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2025 American Ancestors Young Family Historians Essay Contest

Finding Your Inner Strength

No one imagined that a poor boy from Kagarol, a small village in India without running water or electricity, would go on to write two bestselling textbooks and become an esteemed college professor in America. That, however, is the story of my grandfather, Shiv Narain Goyal, who I called “Nana.” He arrived in America in 1975, when my mother was just 4 months old. He visited me for a month in 2020. Though he was suffering from Parkinson’s dementia, I recall his brief, lucid moments when he delighted in asking me math questions. I only caught a small glimpse of who my grandfather was, since he passed away in 2021. My mother always tells me that I remind her of him, so I wanted to learn more about Nana.

I interviewed several family members -- my grandmother who was his wife for 54 years, my grandfather’s 91-year-old brother in India, my uncle who is his oldest child, and my mother who is his youngest child. I also performed internet searches researching Kagarol and the Goyal cloth business that Nana’s family ran there. Remarkably, I located and contacted some of Nana’s other siblings, nieces, nephews, and their children on Facebook. From these sources, I pieced together a family tree and a timeline of my grandfather’s life.

I learned that as a young boy, Nana was not skilled at sports like the other boys in his village. Instead, he excelled in math and was always the first to write the answers on his slate when the headmaster presented arithmetic problems. When he was in 6th grade, Nana’s family moved to the city of Agra in search of a better life. Because of his family’s poverty, his simple village ways, and his lack of athletic ability, my grandfather was relentlessly bullied and ended up dropping out of school.

His love for learning and especially for math, however, continued. Using his older brother's books, my grandfather taught himself at home. Through his steadfast determination and incredible diligence, after 2 years, he passed a standardized exam in India placing him ahead of his grade level. Searching deep within himself and with the support of his family, he found his own courage and strength. With a firm resolve, he overcame his apprehensions about bullying and returned to school. He went on to earn advanced degrees in accounting, a law degree, and a C.P.A. certification. During his lifetime, Nana guided thousands of students as a college professor. He also wrote two accounting textbooks which have been utilized for over 50 years.

Like Nana, sports are not my fort  . I have always gravitated towards numbers, leading me to win two national mathematics competitions. Despite this, like my grandfather, I am teased and bullied because I am different than most boys. While they play soccer or basketball, I prefer to read about trigonometry. Researching Nana's life has empowered me to stand up to bullies. I know that with perseverance and the power of my mind, I can overcome any obstacle. Just like my grandfather, I too can achieve my full potential and reach my destiny. I know this because part of him lives within me.