

## **“What you reading?”**

It was just another day in my undergrad life, I was going back home and I happened to run into Yuyutsu on the subway back home. He had a book with him that looked super fancy (and awfully complicated). “Neural networks!” came the excited reply. Over the course of 1 hour, Yuyutsu proceeded to tell me in great detail about neural networks, which left me beyond fascinated. I immediately took a neural networks class the following semester along with Yuyutsu and there on began my fascinating journey into artificial intelligence, machine learning, and cognitive science. It is only therefore fitting that I write this tribute to him on the eve of what would have been his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and the year when I have begun my PhD here at Berkeley. I've tried to write this several times now over the past 3 years, but the words somehow never seem right nor do they quite live up to the memory of him. In writing this, I hope to let people who unfortunately never got to know him about what a great human being he was, and that the world is surely an extremely poor place without his intellect and compassion.

## **Meeting Yuyutsu**

The funny thing is that Yuyutsu was my classmate during my high school, but we rarely talked during that time. All I knew that he was a crazy smart person who used to study really hard and he was helpful to everyone around him. Coincidentally, we were both admitted to NTU and ended up being each other's roommates throughout the first year of university. I think it would be safe to say that my life changed for the better in that year.

## **From roommates to best friends**

“I was frightened of a thousand hats  
Bouncing off the answers, losing pride”

Before I begin to expand on the impact Yuyutsu had on my life, I think it's necessary to provide a brief background. You see, upon entering university, I was a frightened 18 year old who struggled with poor self-esteem and low-confidence, and I thought the world was a cruel dark place. Yuyutsu, on the other hand, was a supremely confident young man full of hope, and viewed the world in an extremely positive way. Although Yuyutsu wasn't social and understanding human emotions was quite tough for him (cause he simply was very different), for some reason he would ALWAYS readily help anyone who asked him for help.

“Come follow me  
We'll go down where the river flows  
One day  
We'll find the bridge to the neverland”

An important thing to note here is that Yuyutsu was perhaps unlike any other 17 year old you would have seen (or rather I had seen). Science was his lady, and computer his best friend - he had a deep burning desire and love for science. And when I mean deep, it was really deep. Questions about the existence of universe, physics, mind, and computation were stuff that would keep him awake at nights. He would spend countless hours watching lectures and documentaries on various topics mostly revolving around string theory and artificial intelligence. To complement his love for science, he had an unwaivering belief, and confidence in himself and his abilities. Even though the questions and problems he was interested in seemed almost impossible to crack, never once did he believe that he couldn't solve them and that always kept him motivated. And I think, this in particular left an extremely

deep and lasting impression on a young, unsure, me who had little confidence in himself and used to be afraid of the world around him. He helped me believe in myself, and made me realize that no task or goal is unachievable as long as I worked hard and had belief in myself. And I think this simple lesson in itself has helped me shape what I am today. Not only did I gain confidence in myself, I believe viewing the world from a brighter perspective and a positive mindset has made me become a much better person today. When I first arrived at NTU, I didn't know what to expect and was nervous about many things. I remember he was the first person I had come across on the first day of university, and he had greeted me with an extremely warm smile and welcomed me like an old friend. Since day one, he was my roommate, my confidant, a most generous intellectual pacesetter, and most of all, a fierce friend at all times of my life. A friend whom I could always count upon, and a friend whom I shared some of the most cherished moments of my life.

My life wouldn't have been this great without you, old friend.

### **The curse of cancer**

“I know you didn't want to leave  
Your heart yearned to stay  
But the strength I always loved in you  
Finally gave way”

If a naïve 21 year old me had thought that cancer was something that would never affect me, then I was utterly and hopelessly wrong. Cancer took away from me my closest friend, a person whom I would always look up to, and whose positive, upbeat, infectious love for life and science truly made me the person that I am today. It all happened in a blur and in a space of 1 month - you were taken away so cruelly from all of us. If my grief has been extreme over the past couple of years, the sadness your family has had to undergo has been extremely difficult to watch.

I look back in hindsight and doubt if there was ever a time that was as turbulent as they were after your unexpected passing. I was furious with the world, I was angry at myself, I was angry with my friends, I was disappointed with everything in life. 21 is way too early an age for blood cancer to strike. How could the world take away such a brilliant and amazing person as yourself? Surely, things like this are not supposed to happen to people who looked to be destined for great things? Why would a potentially great scientist like you been taken away like this so cruelly?

The only thing that kept me going was the fire you had helped burn in me. I still remember the days when you introduced me to the works of famous professors at MIT, Berkeley etc that had left me in awe and made me dream about working with them. I still remember how you would encourage me to continue working hard and assured me that I would eventually get into these places. Sometimes, when I am sitting here in a lecture at Berkeley, I still can't believe I am here. Everyday, I wish you were here, I wish you could see me learning and working with the very same professors who we used to idolize. I wish to make you proud someday, and always strive to live by the very high standards you set for me. And when a such day arrives, I will proudly look back and say it would have never happened without my old friend who showed me the way of life.

Let me finish with a true tale that symbolizes Yuyutsu to me. When I talked to him the first time after he was diagnosed with blood cancer, this was his nonchalant response. “Hey, ya I am good. Oh nothing much, I am just in hospital cause I have like a little cancer, I should be fine in a couple of week's time”.

And this above, signifies everything what Yuyutsu stood for. Even when faced with the threat of

cancer, he refused to bow down, he refused to be frightened by it, he refused to give up his belief in himself, he simply refused to give up. I will end with a quote by the late and great Sam Roweis:

“I say never let go, never rest, never stop, never give in, never show fear, never tire. Cleaner, faster, better than everybody else, more practice, later nights, earlier mornings. Only the mediocre are always at their best. Push yourself. Keep fire in your eyes and fire in your heart and always do what you think is the right thing.”

Thanks for everything my friend, you are dearly loved and much missed.