot, and like a couple of my dad's colleagues like really wanted me to send them the speech which was kind of pretty cool but — (pause)

[00:21:41]

You know, a lot of people were like "Wow, it's so great that you still play saxophone" or like — I don't know. There was just like compliments the entire night and — (pause) I also feel like I want to say something meaningful. If I'm not just going to say "thank you" so much, which I did for a lot of the people. There's also like "How did you learn like how does jazz work? Did you know the tune beforehand? Did you practice?" Or like "How did you write your speech? Like what a great speech. He [ph] is so lucky." (pause)

[00:22:41]

And I think I found myself like really trying to reach deeply and ask like, how did I write this speech? (pause) I don't know. I sort of like thought a lot about it. I didn't write much until today and — (pause) I don't know. It's like this whole building-the-wheel every time where most people seem to recycle a lot more.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm. (pause) Yeah, it's like you really — almost maybe even a little bit like scrupulously sort of bring yourself to each conversation.

[00:23:36]

CLIENT: What does "scrupulously" mean?

THERAPIST: Like with careful attention.

CLIENT: Yeah. (pause) I got like stuck in that mode. I can't like pull myself out and zone out.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: Or like go back to where I'm just like sitting.

THERAPIST: Yeah, you've been very very on.

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: And enjoying it and into it —

CLIENT: Yeah.

THERAPIST: — and immersed. But also sort of, and most importantly, not aware of how much energy and effort it takes and how it can tire you out after a while.

[00:24:40]

CLIENT: Yeah, I think I realized it kind of a lot later.

THERAPIST: Yeah. (long pause) The thought that I had was that — (pause)

[00:25:32]

I wonder, sort of given the context and given what you wrote, how much it's — (pause) and in part, bound up with your relationship with your parents. Like it's kind of — (pause) like part of how you reflect what they've shown you about the family.

CLIENT: Mmmm-hmmm.

THERAPIST: And part of your sort of devotion and appreciation for them.

CLIENT: (pause) They don't — (pause) They don't show their devotion in the same way.

[00:26:34]

Like they're not trying to make a deep connection with everybody every single time they talk to someone. That's my own way but I think like in the spirit of —

THERAPIST: Uh huh.

CLIENT: Like in what kind of spirit I'm bringing to it.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: (pause) If you're not sort of touching your mouth when you offer a suggestion or an interpretation, your hand goes to your mouth.

THERAPIST: Huh. I never knew that. (chuckles)

CLIENT: (chuckles) [You have to feel unconscious about it now].

THERAPIST: (chuckles)

CLIENT: But it happens. [It's like that's your position for like — (pause) I made an offer and let's do that].

[00:27:37]

THERAPIST: Huh.

CLIENT: (pause) I found out more about my very early relationship with the oldest female cousin. She was there. (pause) First of all, my parents think that it was a matter of a couple of days that I was really, really sad and gloomy.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: I still remember as feeling like a couple of weeks, but I'm sure they're right. They said that the ride up was extremely painful. That was like the worst of it where it was like the transition.

[00:28:36]

Like I'm being like — (pause) All of my connections are being like cut off, completely torn away from me. But that was when I was quite a bit older. When I was a few months old, her [ph] family lived in Virginia at that time, and we would spend many weekends there. Especially during this time that my mom was, from what I understand now, very depressed and it was very hard for her.

THERAPIST: They had just moved there?

CLIENT: Yeah, just moved. My dad had just —

THERAPIST: Done his defense, yeah.

CLIENT: Just defended. I was three weeks old when they moved, and then my mom had never lived away from home and had this new daughter and was like totally depressed for about a year.

[00:29:42]

This is part of my questioning to her, like why — like she frames it in a way that doesn't focus on the feelings. It's like it focuses on explaining why she was feeling bad and then what she did. She couldn't really do much. It was like she was away from home, my dad was gone, I was like crying all of the time. Her parents were very preoccupied. My grandfather had started a business like as a second career, and it completely failed and they were losing a lot of money, so she couldn't —

THERAPIST: What was it?

[00:30:35]

CLIENT: The business? I think it was like a mart, some kind of bodega.

THERAPIST: Uh huh.

CLIENT: He's an entomologist.

THERAPIST: Right.

CLIENT: He was teaching also, but I think he's always had an interest in business but I don't think he had — it doesn't sound like it was a very fruitful venture.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: So they couldn't talk on the phone, and her sister lived like an hour and a half away, so I think that was really important for her to get through.

THERAPIST: Was your dad working long hours?

CLIENT: Yeah, I think he was probably working at least — (pause) So it was an hour commute, so he was probably gone at least nine hours of the day. I mean —

[00:31:35]

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: I don't know. I don't know what his hours were. (pause) Okay, so I like got really obsessed with finding my dad's undergraduate dissertation.

THERAPIST: The harvester?

CLIENT: Yeah. So I was like looking at the university's web archive and — anyway, in the process, I found out that I can look at anybody's dissertation in the whole world, and I spent a bunch of time reading yours.

THERAPIST: Oh.

CLIENT: (pause) I had to disclose that.

THERAPIST: What were your thoughts and reaction?

