

OCHOLIBROS



Autumn Winds

Testimonies of Eight Mothers

Ximena García Blanco



Fundación Nuestros Hijos

Asistencia a niños de escasos recursos enfermos de cáncer



Red Salud UC®

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PROLOGUE

Ximena García

Marcela, Claudia, Bernardita, Yury, Gina, Claudia, Alicia y Adriana are women, mothers that never imagined that the autumn wind would announce to them an infinite pain. Neither did they ever imagine that the silence of the falling leaves would be the omen of an illness that would change their lives and of their children from one moment to the next, that would lay their soul bare in order to recreate itself and to start again embraced by hope, faith, strength and love, above all, love.

TIMES OF TRANSFORMATION

Patricia May

Extreme experiences in life –when we become conscious of our frailness, when everything that we thought was secure and stable crumbles, when pain overturns us, when one of our children becomes sick and the possibility of pain and death opens up– could be understood as a cruel game of destiny, like a meaningless blow. However, from another perspective, times of suffering are times of purification, of leaving aside everything that is extra to connect without masks with those we love, to find support, to find joy in the small details that previously we did not see, like a sunbeam coming in through the window, a breeze that moves the leaves of a tree or a smile from our son/daughter.

Pain can be a great purifier as it sweeps away our certainties, comfort zones, ambitions, arrogance, hardness; leaving us simple, open, sensitive, understanding, with a disposition to give and to help. It brings out our strength and allows us to realize our inner power, how solid and strong we can become, how serenely and consistently we can give company and lend support.

Many times the illness of one of our children becomes our teacher and may be one day we will thank him/her for everything that we learnt, all the wisdom that the experience gave us, all the love, the strength and spirit of service that we unfurled. Furthermore, it gives us the opportunity to reconsider where we stand in the world, to ask those questions that in the hustle and bustle of daily life we never ask ourselves. What is really important? What really matters? Where do I want my life to go? Where do I devote my energy? What is the meaning of my life?

Times of pain are moments of deep transformation, like the stories narrated in this book, that go from hopelessness to bitterness, to getting up for love, to understand that happiness is an option that is there for us to seize everyday as we see every experience as an opportunity to evolve, to collaborate and to bring forth the best in ourselves, as we value, thank and enjoy the gifts that life gives us every day.



Claudia

MARCELA ZUBIETA

One morning in the month of July, when winter was just starting, I got together with Marcela at her house. She was waiting for me in the dining room, reading something that she had written a long time ago on a feeling that wells up from deep down inside her: it is about the memories of Claudita, that hug her in the most delicate and loving way that a daughter could do.

Our conversation spanned memorable moments in her life and that of her family; and some childhood memories marked by the landscape of the country and by the seascape of the Arauco zone, in the Bio Bio Region: “I had a lot of fun in my childhood, I had a good time in school I attended, one year they crowned me queen and I was happy”. Later on, they moved to Santiago. There she finished her school and professional studies, the latter at the University of Chile, where she graduated from Medical School and, more importantly, where she met the man who would become her husband, Dino Besomi, who also graduated from the same school. Marcela says: “Anyone who chooses to become a doctor and loves their neighbor has the possibility of serving others”.



Her first work experience was as regional general practitioner in Santa Cruz, in the Sixth Region. It was like going back to her country childhood memories. There they lived for three years and where their two eldest children, Dino and Marcela, were born.

Now settled back in Santiago, with her family, she continued with her studies to obtain the specialty in Pediatrics, while her husband was preparing to obtain his in Obstetrics. Many years of work, effort and of happy moments too, of course, passed by in which they were together, travelled or, simply, sat and listened to the melodies coming from the piano that Dino played –and still plays– with the mastery of a great musician.

As time went on, the family became more numerous. Marcela relates: “The family wanted it, they wanted a baby, so in November 1987, Claudita* was born. It was a great joy, she was a beautiful girl, always ready to smile. It was a very happy time, although our day to day lives were full of demands. I still remember, as if it were today, all the loving comments that people who surrounded me made, they celebrated the energy that I put into everything, and I actually felt I was a very fortunate woman.

On hearing these very positive comments around me, I told my two closest friends that I could sense that something was going to happen to me. I could feel it, because everything around me was well: I felt loved, there was nothing going wrong, on the contrary, everything seemed too good. And, in the face of this, all I could ask God was that nothing ever happened to my children; to me anything could happen, but not to them”.

These thoughts would crop up now and again, but only that. Life went on and everyday Marcela made the trip

from her house to the southern zone of Santiago, to the Public Children’s Hospital Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes.

It was the end of the eighties, and resources at the hospital were very scarce, specially in the oncology unit. The possibilities of recovery for the sick children were low: the procedures were hindered by the lack of medical supplies and, on top of this there was a lack of financial resources that affected the parents of these children. Reality did not give room for hope.

This daily scenario in which Marcela was submerged was devastating and she felt a great rejection toward it. When she had to go and do the ward round where the children afflicted by some type of cancer were, she did it as fast as possible. However, there was a girl, named Maria, that spent a long time at the hospital and who, for different reasons and at different places, got close to Marcela; and, each time this occurred, she felt sorrow and powerlessness.

These feelings became stronger and more heartrending than ever in an autumn day, when Marcela was moved by pain: a brain tumor had been diagnosed on her one and a half-year-old daughter. She remembers: “For some months I had noticed in her a swelling of her fontanel, this happened in some cases, and it made me think that something wrong was looming ahead. This tumor appeared in the exams that she had done due to an endocranial hypertension. When I knew this tumor existed, the first thing I thought was that it was benign, but it wasn’t. The next step was to have her admitted at the Neurosurgery Institute, where she was operated. What a terrible thing it is to leave your daughter for her to be operated on, with the uncertainty of not knowing how the operation will turn out! On the sixth day there, they gave us the final diagnosis: it was a choroidal plexus

carcinoma, an uncommon malignant brain tumor, the worst diagnosis that we could have received, since there was little experience about its treatment here in Chile”.

And she adds: “The day that I found out that Claudita had cancer, before the operation, I rebelled. What pain, what a terrible sensation..., the world goes on and one wishes it would stop. That day, I went to get my children from school and, when I got there, I went to the chapel. I screamed at God and remembered God to Whom I had asked never to touch my children. That was the only and last time that I rebelled; afterwards, I talked to a priest and received communion. Fortunately, we received the unconditional support of our family, of our friends and also from generous people that we didn’t know and that were going through the same situation. Something marvellous happened, and that is solidarity”.

As in Chile there were no possibilities for a cure, Claudita’s father immediately contacted the most important hospitals in the world specializing in cancer. St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, in Memphis, US, offered them the opportunity of a clinical trial.

