

## The Six Year Anniversary (Family)

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September 24, 2013. I was unaware of the daunting news I would soon receive from my parents. It was news that I feared would one day be presented to me—I just didn't know when. When my father notified me to come to the family room, interrupting whatever my eleven year old self was doing back then, the inflection in his voice was much different than usual. It wasn't the scolding tone he would use when I was in trouble or a light whisper whenever he would want me to see a rabbit resting on the front porch of the house. It was a quite subtle notion that he wanted to talk about something—that something was foreign to me, because my dad had *never* said the simple words of “come here” in the tone that he used that day. After calling my sister down from the confinements of her bedroom in a much more booming voice, my father led us to the family room, where I vividly remember him leading us to our mother who was sitting on the carpet next to the round, mahogany coffee table. We all sat down with her, facing each other. I knew something had to be horribly wrong if this situation was occurring. It was at this moment where my sister and I would learn that our aunt, my godmother, Gina, had quite suddenly passed away after her 17 month battle with lung cancer. A feeling of shock completely overwhelmed me, a feeling I hadn't ever truly felt until that moment. It was at that very moment I realized how important Gina was to me—and how her battle truly inspired me, and hopefully will inspire many others throughout my lifetime.

Gina was quite an anomalous person—but in the best way possible. The wife to my father's youngest brother, she was extremely caring for her husband and two kids, my cousins. She was quite tall, had long blonde hair, and quite honestly was the healthiest eater I

ever knew. Her devotion to Christ was also another characteristic that shaped her amazing personality. Her religious dedication made her such a pleasure to be around, glowing with hospitality and being an overall wonderful person. She could be quite authoritative at times to her kids, but with the best of intentions, making sure they were happy all the time. The sad part is what the cancer diagnosis did to her. While I was a child and didn't really even know what cancer really was, I could tell it was definitely doing something to her.

The months preceding her death were ones in which I could see the effects. I didn't see her a lot, but when I did at family gatherings, she looked physically different each time. It was almost as if the cancer was physically eating her away—it would do so until it she was gone. I became frustrated in trying to understand why this disease would occur in such an amazing person. Quite frankly, the cancer didn't care who she was. The cancer didn't care that she was a loving mother of two amazing children, or that she was devout in her love for Christ. It *didn't* care. It was not only a physically, but spiritually eating, savage disease that would devour every living piece of her until she was gone. Sadly, that's what it did. It took her life. After 17 very, very long months she passed away. The cancer—it won...or so it thought.

Sure, it's something said all around the media, all around film, television, books, wherever, you name it—but it's true, the phrase “cancer never wins,” Cancer can take lives, cancer beat one down until they physically cannot get up anymore, but cancer *cannot* take away the spirit. It *cannot* take away the story. It *cannot* take away the wonders done by the victim. This philosophy is exactly what Gina lived by in the final months of her life. Sure that cancer beat her up but that's not what she was put on this earth for—to lose. Her love for her family, love for Christ, love for the world, was too strong—too strong to go out without a fight and that's

what inspired me the most. Gina's love for her life, despite the harsh, unloving nature of her disease, is what gets me through the days in which I feel like giving up.

Gina's fight truly has helped me grow as a person over the last six years. Words that stick out to me that describe Gina during her fight, ones I try to even remotely model are: loyalty, devotion, and trust. Gina was loyal to herself and believed that she could win the fight, even if she knew she would lose her life. Her devotion and trust towards her family is truly something to be admired, and I will always hold that in my heart. What's truly beautiful is how impactful Gina has been on our family. In spirit, she is here with my family every single day, and with her husband and kids for the rest of their lives. I just hope to one day become even close to the person she was.

I will truly never forget Gina. She died when I was a bit younger, but it's still easy to remember how loving she was and how much good she has done for my family and I over the years. Her battle with cancer was tough—it took a lot out of not only her, but her family and friends. It's hard to understand how this disease could've taken someone like her away from my family. Her battle is something to be truly admired. The cancer was a vulture that scavenged and ate her life away until there was none left to spare. That vulture-like cancer actually missed something vital to its diet that is *never* fulfilled—the spirit. Gina lost her life to this disease—but she didn't lose her courage. She never lost her spiritual strength. She never lost the support and spirit of her loving and truly caring family. She never lost support from me. I have always held her in my heart, and lived by the wondrous virtues that she followed for the entirety of her battle. Her courage and determination through her disease has done marvels for me. It has shown me how to live a life full of love and compassion for my friends, family, and life in general. That cancer really thought it won...but Gina's battle? That doesn't sound like a loss to me.