CLIENT: (pause) Well, okay, so I was like writing the speech so I wasn't really reading it for content.

THERAPIST: Sure.

CLIENT: I was reading it for nuggets of deep insight about your personality —

THERAPIST: Hmmm.

[00:32:41]

CLIENT: — and your life and there wasn't really a lot of those. (pause) I wonder what my mom, the infant mother dyad, the nature of our dyad was when I was an infant.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: It sounds like it falls more into she was withdrawn and I was — (pause)

THERAPIST: Fussy?

CLIENT: Fussy rather than her being intrusive and my being — (pause) Whatever.

THERAPIST: [inaudible at 00:33:30]

CLIENT: Yeah, avoidant. Just from like what I have heard about what she was going through at that time. (pause)

[00:33:42]

And I wonder if she hated me. This is all in the context of what I read. (pause)

So we would go to her sister's house and Selma [ph] was like nine, and apparently she would just like pick me up out of the car seat, like strap me onto her hip and carry me like that for the entire weekend. She would go from place to place to place, and I was really like her doll. We

were inseparable and she was completely adoring and loving and like needed and wanted me to go everywhere with her. It wasn't like she necessarily played a whole lot with me, but (pause) just had me with her everywhere. This was, I think, many weekends of that first year.

[00:34:47]

THERAPIST: Is it also possible — I don't mean this as a comment how she was, I don't know. But, you know, some mothers who are depressed pull it together pretty well.

CLIENT: I think she was probably one of them.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: I think relative to the rest of her life, this was the darkest time for her.

THERAPIST: Yeah.

CLIENT: But it doesn't sound like there is anything outstanding about how she treated me or how she interacted with me. I don't know.

THERAPIST: Yeah. (long pause)

[00:36:47]

THERAPIST: We have about five minutes. (long pause) One thing I'm wondering about is the extent to which you feel (pause) a similar kind of pull or sense of being on in how you want to talk and connect here. (pause)

[00:38:13]

And what you worry would be lost or I think, more specifically, that like I might miss about you or we might not share if you're not that way.

CLIENT: (pause) Yeah, I was just thinking about that too.

THERAPIST: Yep.

CLIENT: (pause) Yeah, I really do feel that way. I don't know what I would lose. (pause) I guess I would (pause) waste minutes.

[00:39:10]

Like I do feel kind of an urgency here. Not that I have to fill up all of the time, but if I'm choosing not to that's — (pause) It should be really important to me.

THERAPIST: Mmmm-hmmm.

CLIENT: (pause) That I'm going to lose the chance to (pause) show you how (pause) committed I am.

THERAPIST: Hmmm.

[00:40:08]

CLIENT: Or how special you should think I am.

THERAPIST: Hmmm.

CLIENT: (pause) But I don't feel the extra layer of filtering or censoring here. It doesn't feel like — I don't feel like I'm (pause) planning or scheming or anything.

THERAPIST: Good.

CLIENT: It just feels like (pause) whatever I have at this time, like should be yours in such a way that (pause) you really see who I am and appreciate it and love it. (pause)

[00:41:18]

THERAPIST: Somehow that could happen differently if you weren't as focused like — you know what I mean?

CLIENT: (pause) I know — I understand what you're saying. I don't know —

THERAPIST: What I'm getting at?

CLIENT: I don't know how it would happen differently.

THERAPIST: I see. (pause) I guess I had the thought that there's maybe something that gets left out a little bit in making the effort. I'm not saying that it's bad to make an effort. That's certainly not what I'm saying. But that there's some part of you that gets left behind a little bit.

CLIENT: Mmmm-hmmm.

[00:42:13]

THERAPIST: Or judged by you not quite as good or worthwhile in some way. I think it's the part that isn't involved with trying or something.

CLIENT: (pause) I think I get why it feels so scary to not want to try in general and why it feels like that's going to be the end of the world (pause) if I fall into (pause) a space where I'm not feeling connected or I'm not feeling momentum or (pause) like not trying.

[00:43:18]

And I think I do fall into that space and it's very bad and scary. (pause) And I'm not accepting it as much as I accept the other mode.

THERAPIST: It may be irrelevant, but it's just funny how these things come up together. It does make me think of your mom being kind of depressed when you were little and feeling like even she could manage that pretty well in how she was with you, that it took effort. (pause) Do you know what I mean? Like [had to gather herself somewhat].

CLIENT: (pause) What's the alternative? (pause)

[00:44:21]

THERAPIST: Well, I'm not going to answer that one. I guess you may be asking rhetorically.

CLIENT: No, I don't — I can't imagine a model (pause) of the alternative. [inaudible at 00:44:39].

THERAPIST: Okay.

CLIENT: (pause) I think I have to make it. (pause) Like figure out what the model is for me. (pause)

THERAPIST: We need to stop unfortunately. (long pause)

[00:45:25]

I'll have to think about [inaudible at 00:45:26]

CLIENT: What?

THERAPIST: I'll have to think about [inaudible at 00:45:30].

CLIENT: You don't have to think about it at all.

THERAPIST: I think I do, to tell you the truth. I think it's so that I will shut up and let you talk.

CLIENT: Bye.

END TRANSCRIPT