Time was against them and they had to leave as soon as possible. Marcela now had a daughter who had recently been operated. From one moment to the next, the world had collapsed: “We were going to do whatever we could do for our daughter and, in order to do this, we had to leave. This meant separating ourselves from the rest of the children for a while and leave them at my sister Ximena’s house. We were under so much pressure, all those things that we had fought to have in our lives seemed an obstacle then. Life had taken a radical turn. At that time, we were making plans to go and study in Barcelona, Spain. Dino was

going to study a subspecialty in Public Health; and I, a subspecialty in Infectology. Fortunately, the scholarship that my husband had obtained could be transferred to Memphis State University, where we were headed”.

For Marcela, this trip meant a hope in life, and in her arms she embraced her daughter in infinite love. And in this way, this so often painful path was began. On arrival at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, they were received by a medical team and, in special, by a woman, Mercedes Moffit, a voluntary social worker, who as time went on became a lifetime friend: “That was a very special day, she welcomed us warmly and I handed over Claudita to her. I sat in one of the sofas in the waiting room, I was exhausted, I had not been able to sleep in a long time. When I woke up, I was given the results of the tests that had been done on my daughter during the day: they confirmed a spinal metastasis and she was diagnosed with the possibility of 30% survival”.

The treatment had to be started. The family had to resume daily life, which meant looking for a place to live and a school for Dino and Marcelita, who soon joined them. Dino, the father, had to fulfill his obligations related to the scholarship; and Marcela, of being a mother and housewife 24 hours a day.

It is indisputable that the help and the generous love of many people who supported this family was a determining fact during the years that the treatment lasted. The protocol indicated by the doctors was intensive: at a given moment 84 radiotherapy sessions accumulated in two months, it was a complicated period. In spite of the difficulties, Claudita spent most of her time at home, which allowed them to have family life and also go for walks in





the parks and by the ponds where ducks swam, which she simply loved.

During these two years, she suffered two relapses. The last one led to a neurological deterioration and the use of morphine to stop the pain, and this was the reason why the healing treatment was dropped.

The return to Chile was imminent. Marcela and Dino prepared their luggage with the same urgency with which they got ready right at the beginning of this journey, with the difference that this time their daughter's life wasn't in their hands.

It was autumn again in the Santiago sky. The leaves of the trees fell with the wind, foretelling another cycle in the life of Claudita, who lived in a deep comma. For a month, Marcela with not leave her daughter's bedside: "It was enough for me to lie beside her, it was such a tremendous love, each time I felt that she could die, I prayed and I asked God not to take her away, I couldn't give her to Him.

Claudita continued to live until one day, for the first time, I saw a gesture of pain. I couldn't tolerate to see her suffer. At that moment, I felt that she had to leave this life. I took my daughter in my arms and I asked my sisters and friends to accompany me to pray together. As soon as we began, she died; I released her and God was there".

Her soul left full of love, to a place without space or time. Here, on earth, she lived, loved, and will continue to live in the memory of her parents, brother and sisters and so many others that once walked beside her.

When Marcela said farewell to her daughter, she felt that such a deep pain must have a meaning, that Claudita opened up a path for her and that she was there to follow it and hold the hands of all the people in the world that might want to help children with cancer. That had been her daughter's mission and, at the end of the day, in the last rays of light, to her there already existed a foundation for children with cancer, for Maria, for our children. 🌳

* Translator's note: Claudita: literally meaning "little Claudia" is used as a term of endearment. Thus, in this book, many times the last part of the first names of the children are modified in this way, thus having an "ita" for the feminine names or "ito" for the masculine names.



Víctor

CLAUDIA PEÑALOZA

Our meeting was in a neighborhood square in the municipality of San Miguel, we sat on a green wooden bench under the shadows of large lush trees.

Claudia, with her brave smile, had decided to take charge of her life from the time she was a young woman of 16 and lived in Rengo, when she abandoned her studies and married, with the hopes of a girl who, above all, wanted to be a mother. It's been 20 years since then and four children have been born: Alexis, 17, Javiera, 12, Víctor, 7 and Daniel, 1 year old.

Of that girl who decided to face life head on there still remain that strength and faith, which have been her travelling companions. This journey, which memory keeps intact, came to a standstill on a hot and exhausting summer's afternoon, in 2006. They were cleaning the refrigerator which they had received as a gift and Víctor, who was then 4 years old, asked his mother that they stop working and go and have an ice-cream. The whole family celebrated the idea. Upon their return, they continued with the pending task; everyone helped, except Víctor who went to bed, tired and sleepy.



At midnight, like never before, he woke up having difficulty in breathing and he himself asked his mother to take him to hospital. Claudia went out running with him in her arms until they arrived. That was the beginning of the road that would lead them from one hospital to another, and also to Claudia's urgency to baptize her son, who, for the first time, had been admitted at the ICU (Intensive Care Unit) of the Rancagua Hospital. At that moment, she directed all her pleas for Victor's health at God.

While she accompanied her son, she received the advice from the physicians in charge: she had to travel to Santiago so he would have more tests and so they would rule out the possibility of leukemia. On getting the news, for the first time she felt she lost control. She left Victor for

a moment and went out into the corridor to cry without consolation. Her most direct relationship with the illness was the synonym of death. Victor was also crying because he understood that he had to travel to another hospital and he was terrified of being alone. As soon as his mother came in, they hugged each other and she promised him that she would always be by his side.

Claudia remembers it as if it was today, with tears in her eyes the day, when she said goodbye to her family in order to travel to Santiago: "It was a white double cab van that took us from Rancagua to Santiago. On that occasion, my son's father accompanied us; it was the last time that we were all together, because I never again counted on his support, on the contrary. When we arrived at Hospital Ex-



equiel Gonzalez Cortes, Victor went immediately into the ICU (Intensive Care Unit), he had a serious infection. The doctor talked to me about the treatment and about the tests that they would do to him, and he also told me that I should stay in Santiago for a few days”.

She adds: “The first thing I thought was: ‘what do I do, I don’t have anywhere to stay’. Fortunately, the social worker explained to me that the hospital had a shelter home for the mothers that came from the province. That day everything went by very quickly. I said goodbye to my son’s father and to the social worker, who fortunately was still by my side, and I started walking to the shelter home. A couple of blocks before arriving, she said goodbye to me and told me to go on by myself, that someone was go-

ing to be waiting for me. I could see the house in the distance; I will never forget the anguish I felt as I walked there. I couldn’t breathe because I had a lump in my throat, I felt so lonely, I didn’t know what was going to happen with Victor or with my other two children. They had always been very close to me and I had never come away from them. I was frightened of leaving them alone, very frightened of the relationship they would have with their father, that on more than one occasion had been aggressive. My heart was tight”.

During the days that followed she arrived early at the hospital to be beside her son. And so, the days went on, until there was finally a diagnosis: myelodysplasia –when the bone marrow doesn’t function well–, which allowed



Victor and herself to return home and come back every fortnight, and be given the appropriate care.

A month later, both were back to continue with the pending exams, but now the diagnosis was different and definitive: low risk acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Claudia, on learning this, felt a pain that is difficult to describe, but she resigned herself with the thought that one makes one's own in the face of complex situations: "God never gives you a burden heavier than you can handle".

