

# Dinner Is at 10 pm

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*7:30 pm. Time for my mother to start cooking dinner. In a few hours, my father would be home.*

*The garage door rumbles open. The car door slams shut. The younger children run to the door to greet their father after a long day at work. He walks into the house and smells the aroma of food. Walking to the dining room, he sees the table is all set and the food is ready to be eaten.*

*It's 10:00 pm now. Time for dinner! One by one, everyone sits in their designated spots. Grace is said and we begin to eat.*

Meals in my family were far from quiet. It was one of the few times we had to spend together as a whole family. We would talk about how our days had been, tell stories of the past, or explain our plans for the week. Dinner was our family bonding time. There are eight of us, my father, my mother, and six children; so, there was always at least one person who had something to talk about.

*It's a crowded dinner table, we're sitting next to each other, elbow to elbow, talking and enjoying the time. Suddenly the phone rings, the chattering slowly stops. My father picks it up and leaves the dinner table. As he walks away, we hear a faded, "Dr. Nguyen." A few minutes later, he reappears in his signature blue scrubs and we know we won't be seeing him until the morning of the next day.*

Being a doctor on-call meant my father's time with the family was limited, but he always tried making as much time for us as possible outside of his schedule. Nevertheless, there would be times when emergencies occurred during a family outing. If a single car was taken, then we would all head to the hospital with him to drop him off. If it were a quick matter, we would stay and wait in the car. If it was a time-consuming matter, we would head home first. Later someone would come pick him up. Days spent at home were usually spent playing with us, fixing things here and there around the house, or catching up on sleep. However, that didn't mean he was "off of work." He could be called in at any time. The sound of his pager was something we were all accustomed to. To us, beeping meant an emergency at the hospital. Whenever his pager wasn't on his person, we would grab the pager and run around the house trying to find him in order to give it to him, knowing that he was being called in to the hospital. In a few minutes he would be out of the house and on his way to work once again. He'll be home by dinner.

*Dinner is over and the family has dispersed to finish his or her own business before heading to bed. Today my father wasn't called in to work. A struggling 10-year-old me walks up to him with a math book in hand asking, "Do you have time to help me?"*

"Do you have time?"—a phrase I would ask him often, whether it was about school, or if I got hurt or wanted advice on life. At that time, I didn't really think about the weight of the question and what it really meant. My father was (and still is) my go-to person when I needed help. I would wait until late for him, not realizing that he was probably tired from work. Despite that, he would always stay up,

- often passing midnight, to help me. This simple and innocent question had yet another meaning. It meant that we were aware of but respected his absence from the family. That absence was never put
- into question. True, there were times when we were upset that he would have to leave in the middle of our time but we, as his family, felt it was our own responsibility to make sure my father was able to fulfill his own duties as a physician. This is just one of the untold sacrifices that the family of a
- doctor must make.

- Fast forward to present day, we've all grown older. Some of us have moved out, while others are still at home.
- We're no longer the ones asking if he has time to help us or do things as a family. Now he's the one asking us if we're too busy with our own schedules, whether it be
- work, school, or any other activity. My father is no longer on-call but still occasionally receives emergency calls.
- We no longer hear the beeping of the pager resonating throughout the house.

- Some things don't change. My father's pager no longer exists but now when we hear the phone ringing and see the hospital name show up as the caller ID, we run around the house with a phone in our hands trying to find him. He may or may not have to leave right away, depending on the situation. As the years in his practice increase and he nears retirement age, my father's daily
- schedule has shortened, and he comes home earlier. For the rest of the day, he completes his paperwork in his home office, watches the news or some dramas, fixes things around the house, attempts to garden, or takes a nap. He has more time on his hands to rest from work. We now have
- the time where we can sit down and have long talks without getting interrupted. Some days he will be fixing things around the house and he will randomly call me over to teach me how to do things, saying I need to learn these skills for my own future. He has been planning these family trips that
- range from out of state to abroad. From the little interactions to the big events, this is his way of making up for the lost time and trying to make the most of the time left before we all go on to lead our own lives.
- As for dinner? It's still at 10 pm.

**“This is just one of the untold sacrifices that the family of a doctor must make.”**

