

Analisa Valdivia is a recent graduate
of Seven Lakes High School

Analisa's
Journey
of
H**ope**

Written by
Kenzie Stanfield & Photography by
Marisa Hugonnett

A Katy Teen's Bright Future Since Overcoming Cancer

Analisa Valdivia, a Katy teen and recent graduate of Seven Lakes High School, beams as she talks about her plans for the future. We first met her in summer 2006 and this fall, just four years later, she will head to college to embark on a whole new journey. It's tough to believe that just a few years ago, in the fall of 2005, the Valdivia family was devastated to learn that Analisa, then only 13, had leukemia. At that moment, everything for her family went on hold as they all focused on the battle ahead. But with the wonderful treatment she received at Texas Children's Hospital and through overwhelming support from friends, family members, and the community, she made it through stronger than ever and facing a bright future.

Winning the Battle

For 36 days straight, Analisa fought hard and fast in the hospital, as she endured numerous rounds of chemotherapy, her family always by her side. "It was so tough, but we're a really strong family," says Barbara Valdivia, Analisa's mother. "We got through it with lots of laughter and fun." She smiles as both of them recall the way nurses and doctors were drawn to their room because of the contagious laughter that could be heard bouncing through the halls. It is apparent that both laughter and fun are just a few of the many traits that characterize this amazing family, even when faced with the lingering effects of cancer.

Over the last four years, Analisa has been forced to grow up in ways that most teens will never understand. "Cancer doesn't care who you are, where you live, what you look like - it's just there to take your body," she says, with a sense of clarity. "There was fun, but there was pain, too," says Barbara, adding, "Losing hair and weight..." But through it all, they had faith that Analisa would be healed. "I actually never worried I wouldn't make it," she says confidently.

Strengthened by Support

A positive effect of the battle with cancer has been the bond it has forged in the Valdivia family and with those supporting them. Thankfully, through Analisa's journey of diagnosis, treatment, and now remission, many people have been there to fulfill the family's needs and help out any way they can. The Valdivias have been strengthened by support on many levels and are tremendously grateful to all of those who have attended events, donated money, and raised awareness for kids fighting cancer.

Analisa is thankful for the bolster of support from her family and friends - especially childhood friends, Jamie and Jennifer - as well as from her SLHS teacher and coach, Shannon Heston. "He has been a sounding board for me," says Analisa. "Someone I can count on, with a bigger, unbiased perspective."

A Spirit of Giving Back

It's a good thing that Analisa has so many people standing in her corner, because she is definitely a force to be reckoned with. As laughter and fun can be used to define this girl, so, too, can service, with a capital S. From earning the National Charity League's Merci award for performing the most service hours in her senior class to working with the Katy Association of Retarded Citizens and completing the Girl Scout Gold award, she has an intense passion for helping others. Her battle with cancer has only fueled her desire to make a difference. "It's not really about me, but my friends and those that I am helping that keeps me going," she shares.

Her giving spirit was epitomized by her request to the Make a Wish Foundation, an organization that strives to make the wishes of children with cancer come true. Instead of asking for an elaborate vacation or to meet someone famous, she requested that Make a Wish place more kennels in the Special Pals Animal Shelter so shelter volunteers could rescue and save more animals. This is just one more of the many ways the Katy teen is making an impact in her community. "I'm really proud of the way she's put herself out there," says her mother, Barbara.

Looking Forward to the Future

As Analisa prepares to depart for college and take the next step in her life, she is full of hope and ready to take on anything that comes her

Get to Know Analisa

- ☀ Daughter of Tony and Barbara Valdivia
- ☀ She has three sisters, Cheri, 45, Kim, 40, and Cristina, 28, and one brother, Tony, 33
- ☀ Plans to attend the University of Texas at Dallas or Trinity University to study psychology before going to medical school
- ☀ Dedicated volunteer, spending more than 230 hours over the past four years helping the Katy ARC, Fort Bend Library, Katy Christian Ministries, Special Pals animal shelter, Sunshine Kids, Relay for Life, and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
- ☀ Attended Katy ISD's Miller Career and Technology Center, working as a chiropractor's assistant
- ☀ Her hobbies include reading, dance, and teaching students at Katy ARC

way. "I want to go to [medical] school and do a fellowship in pediatric hematology-oncology," she reveals. With a clear path to achieving her goals, she is motivated not so much by her own journey with cancer, but rather by the journeys of those whom she has battled with, others who have faced the disease after she overcame it, and friends who didn't make it. "I don't want people to live in the dark and turn a blind eye to cancer," she says. "You can do something about it. You can make a difference."

Analisa is both inspired and inspiring as she so clearly lives her life to help and serve others. When asked about how leukemia has changed her life she simply states, "I wouldn't change my having cancer. It's shaped me as a person... It's made me who I am." KM

KENZIE STANFIELD is a mother of three and wife to her high school sweetheart, Dusty. She enjoys writing about the lives of her fellow Katy-ites.

Analisa and her mother, Barbara