From that moment on, her stay in Santiago was indefinite. Therefore, she went to live in the shelter home belonging to Fundacion Nuestros Hijos (Our Children Foundation). Here she made a lot of friends, she felt supported in her pain, she also began to smile and to understand that there was hope for life for children with cancer.

The situation meant an indefinable weight for the rest of the family, she felt that she was abandoning her older children, Alexis above all, who was a teenager who needed her in a special way. He resented the situation more than any of them, so much so that he abandoned school. To this day, Claudia carries this guilt which isn't hers, which is simply part of the burden that she mentions so naturally.

Victor was under active treatment for 10 months. It was very difficult to sustain, during the last chemotherapy above all, which resulted in serious complications. At this time Claudia thanked every small announcement of recovery.

Time has gone by and today it is indisputable that her son has come through. In her own words, Claudia expresses: "Thank God, to the doctors, to the nurses, to the auxiliaries, to the social worker at to the hospital, to the foundation for all their help and because they gave us a home. I felt I had a family, also unconditional support from other

mothers that were going through the same circumstances".

Because of the above, and much more besides, during the summer of 2007 Victor went into maintenance therapy, which meant, in this case, continuing with the medical check-ups every three months.

From the first day when they arrived in the white double cab van, until the day in which the doctors considered that the maintenance therapy began, there were several family events that took place. Among them, the definitive separation of Victor's parents and Alexis' unexpected fatherhood at the age of sixteen. Claudia, at that point, had resolved to stay to live in Santiago with her children so she could always be near the hospital. With all her strength she decided to start a new life.

What she had never imagined was that one day, at the outpatient unit, when she was waiting for Victor to be called for a medical check-up, she would sit next to the man, who until this day is by her side, who in the most difficult moments embraces her tightly and, more importantly, respects her as the great woman that she is. A woman who is strong and generous in her love for her children, and hard working like no other.

Once a week, as soon as the sun is out, Claudia sets off in her tricycle to the market in Lo Valledor, so that there is nothing essential lacking in their home. There, she stocks up with aromas and colors that by magic she transforms into the food that she offers everyday, with a big smile, under the shadow of a tree right in front of the hospital. Under the shadow of other trees, from a nearby square, I could imagine this story suspended and eternal, because although it is unique, the big pains and joys will belong to those who cross the paths of all and each one of the plazas of the world. 🌳



Karen

BERNARDITA OLGUÍN

Lo Miranda is a town where Bernardita and her family have lived for many years, and it is where she would leave at the crack of dawn to go to work. One day in September, she stopped under the moon that was still shining under the sky and in silence she thought back at her whole life; the only thought that came to her mind was to ask God to be happy, she would do anything to be so.

After that so heartfelt plea, Karen, her ten-year-old daughter, felt very weak. Bernardita and her husband, Alberto, decided to take her to the doctor and firstly they went the outpatient unit of Lo Miranda. There was not a clear diagnosis and, and as she continued to feel weak and unwell, they decided to take her to the outpatient unit in Doñihue.

The girl's health worsened and the anxiety of the parents increased. They therefore followed the advice from the doctors and took her to Rancagua Hospital, where she was admitted and underwent the routine exams. Bernardita, who had not been able to be by her side and felt more and more distressed, decided to leave her job and travel together with her husband to visit Karen, who had spent the night in a ward, alone for the first time. They met her and the doctors there. They had a diagnosis that had to be confirmed in a specialized center.



The initial result was unexpected and devastating: probably leukemia. However, the stipulated procedure for these cases had to be followed: transfer to Santiago, to Hospital Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes. They arrived there on September 29, 2008. Alberto and Bernardita soon received the definitive diagnosis: high risk myeloid leukemia; an incomprehensible result for them. They hoped with all their heart that it would be a mistake. It was the beginning of an unknown and painful path wrought with big irreversible changes.

That same day, Alberto said goodbye to his wife and daughter to return to Lo Miranda and tell the rest of the children that their mother would not return for a while because she had to take care of Karen. For Bernardita, it was extremely painful to stop seeing her other children specially as they had to be separated between them. Karina, who was 12 years old, and Benjamin, who was 5, had to move to Coltauco, a town near Lo Miranda, to live with aunt Emiliana, Bernardita's sister, and Pablo, aged 14, stayed with his father.

In Santiago, at the oncology ward, where there are normally 12 children in their blue-painted rooms, with windows which pretend not to exist, so the children can see everything that is around them and feel accompanied, Karen was very well received and loved by those who would soon be her friends and by all the people that work there. The same occurred with the teachers in charge of the hospital school belonging to the Foundation, who supervised her studies and helped her to feel that time went by a little faster.

On one of those days, when Karen was working out

some math exercises and I was helping her with some drawings, she commented to me that she already knew what was happening to her: “I talked with my mom and what’s happening is that I have a little bug in my blood, but with the treatment the bug is going to die and I am going to get better. My mom also told me that my illness is called cancer and that in this hospital there are a lot of sick children. We’re going to be here for a while and then we are going back home”.

The track did not seem so difficult, until the ninth day after the second treatment dosis Bernardita was with her daughter in the shelter home when her daughter started feeling ill. They went immediately to the hospital, Karen in her wheelchair. As Bernardita held it tight she felt that her whole life seemed to vanish. Upon arrival, Karen was examined and immediately admitted to the ICU due to decompensation which means that all the hemodynamic part was not functioning well: blood pressure, pulse and oxygen saturation. To this, other problems were added that kept her in a serious condition and connected to machines that allowed her to survive when her condition was most critical.

During the first two days Karen went through a lot of pain and grief, so much so that she told her mother that she was very tired and that she didn’t want to go on. Bernardita had never imagined her daughter not wanting to continue living. She was so shocked and struck with so much sadness that she went out to cry in the hallway of the ICU, a long and open corridor, that at the end opens up to a large ward, where the beds seem too big for the children



who lie amidst white sheets and machines that keep them alive. Later, Bernardita came back beside her daughter and asked her if she continued to think what she had told her. She told her that she didn't, that they would continue on together. From that moment, Bernardita made up her mind to celebrate each day that was gained.

Every evening, when the clock struck seven thirty, Bernardita would say good-bye to Karen and together they would ask God to help them. Her daughter would wait for her until the following day, always with the certainty that she would be with her, because she knew that her mother would spend the night sitting only a few steps away, behind the access doors to the ICU. Bernardita pointed out to me: "I would have done anything to stay with her, but it was not allowed, as I waited for the night to go by my head could no longer bear the thoughts that came and went, they didn't stop. And I couldn't avoid thinking about death, it was beside me, it appeared like a bad thought. Why Karen?"

At the same time as Karen fought to recover, her siblings, in their accompanied solitude, made an effort to be good students. At that time, Karina won third place in the regional chess championship and sent the medal to her sister in a great gesture of love. This coincided with her recovery and transfer to the first floor of the hospital, to the oncology ward, where her friends were waiting for her.

