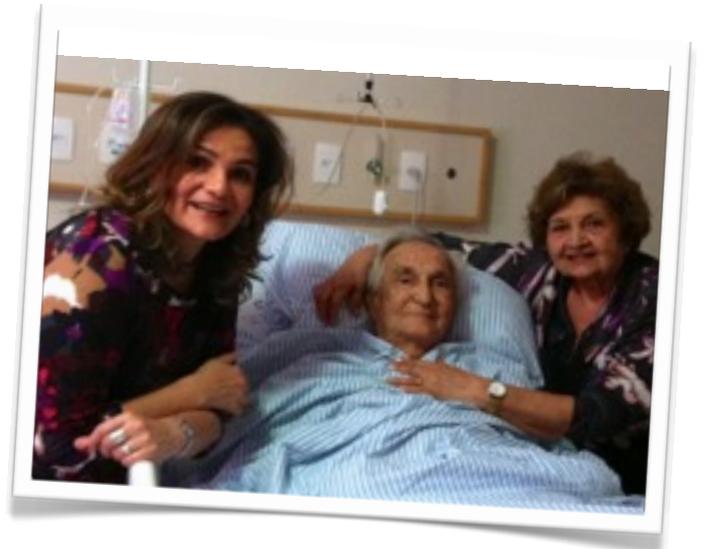


It Is Never Too Late To Pursue Intimacy!



Greater intimacy

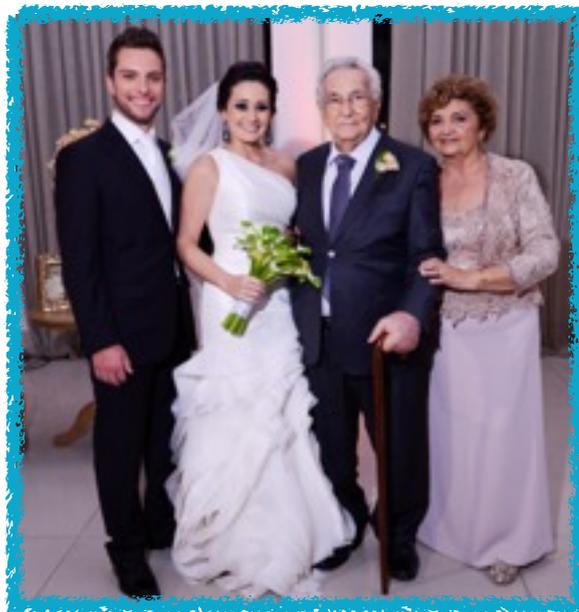
I received a gift that came with pain, tears and joy. I was able to spend two months with my dear father before his death and grew to be so intimate with him, enjoying sleepless nights filled with stories, songs, prayers, sharing of hearts, words of love and affirmation, being such a recipient of his generous heart.



Two months that changed my life!

I had gone back to Brazil to officiate my niece's wedding only to find my dear father sick. His kidneys were failing and two days after my being back there we had to put him in the hospital. The following weeks were full of doctors, exams, not knowing what caused the failure of the kidneys, sleepless nights and a lot of stress. On one side preparations for the wedding, on the other side, trying everything we could to see dad get better and even able to be in the wedding. This was the first time he had ever been hospitalized, at the age of 83.

He made it to the wedding and soon after was back in the hospital, this time for three weeks and to find out that he had cancer, multiple myeloma. By now he was on dialysis almost everyday for much of his body was swollen and kidneys had failed completely. My sweet dad now had to live with new routines of dialysis and chemo, new diets and limited mobility. He was dying and we did not know it.



