

To my redshirt father, who is no longer here with me

written by กองบรรณาธิการ | December 8, 2022

The daughter of a redshirt grows up and comes to understand and appreciate her father in a new way. Although he died a decade ago when she was just a child, she now reaches out to him in a letter. Guest contributor Rattapon Noi-Wong confronts the past and asks to join her father, as a comrade, in struggling for a new, just, and democratic Thailand.

By Rattapon Noi-Wong

“You’re the daughter of that drunkard, Yot, right?” That is something I heard every time I met my elderly relatives on both my father and my mother’s side. It is not so surprising, after all: my father loved drinking. For most of his life, besides selling pancake rolls to bring in an unsteady income to our family, all of his time was spent with alcohol.

Of course, he died from drinking too much liquor; gastric perforation was the cause. He developed sepsis, and was on life support for over a week before they stopped treatment. His body could no longer take it.

I was only 12. When I learned that my father had died, no tears fell from my eyes. I’m not sure if it was due to shock, or that deep down, I believed it wouldn’t matter if he had survived.

For as long as I could remember, I had only seen my father in pain. Even on the few occasions he had a smile on his face, I could still feel the sadness on his curved lips. From the moment I was born into this family, I always saw my parents struggling. They lived in poverty, suffocated by despair and battered lives.

I really ought to say that my father suffered mental illness, and it drove him into alcoholism. I learned that fact — the very reason why he could not give up alcohol — six years after his death.

I found out because I had read an article posted on social media about ‘depression and alcoholism.’ After reading it, I realized that my father had been addicted to alcohol because he suffered from depression, from the economic downturn, from losing his income, causing his family to experience a difficult life.

My father endured the cruelty of society. He could not cope with the feeling of hopelessness. I did not understand it back then, so I did not think of seeking help for him — until he was gone.

I only got an inkling about the reasons behind his desperation when I was still very young. I could not remember exactly what year it was, but it was when my family still lived in Bangkok. My father had joined protests in the redshirt movement that demanded social change. I was quite young, so I had no idea. I only knew as much as what my father told me. He went out protesting with several people, including me, my mother, and his younger sister.



A protest organized by the redshirt movement in 2010. Credit: Flickr.

He had hope. When my father went out to the protests, I saw his eyes sparkle with hope. I had never seen it before. From what I could remember at the time, I always heard my father and my aunt say that they wanted equality, and that something was suppressing them. I did not know what it was, but when I saw the hope in my father's eyes, I could feel his energy intensify. I could feel that his hope was to bring a better life to all of us.

That worn out middle-aged man who was always drunk before sundown was completely different from the middle-aged man I saw in the redshirt protests.

One day after we came back from a protest, my aunt's grocery shop was vandalized. Liquor bottles on the shelves had been shattered. A table in front of the shop was destroyed.

A group of people standing on the opposite side of the shop approached, announcing to the whole neighborhood that they were the guardians of the monarchy. A man standing under a tree next to the road walked up to my father and pointed a gun at his head. He said nothing, and my father stood still. My aunt recalled that an eyewitness had told her it was "probably just a threat," before the group backed out.

Later, we learned that the men knew that my family had participated in a political rally. They turned from being friendly to us and being our neighbors to becoming aggressive and threatening to our family for having a different political view.

My aunt said my father strongly embraced a certain ideology. He always followed political news. Even after being threatened, he did not stop joining rallies. The day he heard that people were killed during a protest, he was dismayed. As live bullets rained on protesters, he told his sister that "they don't even think of us as human beings."

Now, I have grown up and know things better. After hearing these stories from my aunt, I want another chance to talk to my father. I wish I could exchange political views with him, read the books

he recommended, and listen to his experience of political struggle. All of these, however, are just wishes that will never come true.

I never thought I would want to turn back time so I could fix something — except for this one thing. I want to turn back time. I want to get my father the treatment he needed if I only had the chance. I want him to have lived longer. I want us to be able to fight together. I want to talk to him about all the social issues happening now.

I wanted you to know — although people saw you as a drunkard, a redshirt who caused turmoil to the country, a person stigmatized by society – this daughter of that drunk man will always be proud of you.

Father, you were a brave man. You were a hope. You were an inspiration. I would like to continue all of your unfinished business. I would like to see that hope again. I would like to take part in bringing change to this society.

Although you are no longer around to know about all of my intentions, that is alright. I hope that one day you'll come back, living a new life in a new Thailand that is ready to treat everyone equally, and is governed as a true democracy.

I hope we will see each other again, Somyot Noi Wong (my comrade, my father).

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