Her recovery took its course and with time the new challenges were met that, at moments, weakened her health, but which, little by little, gave way to new energies that transformed into the happiness of returning home for a couple of days, to then return to the hospital or the shelter home and continue with the radiotherapy treatments that seemed to drag on forever.

In all this journey her mother was her company, her love, her security, her friend and confidante. And in the moments when Bernardita asked herself why they had to go through so much hardship, the reason for her daughter's suffering and that of the whole family, she could not help crying. She was overwhelmed by grief and it was her daughter, Karen, who told her that everything was going to be alright, that she shouldn't think anymore, and made up games so that she would be happy.

Unquestionably, Bernardita has come out stronger from this path that at the beginning seemed so uncertain, when her life revolved around the platelet count, red cells and white cells and so many more things that determined each course of action.

Her life has changed and in relation to this she tells me: "One morning I was alone in the shelter home, I turned on the television and heard that the word happiness was a decision. I don't think it was a mere coincidence, I had to be there to listen to this, it kept going around in my head and it is so true, God wanted me to listen to this. Many things had happened to me that have made me suffer throughout my life and I always saw them with sadness, in a negative way. I feel that in a certain way I wanted to continue suffering. It's enough, now I think differently, I have had time to reflect, to talk and to read; I am sure that my daughter's illness is not a punishment and I feel that good things have also happened. With Alberto, my husband, we have become closer in spite of the critical circumstances that we have gone through, he has been a great father to my children and when I go home for a few days with Karen I feel welcomed and I can't stop thinking that, when one wants to, one can be well. For some reason and in spite





of my daughter's pain, which is also mine, this illness has caused positive changes".

The time for them to return to their home in Lo Miranda is getting nearer and they will only return sporadically to Santiago to continue with an outpatient chemotherapy treatment. They are very happy, Karen is counting the days to be with her brothers, sister and father. In spite of the fact that they have felt very comfortable in the shelter home and that Bernardita is very grateful to everyone who has assisted her daughter, her mind is already in her home, which has been remodeled, is bigger and has more bedrooms, thanks to the constant work of Alberto and Pablo, who has worked alongside him.

From that time when Bernardita, under the moon,

asked to be happy, many other moon cycles have gone by. Meanwhile, this family has lived heartrending sorrows, when the life of their daughter appeared to slip through their hands that supported her daily. They have also had greatest of joys: when their daughter smiled again.

For now, the decision has been taken, Bernardita will continue to motivate her family to enjoy the moments of happiness, to recognize them in the most simple thing that life can give them: to be together. And, to celebrate it, she will accept an invitation from her husband that thrilled her because she had dreamt about it for a long time and had remained suspended a day in September: to dance; yes, to dance. 🌿





Nicolás

YURY MARÍN

In an apartment building in the municipality of La Cisterna, in Santiago, lives Yury and her children: Nicolas, who is 2 years old, and Leito who is nine months; also their father, Leonardo. For now, Yury is fully dedicated to her children, as the job she had at the textile factory was suspended in autumn 2008, when Nicolas turned one year of age and was just beginning to walk.

Only some days after having celebrated her birthday, Yury realized that Nicolas had a mass in his tummy. She and Leonardo were so worried that they immediately went to the medical center; only a few days went by and he was diagnosed with a neuroblastoma, that is to say, a tumor of the central nervous system, which extended to the abdominal area. The boy was transferred to Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital, where he was admitted and the diagnosis was confirmed. Nicolas' parents only realized the seriousness of their son's health when the doctors explained to them that the life expectancy of this type of cancer was extremely low.

Yury, very moved, tells me: “It was terrible for me, also for Leo, when I heard one of the doctors say that Nico had practically no possibility of living, it was terrible, the whole world fell apart. I felt so much pain that I can’t explain it. At that time I was expecting Leito, I was four months pregnant. I have asked myself more than once why this happened to Nico, and to me. I’ve been told that things happen for a reason, may be in the future I will understand, but now I don’t know. That day they also explained to us that the treatment was going to begin with a series of eight chemotherapies and, if everything worked according to plan, a transplant of the bone marrow would be done. Depending on the outcome, at the end of the treatment, 28 radiotherapy sessions would be carried out. After hearing this, which at that moment was so difficult to accept and understand, we decided to do everything that was necessary to pull through, whatever it took”.

At the moment in which Yury came face to face with her son’s illness, her life changed radically. For a long time she lived the 24 hours of the day next to Nicolas in the hospital, taking care of him, comforting him and, above all, entertaining him with the toy cars, which were of all colors and sizes, and that have always been on his bed.

As the chemotherapies succeeded and time went on, each hour that struck became more complicated. She comments: “At the beginning, the effects of chemotherapy are not so noticeable, but with time the physical changes begin, there is more discomfort, more pain. The distressing thing is that a one-year-old boy can’t speak; Nico’s age when we started the treatment... So I can’t help thinking, for example, that the pain could be stronger than

what I imagine it to be, and that only thought doesn’t let me sleep”.

There is no doubt that, although the pain has been controlled, Nicolas has felt pain that is inevitable, as in the two surgical interventions that he underwent to remove the tumor; the first one of these, when he was already receiving chemotherapy treatment and, the second, at the moment in which this treatment ended.

Luckily, this pain has been accompanied by some joys also; the biggest one came with the first rays of sunlight in October, which was when Leito, Nicolas’ brother, was born. It has been the family’s joy and also the proof of the solidarity that exists among them, specially that coming from a cousin named Patricia. She has taken care of the child as her own son at the times in which Yury has not been able to take care of him, which has happened more often than they would have wanted.

One of these instances was during the long bone marrow transplant process, that took place after the chemotherapies were over. This intervention took place in Luis Calvo Mackenna Hospital, on March 30, 2009. Yury remembers: “Before the transplant, we were hospitalized for three months. The preparation for the transplant involves many exams and special care. He was the one that was really hospitalized, but I was too, in a way, because the mother always has to be there, which is fine because I would never have left him alone in any case. After the day that the transplant was carried out, we were at the hospital for 15 more days and we were discharged. Fortunately, everything turned out well, I have prayed a lot for my child and I also know that our friends have too, as they have joined in prayer chains.





There are many people who have, in one way or another, supported our family, and with regard to this, Yury tells me: "Fundacion Nuestros Hijos has been a great help. Ever since we arrived at the hospital, they have taken care of Nico, they have supported us in different ways and they have always taken care of our needs, we have felt their love and their good will".

However, good will is not always enough in these very uncertain circumstances, when the possibility of life seems scarce. One must risk everything; and this is what has been done all along the way. No doubt this has been so thanks to the medical team's commitment, of the family and, of course, to Nicolas' mother who has taken her child by the hand with infinite love, strength and much courage. She has always been there for him and the medical results are now very encouraging.