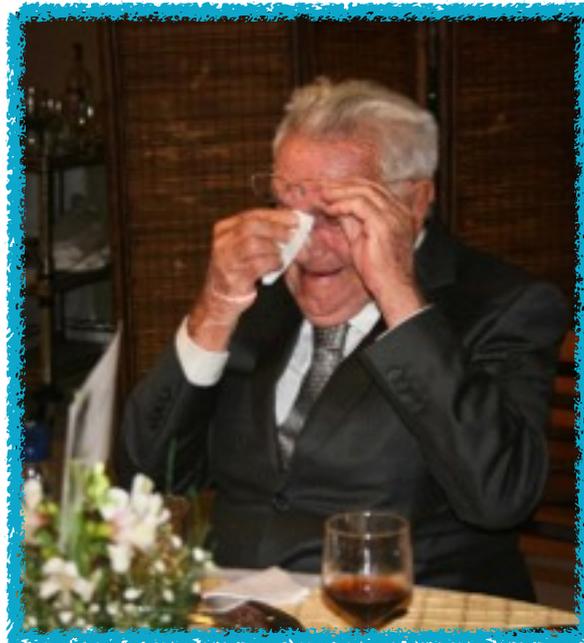
The gift I mention in this story is the gift of intimacy I gained through the countless hours of deep sharing I had with my sweet dad. So many words and gestures that I had longed for all my life were now flowing in these moments and have become engraved in my memory. I believed in two months of caring for him, being at his side, I experienced more intimacy with him than in my 45 years of existence. The only agenda was to see him well and and to treasure every minute of being together.

I found out so much about this sweet man who gave me life and also led me to know Jesus. This man who was so proud of his daughter and happily boasted to all that she was a missionary.

My dad did all he could to provide for us through in-numerous generous actions, even anticipating our deep and unspoken desires. This man who was loved and cherished by all who knew him, whose goodness and gentleness marked all his

relationships. His character stands out to all of us and left an imprint on those who paid attention to the contribution to life he was intentionally making.

I got to tell him so many things and cried together with him, laughed and just simply enjoyed his presence. I told him that whenever I feel like I display the fruit of the Holy Spirit in my life I looked like him. (these are mentioned in the bible / Galatians 5:22-23). I can still see his smile followed by tears. He often said: "happy is the man who knows how to cry".



Oh I miss him, my sweet father!

I had left home at the age of 17 to follow the call of God in my life and was often not understood by the rest of the family since no one knew how to figure me out...I was not a nun, nor was making money...yet my dad was my biggest supporter and proud announcer of a new "vocation" in our family: missionary.

For the past 27 years I visited Brazil on a yearly basis, spending 3 or 4 weeks there. Times with my father were rare for I would get involved in so many other things and family affairs. So I can say that I had more quality time with him in his last two months of life than all of my life. What a gift that was to me!

I wanted nothing from him except his love, to be in his presence and to see him well and healthy. I gave him undivided attention and unmeasured care just because he was my father and I loved him dearly. To serve him was my gift. To care for him was my joy. To express my love to him was fresh as healing coming to the needy heart.

The affirmation and reciprocity longed for all my life had been met by this dying father. His face, expressions, sometimes teeth-less smiles, are forever imprinted on my mind.

I will cherish the memories of him and hope to live up to the legacy he left behind of one who loved, gave, was quick to forgive, always willing to sacrifice for the good of others. Simplicity displayed in grace and wisdom, always grateful to God. He had a refined taste for music and the arts and freely shared his great humor and love for life.

Oh my sweet father, how I miss you and how full of hope I am to see you again, without pain, sickness, fainting, but in eternity's home. I look forward to the countless conversations and sleepless night we will share where you will impart



more wisdom, beauty and a love for life to this daughter of yours!

I love you more than ever before and will live my life knowing that I was known by you and you were known by me. You will be my reference as I navigate through life as you so richly displayed the character of God to me!

- I write this account to say that it is never too late to pursue intimacy with those around us, and to be intentional in our efforts to share our stories without fear, to embrace one another, to allow ourselves to be vulnerable and risk in love. To feel seen, felt, understood is a crucial need we all share as human beings.

Life is so short and it can take so many turns and so often we live with regrets.. We all long for connection and intimacy and we waste so much time and energy going to the wrong places for it or hiding from love.

Let's ask these questions: - Who is in my life that I care for? That I desire to know and be known? What am I waiting for? Am I holding back? Are there fears, shame, or other emotions keeping me back from pursuing intimacy?

It takes courage, risk, vulnerability, humility, pursuit, constancy but it is worth it! I am discovering that we can change the past and the experiences of the past if we

are willing to engage with people in the present and become in tune with them as we pursue intimacy. The mutual presence, the embracing, the empathy, receptivity of each other's story and life, will restore the memories and strengthen us to live changed and free to be who we are meant to be.

Let us not hold back, hide, live in fear and regrets!

Anna Leitao