My grandpa Irwin was a character. He was the sort of person who, when he was hospitalized for heart failure at age 91, managed to get the good Italian restaurant across town to deliver a ricotta calzone to his hospital room. And when he learned that the hospital didn't serve drinks, he managed to bribe an orderly into smuggling a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label scotch into the intensive care unit.

Grandpa Irwin's favorite thing in the world, possibly second only to Johnnie Walker Black Label scotch, was socializing. He was an enthusiastic member of all sorts of San Francisco social clubs: the Wine and Cheese Society, the Duck Club, the French Club, the Foodsters (Okay, they were mostly food related) and his social calendar was jammed up until the day he died. The guy had more friends than anyone I have ever met.

A few years before he passed away, I was having dinner with him, just the two of us. And I asked him, "Grandpa, what's your secret? What's the secret to having so many friends?" I was fully expecting him to give me some garbage answer about how you just have to be yourself and blah blah blah. But no.

What he actually said was: "It's simple. The secret to friendship is that everyone thinks that it's 50/50. But really it's 90/10. You put in 90% effort and you get back 10%. That's the secret."

What did he mean by this? I would ask him, but he's dead. So I get to make something up.

What I think he meant was: with friendships, many people get frustrated. You invite people to lunch who don't invite you back. You pick up the phone when people call, but others aren't nearly as reliable for you. You are doing all of the giving, and the people who are supposedly your friends are doing all of the taking.

His point—agree with it or not—was that friendship is not about reciprocity. You should invite people to lunch because you like having lunch with them. You should pick up the phone when the people in your life call because you enjoy

talking to them. You give of yourself because giving is wonderful. And if you get invited to a birthday party, that's a bonus, not an expectation.

What does any of this have to do with research? For me, I feel like the 90/10 rule applies in research too.

Many people get frustrated. You put in consistent effort over a long period of time. And often, it feels like you get nothing back in return. But getting something concrete in return—papers, awards, Tik Tok fans, whatever—is not really the point. The point is that you love the process: you have great collaborators, you learn about a topic you love, you go to conferences on the beach and hear old people muse about life.

Concretely, my one conclusion about research is: If you are not having fun in research—a lot of fun—you are doing something wrong. Maybe you need a new topic, new collaborators, or a new advisor. But the process is supposed to be fun. Because that's really all there is.

This one thing I learned from my grandfather is something that I wanted to share with you. I hope that it's useful in your research career. And if it's not useful in your research career, I hope that it helps you make new friends. Which is way more important than research anyways. And if it's not useful there either, I can at least tell you where in San Francisco you can find a good ricotta calzone.

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