

## The Value of a Ticking Heart

Tick, Tick, Tick, Tick.

Giggling, I burrowed my face further into my dad's chest, marvelling at the seemingly mechanical sounds funneling into my ear. Blissfully unaware of the significance of such a trivial noise yet captivated by its unfamiliarity, I asked "Papi, why are you ticking?".

"Well you see" he whispered intriguingly, causing me to lean in with anticipation, "I'm part robot"

"No you're not!" I shrieked, wrapping my arms around his neck, pressing my cheek to his heart, and closing my eyes. In that moment I felt safe, listening to the constant ticking arising from his chest, my own personal lullaby, coaxing me to sleep.

Of course my dad wasn't truly a robot, he had had open heart surgery when I was seven years old, and his aortic valve was now made of titanium, which clicked as it opened and shut, allowing blood to flow throughout his body. I was young, too young to fully understand the situation. I remember him coming home from the hospital with a big scar in the middle of his chest, I remember my mom telling us that we couldn't give papi any big hugs for a while, I remember the heart shaped pillow that he would hug whenever he was in pain, and most of all I remember the ticking. Regardless, I was positively fascinated with my dad's ticking heart, and would proudly tell my friends about it at every possible occasion. One day, one of my friends asked me a question that at the time perplexed me, "but like, how is he normal if he's made of metal, like how is he even here?" I didn't really have an answer for her, I guess I just always took it for granted that my dad was there.

Looking back, he was indeed always there, throughout life's moments, big and small. He was there on Christmas Eve, standing over me, helping me stir cheese into the fondue, and teaching me the recipe that my opa taught him when he was young. He was there on family vacations, all around the globe, giving me experiences I could never dream of in a million years and educating me on the 'proper' way of relaxing at the beach. He was there blasting Hall and Oates, the Eagles, and Lynyrd Skynyrd in the car, breeding my love for classics, and cheering me up whenever I felt down. He was there letting me grab onto his poles, and teaching me the difference between 'pizza' and 'french fries' on the slopes. He is here. No matter how rude I must be at times, I know for a fact that he is here for me.

I will always remember those moments with my dad and will continue to cherish every single trip, dinner, and car-ride that I get to spend with him. His ticking heart has allowed these experiences to provide me with memories, lessons, and perspective that have shaped me into the person I am today. When I was younger, my dad's 'robot heart' was just a sound coming from his chest, or an interesting story to tell my friends. Now I see it for what it really is: a tribute to life, a reminder of the past, an innovative symbol, and a miracle of science. My life would be so different, my story would be so different. The value of a piece of metal, of a ticking heart, is beyond imaginable.