

Think of someone important to you. Have you ever thought about what it would be like to suddenly lose that person? I lost my father two years ago. It happened so suddenly that I still haven't fully processed it, and I still have many regrets. My mother told me about my father's sickness just two months before he passed away. He had been sick for many years, and in the end, he took his own life. However, I am not ashamed of my father and the life he lived. I am proud of him, because by his life and actions, he made me into who I am today. I am proof that he lived.

At my father's recommendation, I have been practicing Judo at the local dojo since I was in the first grade. However, I often wanted to quit since I lost many matches. Though my father was an experienced judo instructor, he wasn't overly critical of me when I made mistakes. I always wondered why my father wanted me to practice judo, but it was only after his passing that I finally understood his reason. There was a hint in a conversation we had together during Christmas when I was in elementary school. Back then, I was grateful for Santa Claus because he gave me presents. I wanted to know the truth about Santa Claus, so I asked my father who he really was. He told me, "You can't practice or compete in judo without an opponent. That's why everyone is Santa." At the time, I didn't understand what he meant. But now I interpret his answer as meaning, we depend on each other for support, and we help to improve each other. We should be grateful for all the people in our lives then, since everyone is a gift.

In Japan we say, Judo has a spirit of "Seiryoku Zenyo - Jita Kyoei." This means using your physical and mental strength to the fullest, while helping those around you. The purpose of Judo is to serve humanity, not to defeat opponents. Anyone who practices Judo learns courtesy and how to respect their opponents. I think my father wanted to teach me these values and that this is far more important than mere matches.

With all the resources, information, and conveniences that modern life offers us, it's easy to conclude that everyone is self-sufficient. Unfortunately, this mindset can lead people to forget how to rely on and care for each other. Sadly, every day we hear news of conflicts, bullying and killing. It's crucial to pause and reflect on our own actions and to consider how we may have hurt others. Nothing lasts forever, and the people that you care about won't always be with you. The people and time that you've lost will never return. We must never forget to value the lives of others as well as our own. My beloved father taught me this important lesson.

My sadness will not go away, but I will always cherish the memories I have of the 13 years I spent with my father, and I will continue to live with the proof of his life in my heart.

Thank you, daddy.

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Proof of Life