

On September 13, 2001 I went to visit my father to simply be with him as I tried to comprehend what had just happened to our World Trade Center. Also, I had been hearing (indirectly) that my father may be facing a battle with Alzheimers. One of the questions I had for him that day was "Are you fearful that you will forget things, not know who we are"?

He grinned and rolled his eyes and said, "You know, there are a lot of things I'd like to forget."

I smiled, then he added, "But, one thing I regret, Al, is that I don't think you ever got to know me...so I am concerned about who "I" will be as you try to remember me years from now.

I was confused by what he said, but he went on. "He told me I was the middle child and that he paid a lot of attention to the older and younger ones, and that he didn't spend a lot of time with me.

I told him he did, and that I knew him better than he thought. He just stared at me and said, "Well, I don't think you do".

I cried as I drove home that night. I regretted all the time we lost, and most potently, I regretted the time I told him not to come to see me run in races at Warinanco because it was too much pressure. I should have kept my mouth shut and appreciated the effort this widower was putting into raising the 5 of us. My next few years were full of restless evenings. I started jotting down little memories and take-aways from my life with my father. In the evenings, these memories started to meld into a story and I found myself doing something I never thought I would do...write a book. My goal was to write a story for my dad and read it to him. The book would be laced with life lessons from my dad. I wanted him to hear his message coming through my key strokes. I finished the book in 2008 and read it to my dad. By then, he was a much quieter person. He smiled and nodded at many of the sections I wrote with him in mind. That helped me recover - a lot! Sometimes, I think he smiled, to help me recover.

I shelved the book after my father passed. I pretty much gave up running around that time, as well. Every now and then I will limp down to Warinanco Park in Union County, NJ and run and think of my life growing up with him. And every now and then I come across the draft of this book sitting on my bookshelf. My father would've made sure there was something for us to do as we fight the anxiety and frustration of socially distancing ourselves during this Covid-19 Pandemic. I looked at the book on the shelf today and I could hear him...he was saying...do it... take the chance... your friends need this story... now is the time. So here it is... don't laugh...my grammar isn't perfect, my punctuation is at times, laughable. But this is my attempt at describing my father to you through the eyes, words, and actions of runner and coach, PJ Irwin.

On your mark, get set, go.....