So much so that Nicolas has taken on his life again, just

as a two-year-old would. After a long time he has gone out to run in his car, that his mother directs from the distance by remote control, through the streets and plazas of his neighborhood. He also plays with his brother and with the million toys that he has received due to his great kindness, a virtue which he has freely shared with many in all the places where he has been.

For now, what is needed is faith and to continue on. There are also Yury's dreams –who just turned 23–, which are to go and live with her family in their own home in the municipality of Lo Espejo, in Las Turbinas, where she will continue to be the loving and caring mother, and Leonardo's partner. She comments: "The greatest joy I could have would be to see my two children arrive back from school, to see their happy little faces and welcome them with a lot of hugs and to be able to help them in their homework. This would be the most beautiful thing that could happen in my life". 🌱





Pablo

GINA PARRA

A year has passed since that Tuesday, July 8th, 2008 and, without doubt, there will be an infinite number of days that will have to go by so that Gina will feel the sorrow for the passing away of her son Pablo from a place in her heart where sadness settled forever so that she can transform it into a silent grief, with the certainty that there is an end for everyone and for everything in life, into acceptance; to continue being present in the company of Pablo, her husband –who feels the loss of his son as strongly as she does–, of Marcia and Katherine, her daughters, and of Damian, her grandson, who love her and support her while she intensely lives the love of her son through that which he embraced in his life.

Still more years have gone by since Gina was a girl and dreamt with a family and children, while she played and run through the hills in Peñalolen, where she lived with her parents and siblings. Time went by and those hills were left behind when she met Pablo and they decided to make their childhood dreams come true. 15 years ago, they made their home in Calera de Tango, a house as light blue as the sky, surrounded by fruit trees and also by the eleven chickens that run around and once belonged to Pablito, but which now have become one more memory of what this well-loved and cared-for son left.

It was in that place where we got together to talk on a sunny winter morning. Gina generously shared her experiences marked by emotions. She, in spite of her physical difficulties - a dysplasia that generated in arthrosis and that makes it difficult for her to walk -, has worked relentlessly: as a mother, giving all of herself; in her role as a housewife and as a temporary worker in the fruit harvest. Likewise, her husband has worked in agriculture and as a gardener, from Monday to Saturday, because on Sunday he always had a clear destiny: the soccer field. He and Pablito would leave the house early proudly wearing the uniform of Roto Chileno* Sports Club, with ball in hand, ready to win.

Gina remembers: "I started to suspect that something was wrong when Pablito returned from the game and would lie down on his bed to rest, would fall asleep anywhere; one day even, he fell asleep on the bus that brought him from school: he travelled all the way back to school and only then did anyone notice that he had not gotten off. He also often caught a cold with a fever. These were the first signs of the illness. Afterwards, the abdominal pains followed; the visits to the outpatient unit at Calera de Tango increased and, when I saw that this situation persisted, I requested a second opinion at the Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital. As it wasn't possible to get an appointment during the week, I took the risk and just went anyway. Thank God, they saw him and, not only that, they also did tests on him. This story started in the spring of 2002, when Pablito was 7 years old.

We came back home without knowing what the diagnosis was, we had to return the following Monday to the hospital. The next day, on Saturday, I received a phone call where we were asked to go to Santiago immediately: it was

urgent to have Pablito hospitalized. The shock was so great, that I called my husband, who was working. He came as quickly as he could on his bicycle and we went off on a bus with our son. We left our daughters in charge of señora Ana, a friend and neighbor who has always supported us. At that moment, Catita, my youngest daughter, was one year old.

Not many days passed before Gina knew which was the diagnosis for her son: medium risk lymphoblastic leukemia. She relates that moment: "I remember it as if it was today. I talked to the doctor in one of the hospital hallways. When I heard her say the word 'leukemia', I wasn't able to retain anything from the explanations given on the treatment, my brain was blocked. We said goodbye and I stayed alone, feeling a horrible pain, that I can't describe. Fortunately, a few steps from us, there was a couple that had heard our conversation; they came closer and hugged me without knowing me, they consoled me and I thanked them with all my heart".

The chemotherapy treatment lasted seven months. On the third month, Fundacion Nuestros Hijos supplied them with a catheter, which is so necessary in these types of treatments due to the fact that the use of this instrument meant for Pablo diminishing the amount of injections and improving his quality of life.

In the first stage of the treatment, he remained hospitalized while he was given chemotherapy. Unfortunately, at that time, in the hospital there was a rule that prohibited mothers to accompany their children during the night. For Gina it hurt her soul to say goodbye to him, in order to return the next day, specially when he was not feeling well. Fortunately, as the years passed, this rule was changed.

They went through the second stage of the treatment





without many alterations. Both of them travelled daily from Calera de Tango to the hospital to receive the medicine and so that Pablito participated in the school hospital. Upon returning each evening to their home they were optimistic, in high spirits and, most importantly, with Gina's certainty that her son would recover.

The month of April of 2003 was a decisive month: Pablo was discharged and went into maintenance therapy. The definitive return home was celebrated by all the people that had accompanied them in the process. He was happy, he played again with his school friends and at his club's soccer field; no doubt, the best thing there could be. Time went by quickly and, when the spring of 2005 arrived, everything changed. Without apparent reason, he started to suffer intense headaches and could not tolerate the noises that his classmates made. Gina, once more, sensed that something was wrong, they had to return to the hospital.

Uncertainty, fear, sadness; everything got mixed up, everything was relived. The exams showed a diagnosis of a combined medullar and testicular relapse: "What powerlessness, what a great sorrow... to start everything again. The greatest pain was to tell this to my son, who was 11. I explained to him what was happening, he took it very badly. He punched the bed and cried without consolation, it was very complicated. I told him that the first time we had been able to pull through and that we would do it again, because, we, his father and his mother, were going to be with him as always, that we loved him, that it was another trial from God. Just then, in that very difficult moment and due to those good things in life, my husband met a great man, Victor Rodriguez, who, on learning about Pablito's illness, held out his hand to us and never left our side".

This treatment also went on for about seven months, this time, radiotherapy was added to the chemotherapy trial. On that occasion, Gina did not go and live in the Foundation's shelter home, although she had had the opportunity to do so. She had a great need to see her daughters and for them not to feel abandoned.

"When the chemotherapy ended, we had to go to the Cancer Institute for the radiotherapy sessions. When we arrived there, Pablito got off the bus running and went in screaming to the waiting room, announcing that Pablo Plaza had arrived and that he was ready to be seen. On the last day that we went, our visit there was special: it was July 21. Before we took the bus that took us to Santiago, we went to leave our 17-year-old daughter Marcia to the San Bernardo Hospital at midnight. She was about to be a mom, nine months of waiting and of worries had passed. I was very sad because I couldn't accompany her when she most needed me. My grandson Damian was born at six in the morning, just at the time when we got on the bus to the Cancer Institute for the last time".

