

● ST. JUDE

inspire



FALL 2022

NEXT CHAPTERS

St. Jude saved their lives,
now these childhood
cancer survivors are
determined to live
life to the fullest.

St. Jude Global Impact

After St. Jude helped
her daughter, this
mother vowed to help
kids back home.



MARTER



THAN YOU THINK





Comfort hug

St. Jude patient Kyla, 5, hugs her pediatric oncologist, Santhosh Upadhyaya, MD, who donned a pink, inflatable unicorn costume during her No More Chemo party at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Kyla, who was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, will return for regular checkups and continue to be monitored by St. Jude doctors.



Your gift will help more patients like Kyla celebrate the end of chemotherapy and many milestones to come. stjude.org/donate



Welcome to Inspire

They were never guaranteed high school graduations. Never guaranteed a first day at college and the new friends, experiences and opportunities that chapter might provide.

Retinoblastoma. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). Neuroblastoma. Pineoblastoma. T-cell ALL. Devastating diseases that drastically cut the odds of any child realizing their hopes and dreams.

But these five were all treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Emmanuel. Lauren. Pete. Juan Sebastián. Moira.

And now they're looking to the next chapters of their lives. They're in college and playing football. Following their passions for engineering and law. Studying medicine with a goal of returning to St. Jude to help other kids.

These young women and men will give back tenfold for the second chances they've been given.

Imagine the impact they'll have on the world as a direct result of your impact as a supporter of this lifesaving mission.

St. Jude Inspire is designed with you in mind because we want to tell you and the world about the impact of your generosity. You'll see it in the stories of Emmanuel, Lauren, Pete, Juan

Sebastián and Moira, but also in the cutting-edge research happening in labs on our campus and shared around the world.

And you'll meet people who inspire us, even as they're inspired by the work you help fuel. These are moms like Claudia, who brought her daughter, Claudita, to St. Jude from Mexico to be treated for ALL. Claudia was so moved by what she saw here that she founded GANAC, a partner foundation of St. Jude Global, to improve conditions for the treatment of childhood cancer in her home country.

Impact. Inspiration. Hope. That's what you give the kids and families of St. Jude, and it's what you'll find in these pages and subsequent issues of *St. Jude Inspire*.

So, thank you for reading. Thank you for sharing. And thank you for all you do for our mission.

Richard C. Shadyac Jr.

President and Chief Executive Officer, ALSAC

 @RickShadyac

ST. JUDE inspire

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Research Hospital**
Finding cures. Saving children.
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You can help ensure families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food. stjude.org/donate

COVER
STORY

WITH ST. JUDE
ON HIS TEAM,
EMMANUEL
WORKED
HARD AND

KEPT
THE FAITH
ON THE
FOOTBALL
FIELD

By Betsy Taylor - ALSAC



EMMANUEL



HOUSTON, Texas

Emmanuel had a question that had been knocking around in his mind for weeks. It was the kind of question that would have broken his mom's heart if she had known. The question had kept the high school junior from Texas up at night and made it hard for him to focus on anything else.

So when Emmanuel walked into his football coach's office in October 2020 to ask Coach Cody Blanchard his question, he was laying down a burden:

"Am I not good enough?"

Some of his teammates were already getting a lot of big-time offers from Division I football colleges, but not Emmanuel. As far as he could tell, no one even seemed interested.

Cancer had never shaken his confidence, but this did.

Emmanuel was diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a cancer of the eye, in 2008 when he was 4 years old. At St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, his parents, Regina and Shannon, learned the devastating news that to contain the cancer, his left eye needed to come out.

A couple days after the surgery, bandaged up, Emmanuel ran down the hallway as if nothing had happened. Regina credits St. Jude child life specialists for his confidence.

"He's one of those kids where, even as a coach, you're not supposed to have favorites, but you root for that guy," said Blanchard. "You root for that guy because he's such a good leader and such a positive person to be around."

EMMANUEL

But on that afternoon in October 2020 in the coach's office, Emmanuel the one-eyed football player was having doubts.

'Colleges are still going to find you'

Emmanuel grabbed the tennis balls, threw them on the roof of his house and ran to catch each one.

He repeated this drill until it got dark. He did it the next day, too.

"I kind of just started to look things up, did some research and found out some workouts I could do to improve my coordination," Emmanuel said, explaining the drill.

"Everybody else did have a little advantage over me, but as I got older, I became a harder worker to overcome what a lot of people call a disability."

Inside the house, his family had grown accustomed to the sounds of the tennis ball hailstorm, this force of nature that was Emmanuel's ambition.

During Emmanuel's sophomore year of high school, his coaches made a decision that might have made another player quit the team or transfer schools. They put Emmanuel with the defensive ends, when traditional wisdom said he was better suited to be a strong safety or linebacker.

