

## Gilda's Gift To Me

By Gabriela Loiz

In 5th grade, I was sent to the principal's office. I walked in to see my mom and principal looking at me with such sympathy. I knew I was going to see my dad, I just didn't realize the reason was that it was his time. The memory of that day is so vivid. My dad, who was once a strong and fierce being, was lying there, unable to speak or even open his eyes. The cancer was taking over his mind and his body. At the sound of both of his daughters' voices, all he could manage to do was raise his eyebrows and make a quiet sound. I laid there with him and we shared bites of watermelon, which would come to be the last meal we would ever have together. It was getting late, so they told me to go to sleep. At the possibility of these being the last words I would say to my dad, I told him to come visit me in my dreams and to tuck me in every night. I said, "I love you daddy, it's okay, I love you." I kissed him on his warm forehead and I left him. Then, just like that he was gone, and my life was changed forever.

When I woke up I could hear heavy voices saying, "Who's going to tell her?" I opened the bedroom door and immediately eyes were directed at me. I made my way over to my mom and said to her, "He's gone isn't he?" She didn't have to say yes; I already knew the answer. I saw him lying there, lifeless and I gave him a kiss on his forehead once more, but this time it was cold and clammy. I had to fight the realization that he was no more, his soul had passed onto better things but it comforted me that he was no longer having to suffer through the pain for us.

As years pass, the more I realize how many things were taken from me that day. The sound of his voice, his smile, his laugh, just merely memories. This year, he won't be there when I graduate from high school. He won't be there to help my mom put me through college. He will never meet the love of my life, or give me away at my wedding. I'll never get the chance to have

a father-daughter dance. I never got the chance to ask him about where he was from. The only way my kids will get to know their grandfather is through my pictures and memories of him. It's so unfair, so many possibilities taken from me, and without a choice, but God has a plan, right?

At a very low time in my life, it could've been easy to give up and to go down the wrong path. Instead, I found a safe haven with Gilda's Club. We were blessed to have been members of Gilda's Club of the Quad Cities. My sister, and I attended their kids club while my Mom received the support she needed to be strong for us. It gives me joy to volunteer as often as I can to the same kids club program and help other children touched by cancer. Gilda's club played a big part in mending my broken heart and it helped me learn how to cope, and that was Gilda's gift to me.

In addition, the game of basketball became another way for me to cope. The day we lost my dad, I had a basketball game later that night. I chose to play because I knew my dad would be disappointed if I didn't. As I entered the building, I was overwhelmed with the sad faces and the sorrow but as I started playing I was relieved of it all. Throughout the entire game I felt as if he was with me on the court. That night, we were all playing for Team Niuman. To this day, basketball is my passion; it continues to be how I let my emotions out and keep myself composed. My goal is to play in college; not only do I want to become a better person and athlete, I want to make my teammates the best people they can be on and off the court as well. I believe developing as an athlete is the best way for me to develop as a person and I hope to show others that finding their special talent can take them a long way.

Losing my dad to colon cancer at a young age taught me many things most people won't learn until they are well into their adulthood. I firmly believe that God has taken me through this journey so that I can help others who have gone through the same experiences I have. I've

learned the importance of spending every moment with the ones you love because you never know when things will change for the worst. My dad was taken from this Earth at a young age because his mission was completed. Now, not only is it my mission to continue the legacy of Niuman Loiz, but also to create my own.