They came back very happy to Calera de Tango: another maintenance therapy period had begun, the family had grown, a boy had arrived who filled the home with joy and hope. Life began to be resumed once again. With the September winds they flew kites, played football, collected the eggs in the henhouse and, when summer lit up the trees with colors, they harvested the fruit. Each day was a celebration.

A year went by and destiny destroyed Gina's and Pablo's hopes for the third time. Pablito received the news that shrunk his heart with pain: a medullar relapse, there was nowhere to find comfort. From the offset of this treatment, the complications increased, the track was more and more



difficult and painful. Gina never left his side. She moved into the Our Children Foundation's shelter home, where she was welcomed with much affection. To this day, the Foundation has meant unconditional support for her. The bonds of friendship with the people involved have strengthened as the years have gone by.

In January 2008, the chances of survival were minimal, all that Gina asked God was that her son didn't suffer anymore. Unfortunately, the difficulties continued and there was no limit to her and Pablo's pain.

In June that year, hope vanished, there was nothing more that could be done. Gina, with the greatest pain she has ever felt, talked to her son: "Pablito asked me if he was going to die. Our eyes met and we knew what was coming. My answer was that it was the saddest day in my life, that life without him was meaningless for me. We hugged and we cried together".



"We went back home and one day, in the evening, we said goodbye forever. I took his hands and I told him that it was time for him to go with God. I handed him to Him. And, as Pablito left, something came out of me, he took away my grief, my great anguish; he rested and I rested, I will never forget this".

A year has gone by, and winter is here again. With the difference that this time the sun has come out and Pablito can feel strongly in his heart that Gina has done what he many times asked her to do: to look after the family and to stay close forever. For the family each dawn has meant living with the absence of a son and brother. All the memories are around, in every corner. From that day in July, every Sunday, the family gets ready to go as early as possible to the cemetery where Pablito is resting. This is his day. They accompany him, dress him in flowers, tell stories, cry and also smile. 🌳



* Translator's note: Roto Chileno describes a Chilean person who essentially represents a brave man who is proud of his country.



Kiomara

CLAUDIA FLORES

Every year, in spring, hundreds of young people parade to the beat of music through the streets of the town of Santa Cruz and, every year, Claudia and her daughter Kiomara wait for their arrival.

Spring 2007 marked the difference. Once more, they had arranged to meet: Kiomara, after school, and Claudia, after her work at Hogar de Cristo,* but Kiomara didn't arrive. Claudia had the feeling that something could have happened to her and decided to return home. When she arrived, her daughter was waiting for her to tell her that she had felt on her right leg, over her knee, a mass of 10 centimeters. It apparently had kept hidden; or it had aggressively appeared from one moment to the next. Claudia did not want to wait till the next day and they immediately went to a medical center to consult about it.

From that evening, six long months went by before they actually knew what the disease was. During that period, this mass diminished and increased in size; on occasions, it grew so much that Kiomara had difficulty in walking.



In March 2008, after many medical consultations and tests, it was at San Fernando Hospital where they gave Claudia a definitive diagnosis. Specially on that day, she decided to go alone because she had the feeling that the results could present problems and she didn't want her daughter to know. She wasn't mistaken, the news were disheartening: the mass proved to be a sarcoma and she had to be transferred to a specialized oncology centre that, in this case, corresponded to Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital, in Santiago.

As she came out of the hospital, laden with anguish, Claudia decided to go to a cyber cafe. She needed to find out right away through Internet the exact meaning of the word sarcoma, that she, of course, knew but which at that moment couldn't accept. The information corroborated that it was a malignancy developed in the mesenchymal tissue and that she summarized in the word cancer; also in fear, in an uncertain future and in something that could not be happening to her daughter who was only 13 years old.

She left that place and walked to the bus terminal to return to Santa Cruz. She wanted to get there as soon as possible to run to the cemetery to be by his husband Andres' grave. She needed to feel free to cry all that she needed to in his company. It was a silent and always close company.

Claudia, moved, tells me: "I thought about the hard moments that we have had to live, but nothing had given me more pain than my daughter's illness. My husband's death was also painful, but the suffering for a daughter is very difficult to explain. With Andres we were happy. When we married, we went to live in El Huique, a rural area a few

kilometers from Santa Cruz. Our story was interrupted on a 27th June, ten years ago. My husband worked in an electrical company and I worked in the rural medical center; Kio was four years old and was very close to her father. That day, in the morning, Andres went out on his bicycle to do an electrical installation in the Evangelical church that was a couple of kilometers away from our house. As he was riding on the dirt road, a van was coming at excessive speed and the driver, who wasn't well, run him over and dragged him for several meters. With the impact, my husband died immediately. It was terrible: the driver escaped leaving him there. It was shocking, to say the least. I felt such powerlessness, so much rage, a sadness difficult to overcome. I questioned everything: religion, life. He always served God and he died alone, he was only 29 years old; I don't know, I guess it's destiny. We had known each other all our lives, for years I lived submerged in sadness, I couldn't accept it, but for my daughter and for my family I realized that I had to turn the page and leave everything in the hands of God".

In the evening when she returned to her house, which she shares with her parents, Alejandro and Rosa, with her sister Paula and with Cesar, her 13-year-old cousin, ever since she widowed, she talked to her family about her daughter's cancer; she only told Kiomara that they would travel to Santiago to continue with the tests. Claudia remembers: "The same day that we arrived at the hospital in Santiago, Kiomara was admitted. She had surgery the following day for the removal of her sarcoma. Fortunately it proved to be encapsulated and without dissemination. She recovered very quickly and we returned to Santa Cruz. Her happy and optimistic personality has helped her a lot.

Several days went by and the hospital social worker



called me to tell me that the result of the biopsy showed a primary neuroectodermic tumor, which meant that we would have to return to Santiago and stay there for a long time.

Whilst at the hospital, the doctor explained to us about the chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment. The clinical trial consisted in three week courses of chemotherapy during 48 weeks. In the middle of this treatment, the 31 consecutive sessions would be started, at the same time as the chemios that remained. These are not good memories, the radiotherapy was endless, the worst.

During the radiotherapy, we had to go to the Cancer Institute. Uncle Luis –as we call him– from Fundacion Nuestros Hijos, took us in the van everyday and we came back by subway. Kio was always in her wheelchair. There

were days in which she could not move; her skin burnt from radiotherapy, she couldn't put her clothes on, her wound bled and, in spite of this, she had to continue with the treatment. Another mother who also took her son to the institute helped me with the wheelchair in the subway; I am sure that God places little angels in our path to help us. We would return together to the shelter home, which, thank God, exists for us".

In this home, Kiomara also found good friends who, according to her own words, "I will always carry in my heart". It has been the place where life faced her with great joys and losses: her first and great friend, Pablo, who welcomed her at the moment in which she most needed it from a fellow traveler and games companion, passed away early, when she didn't even think that children could also die. I



was a hard blow and difficult to understand. This loss swept away the fear of mother and daughter to speak about the possibility of death, to talk endlessly about the illness.

