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# Before Mother's Day passes by

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**HAMID  
TAVAKOLI**

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ON FRIDAY, DEC. 22, at 2:22 a.m., I took a screenshot of my phone to commemorate the moment my niece called me to inform me that my mother had just died.

My niece, a teacher with responsibilities of her own, had flown to Virginia from Florida three weeks before to be at her grandmother's bedside, where she stayed until the end. She slept on the floor at her bedside.

I already knew how much she loved my mother, but I was still awed by her love, dedication and stamina. Because of a 16-year spread of age between the kids, my relationship with my niece is

at times more brotherly than uncle-like. In such, I confess, with some guilt, that I envied the relationship she and my mother had.

My mother had an interesting life. She had nine children. Four of them died at childbirth or by the time they were toddlers. Her three daughters and two sons are all contributing members of society. I was the last child, born seven years after my brother, with my parents already in their fifth decade of life. My brother to this day doesn't hesitate to remind me that I was "most definitely an accident."

Both my parents came from very humble beginnings, but

to illustrate my mother's childhood, I will say: She was zero generations removed from living in a tent. She came from a historic tribe called *Qashqai* — a nomadic people near the city of Shiraz, Iran. She had a fifth-grade education and spoke very broken English, yet she was one of the sharpest people I have ever known.

Her eulogy, which my sisters wrote, says that "she passed just as peacefully as she lived." But my mother was never at peace, never at rest. She would put the Energizer Bunny to shame. She was relentless, immovable, stubborn, but most importantly, she was brave. She was a visionary with one single goal: to give her kids the best opportunity possible.

She had heard from neighbors that people with more means and better connections were sending their children to the United States, so that be-

came her sole mission. I have to give some tribute to my father. Indeed, it was because of his hard-earned money and incredible people skills that we were all able to come here, but the fuel in that engine was, without any doubt, my mother.

Getting her children into the United States legally was her dream, her single mission in life. She achieved that. She became the biggest patriot I knew. She believed in the United States in the most genuine and natural way imaginable. She was the first person to tell me that people have it wrong when it comes to "the promised land." It's not in the Middle East, she'd say. "It's here, in America!" She was very proud that two of her sons served in the military.

It's too involved to elaborate, but I did not have the greatest relationship with my mother. We were not that close. I am closer to my sisters, who most-

ly raised me during those formidable years of my testing boundaries. On past Mother's Days, I would often call my sisters instead of my mother.

So, as the country celebrates Mother's Day today, I have some emotional baggage that I need to delve into. While I dig through my baggage, you go ahead and take a moment to express your thanks to the person who raised you. Don't forget that the world exists because of mothers.

Family — with all its good, bad and ugly — must be valued. Go visit your mother. If you can't visit, pick up the phone and give her a call. It's the least you can do. Do it before there comes a time when you can't do it anymore — before it's too late. I'd hate for you to carry such battered luggage as I do.

**Hamid R. Tavakoli**, a psychiatrist, lives in Norfolk.

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