Kiomara undoubtedly felt weighed down with existential doubts, particularly regarding God. It was so complicated to understand the absurdity of a world where children suffered indescribable pain and sorrow and where they faced premature death. In more than one occasion, she told her mother that she did not want to be in that place. Claudia would reply that it was not an option, it was what they had had to go through and that it was her obligation to stay there until she was discharged, which they so much hoped for.

As time went on, however, this troubled path started to become covered in hope. Kiomara's health clearly im-

proved and, together with this, Claudia's and Kiomara's dreams began to gain strength: to go back to Santa Cruz and be embraced by their family.

Claudia says: "I return with the certainty that Kiomara is well, that the best possible decisions have been made. I will distance myself from the great friends that I have found here; I go calm, strengthened and, above all, very thankful to all the people that helped us at the hospital, at the outpatient unit, at the Fundacion Nuestros Hijos. We are going to resume our lives. Kiomara, who will soon be 15, will return to school, will meet her friends and will prepare to study at the university to study dentistry. I will return to my work in Hogar de Cristo and life will continue". 🌿

* Translator's note: Hogar de Cristo is a charitable foundation.



ITALIAN SPORT DESIGN

Jacob

ALICIA LIRA

We met on a November morning, at the oncology unit at Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital. One more morning, where children with their mothers, waited to hear the loudspeaker voice announcing their name for them to go to the second floor and be seen by their physician in charge; while the nurses assisted other children in the ambulatory treatment room, in the middle of tears and few smiles.

Many voices could be heard in the waiting room, but you could hear a specially happy and loud one that told a child a story: it was Alicia Lira, 10-year-old Jacob's mother, that that Friday had come from Rengo for a medical check-up. It just took us an instant to schedule our meeting for when she returned to Santiago for her son's next check-up, this time at the shelter home of Fundacion Nuestros Hijos.

On December 10, Alicia was waiting for me in her room to talk with the same freedom with which she goes about her business, the freedom to express herself from the heart.

We sat on the beds; she was by the window. In her hands she had many photographs which also told something of Jacob's story, from now on, Jaquito.

In the year 2004, at 6 years of age and in first grade at a school in Malloa –where they lived at the time– he showed the first symptoms: bronchitis and feverish states, which in no case were the signs of a serious illness.

It was the month of July and winter was cold and rainy. Everyday, on his return from school, Jaquito did his homework, played and had a bath before going to bed, like any other child. Until one day, while his mother dried him, she discovered a small lump in his neck that you couldn't notice at first glance. That minute, fear clung strongly inside of her.

Next morning, they travelled to Rengo Hospital so that her son could be examined and, from there, he was transferred to Rancagua Hospital, with an appointment scheduled for three more months, for September 17.

Alice remembers: "It was a never-ending wait, with the uncertainty of not knowing what was wrong with him. Ja-

quito felt weaker and weaker by the day, we had him lying in a hammock so he would not feel so much pain. He couldn't get up, he was losing weight and small lumps appeared that grew as the days went by. They only fed him soup. I would bring his fever down with warm cloths that I put on his stomach. I did everything I could to alleviate him. A friend even took me to a country woman doctor, and as soon as she saw him she told me that he had cancer and that he urgently needed to be treated. He is my youngest child, I call him my pain child".

September 7 finally arrived. At Rancagua Hospital he underwent several tests and the result of the biopsy where cancer was diagnosed was given to Alicia at the end of the month, together with the authorization to transfer Jaquito to Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital, in Santiago.

"That day, I don't know how I came out of the hospital,





I really don't remember. I arrived in Malloa and went running to the municipality to talk to the mayor. I asked him to lend us the ambulance to transfer my son to Santiago. We travelled on the next day. We placed Jaquito on an opened sleeping bag which my husband Gilberto and I held up in the air, during the whole trip. We got cramps in our arms, we couldn't touch him because he howled with pain"

They arrived in Santiago and they were waiting for them at the hospital. They hadn't received a child in this condition for a long time. The follow-up tests showed an acute lymphoblastic leukemia and the probabilities of sur-

vival were very low; they had to start the treatment immediately.

"It was the first place where we felt welcomed and where I gave myself over. When the doctor gave me the news that my son had cancer, my only thought was that he was dying. For me cancer equaled death. At that moment there isn't any faith, only pain; I felt a lot of pain. On the third day, my husband told me that we should go together to the chapel and release him to God. I agreed, we went and I told God: "I give him to you, but don't make him suffer any more". I wanted to let him go but I was going out

of the chapel and I came back to tell Him, to shout at Him really, that I wasn't giving him to Him, that I didn't give my son away to anyone".

For a mother with a sick child life stops. However, in spite of the pain, the family must continue forward. In this case, unfortunately, it seemed that the journey abruptly stopped at that moment: the husband was unemployed; the eldest son had been admitted in a rehabilitation center; one of the daughters was pregnant and alone; and there wasn't a dime.

All this weight on the family, that Alice bore for a long time, felt lighter when she came out of the shelter home. She arrived at the hospital –to the children's oncology ward– and she found her son waiting for her sitting on the bed. Ten days of hospital stay had gone by. It was the best gift for spring that, by then, was showing all its colors.

Although little time had passed, the treatment was having an effect and for her the results were clear. The image of Jaquito sitting, which his mother remembers to this day, was an invitation to think and to understand that cancer is not a synonym for death, although the latter stubbornly insists in casting a shadow on the path.

The months went by and recovery brought with it side effects as a result of the chemotherapy. It was a very complicated period, of which there are still traces that with time will become more amiable.

Today Alicia sees that her son is well and smiles because he is happy. She comments: "Pain made him mature. Leaving the house, his brother and sisters and his school mates, his friends that he played football with; made him suffer. I am sure that he will be able to overcome obstacles in life. But I, being his mother, still feel fear inside, it is fear about feeling fear, that my son could have a relapse".

Emotions, fears, eternal sleeplessness, powerlessness, anger, joys, deep sorrow, lack of understanding and so much more, transformed Jaquito's mother. Leaving aside all the problems inherent to harsh poverty that takes your breath away, she says with the sure and firm voice and that characterizes her: "When I lived in Malloa and went out to work in the countryside wrapped in nylon sheets so as not to get wet in the winter and take food home, I thought little of God. Today I value life more and give thanks to God. I learnt about Jesus at the hospital and at the shelter home, for me these two places mean love".

She states: "Now I feel joy, for example, when I walk in the street to the hospital and I hear one of the tías* of the Fundacion call my name out loud from the distance and that of my son's; I feel such happiness, it makes me feel a valuable person. Another thing that I learnt is to look at nature, now I see the trees and I find them beautiful".

That afternoon of December 10, before we said goodbye, we looked at all her children's photos: Alejandra, Samantha, Gilberto and Jaquito, also of her granddaughter Fabiola, of important love relationships; and with these in her hand she commented to me that she had decided to tear all the ones that reminded her of her son's illness, because the pain was already gone.

At peace with herself and as if it came from the bottom of her heart, she told me: "Pain appears like a rainbow, without expecting it, that's how pain is; and one day it disappears without one realizing it, just like the rainbow". 🌈

* Translator's Note: "Tía" or aunt is a term of endearment in Chile for someone close to you that renders you a service, like a nurse in this case. (It is also commonly the way pre-school and primary school teachers are called by the students).





Marisol

ADRIANA ESPINOZA

In Santiago, at the foot of the mountains, in the municipality of Puente Alto, lives Adriana and her children: Marisol who is 24 years old, Abraham who is 14 y her grandson, Javier, who is 5 years old.

Without an introduction, she goes back to the month of January 1992. At that time they lived in the house of Adriana's parents: Juan and Rosa. Marisol was 7 years old, she was a girl with long hair and smiling eyes, that never got off the new bicycle she had received for Christmas.

Adriana worked as an pre-school teacher at Barros Luco Hospital, a job which she still carries out to this day. From the moment her daughter was born, everyday they took a bus together to the hospital. Adriana did her work and Marisol, in the meantime, stayed at the day nursery. When she was a little older, she went to nursery school.



That summer of 1992, during the school vacations, Marisol's health declined. The first alert was her feverish state. Adriana, worried about her daughter's health, took her to the Pediatrics unit of the Barros Luco Hospital. Several doctors examined her and, due to the fact that the diagnosis was so serious, they immediately transferred her to Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital.

Very early the next day, they both set off to the hospital accompanied by Juan, Adriana's brother-in-law: "We went with Juan. He always supported us, it was a great help to us because my daughter's father has never been present. I remember it as if it were today, it was a shock to arrive at the outpatient unit and to see the children showing their heads affected by cancer. The first thing I thought was:

what are we doing here? At that time, the hospital inside was a very sad sight, the doctor's offices were in a long and dark hallway, there was nothing there to alleviate the pain. I still remember the children's cries.

Without much explanation, an auxiliary nurse asked me to leave my daughter in a room because they were going to do a test on her. They told me to leave. Afterwards, I learnt that they had done a lumbar puncture on her. From one moment to the next my world collapsed around me; when she came out, we hugged tightly and we cried together".

For Adriana that day in particular was an eternity. There were moments in which she thought that everything was going to be all right, she could clearly feel it, but as time went on she thought the contrary. The eight hours went by

in this way, until they called her to give her the definitive result: acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

“It was like a blow on the head, terrible. At that minute I would have preferred to go out running, hug my daughter and put her inside of me, so as to avert from her all the pain and suffering that would come in the future. It was a nightmare difficult to go through and understand. That same day, the doctor explained to me what the treatment entailed. At that moment it was little that I could under-

stand and I wasn't able to ask any questions because the conversation was fast and drastic. The doctor told me that my daughter would be hospitalized immediately; the fever was due to paratyphoid, her defenses were very low. This was the first of many separations. I gathered up strength and I left her in an isolated, dark and somber room. I had to leave her there against my will. Fortunately, today this place has been remodeled, it has nothing to do with what it once was”.



This great sorrow, that so many times twists life when one least expects it, opened up a spiritual path, according to Adriana's words: "During the three years that the treatment lasted I got close to Jesus and I received answers that moved me. There were dark days, one after the other, but there was always a day when I opened the windows and there was a beautiful sun, a day of hope".

On more than one occasion, on feeling my daughter's frailness and as her physical suffering increased, she asked Jesus to take her away. She always felt that she had to let her go, to set her free. She was sure that beyond this life there was another one and that, precisely there, Marisol would be happy.

It was a period for reflection and for prayer, of a faith that was born from deep down in her heart. They were 3 years of a firm fight against cancer, 3 years in which strong love and friendship bonds were made with many people. Adriana remembers: "When we arrived at the hospital, it had been a year since Fundacion Nuestros Hijos had been created to help children with cancer. It was the best that could have happened to us. We still keep in touch with some of the voluntary workers. I would arrive at the hospital and I would see them looking after my daughter: these are such great bonds of love that they strengthen and encourage you to go on".

At 10 years of age Marisol was discharged and they didn't come back to her grandparents house, but, instead, to her house near the mountains. From that moment on, this would be her home, that of her mother and of her brother Abraham, who had just been born celebrating life.

The family made the most of their everyday life: Adriana resumed work and Marisol went back to school. There

she met up with her friends again and, after a while her dark hair flew in the wind while she cycled around the streets of her neighborhood. Meanwhile, Abraham stayed at the day nursery of Barros Luco Hospital.

Two years went by, and one day Marisol started to feel strong headaches. As time passed, these became so strong that it was necessary to go to the hospital again.

Adriana comments: "Because of these headaches, they gave us an appointment at the outpatient unit, on a Thursday, in order to do a series of tests on her. They asked me to return the next Monday to know about the results. The next day, Friday, I felt so much anguish, that I wasn't capable of waiting all weekend without knowing what was the matter with her. During my lunch hour, I went running from Barros Luco to Exequiel Gonzalez Cortes Hospital. I don't know how many blocks they are from one other, but when I arrived I could hardly breathe. Fortunately, the test results were ready.

They explained to me that, unfortunately, Marisol had a late medullary relapse. I couldn't believe it, I could feel how tears went down my cheeks, what I was hearing couldn't be true. We had to start as soon as possible with a more aggressive treatment, and if this one didn't work out, we would have to think of a medullar transplant. How was I going to tell this to my daughter, if she had already suffered so much".

The story repeated itself, only this time it was harder and it extended for a longer period of time. For 4 years the life of the family revolved around the hospital. In spite of many setbacks, Adriana completely devoted herself to her daughter, and she dedicated the few hours that remained to her youngest son, who didn't count on her father either. They were years in which this mother's strength never





weakened, she accompanied her daughter when her life seemed to hang from a very thin string, as frail as her body. Both fought so much to overcome this illness, that the day arrived when Marisol was able to go out of the hospital holding her mother's hand. They resumed life once again.

At 16 years and many of these having elapsed within hospital walls, Marisol started to slowly take up what daily life offered her: she continued with her studies and finished high school. There was also time for love: at 19 she became a mother when her son Javier was born.

The painful experiences lived within those walls will be difficult to forget, but dreams exist and the next one in

line is to study a profession. To be able to accomplish this she will have to return to the hospital once more to be intervened due to the hyperhidrosis that has afflicted her since she was a teenager. It will be the last battle to be won.

Today, Adriana is happy. They continue to be a happy family. As usual, she goes to work every morning, in the same way as she has done for the past 32 years, the difference being that it is now her grandson who takes her hand to walk together to the nearest bus terminal to go to the nursery school of Barros Luco Hospital, which has received each one of her children; the first was Marisol when her eyes just started to learn to smile. 🌿



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