Defensive ends are typically massive, and Emmanuel wasn't.

But it's what the team needed.

"I reassured him and said, 'Listen. You're a good enough player that colleges are still going to find you,'" said Blanchard.

'God sent those caregivers into St. Jude'

On the field, Emmanuel called on strength from God to help him through every game, repeating,

"I can do all things through Jesus Christ." Sometimes he'd realize he was chanting these words out loud.

He maintained all A's, intent on his goal of becoming a mechanical engineer someday.

He stayed hours after practice doing footwork.

His coaches tapped him to help the other players by running them through drills or tutoring them in math.

What free time Emmanuel had, he spent sharing "my testimony": the story of how St. Jude and God had saved his life. He spoke to local church congregations and shared his story during the Majic 102.1 St. Jude radiothon.



Emmanuel dreamed of playing football in college. Help other St. Jude patients realize their dreams by donating today. stjude.org/donate



February 2008



“

Everybody else did have a little advantage over me, but as I got older, I became a harder worker to overcome what a lot of people call a disability.

EMMANUEL

”



“Without God, I wouldn’t be able to do any of it,” said Emmanuel. “He’s guided me through this path for a very long time. I know because of Him, I’m able to play football with one eye. ...God sent those caregivers into St. Jude and into my life to help me.”

‘It’s going to happen’

But that day in Coach Blanchard’s office, Emmanuel wondered: What if it hadn’t been enough?

What if you can’t overcome being a football player with one eye?

“It’s going to happen,” said Blanchard. “The big schools clear out their guys first and the smaller schools come in. You’re going to be the one that they’re going to be all over.”

Emmanuel could play more than one position with agility, which made him the kind of hybrid player the smaller Division II schools needed.

Emmanuel just had to keep the faith — in himself. So, Emmanuel worked even harder.

For his last high school football season he was a first team all-district pick, one of the best in his conference, voted on by his opponents’ coaches.

“Sure enough ... here come the small schools,” said Blanchard, “and they are all over him. Literally all over the country they are coming in. He’s got them from Kansas to North Dakota to Texas, Tennessee. I mean, they’re all over the place and he deserves it, you know?”

The kid with one eye got 18 football scholarship offers. He graduated high school with honors.

Now he needs to go buy a big winter coat because he’s attending Dakota State.

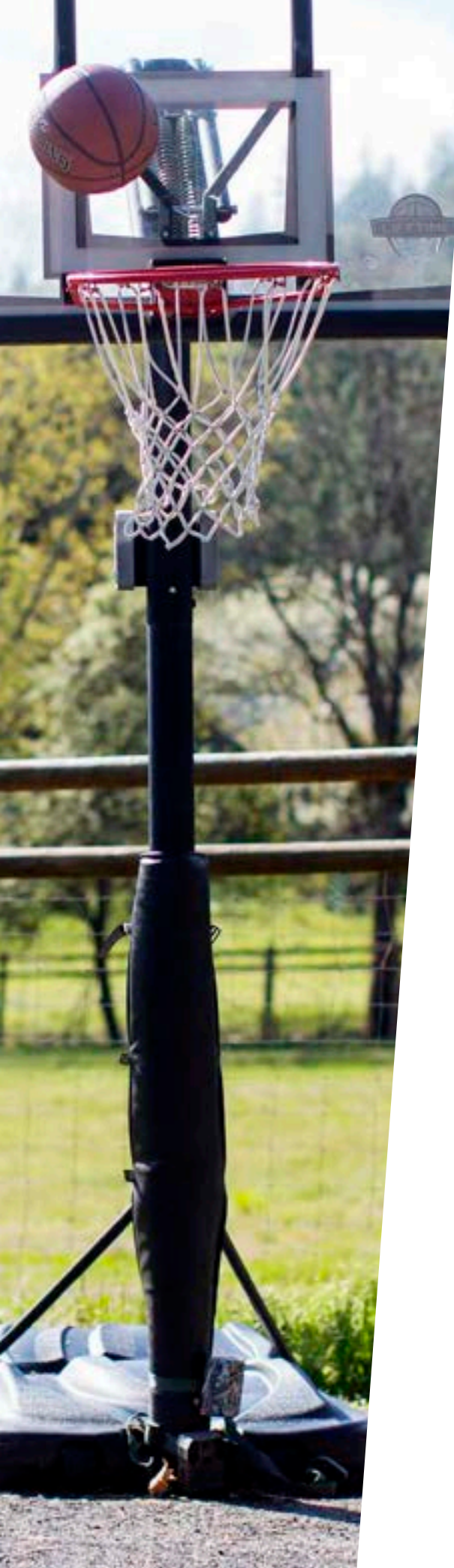
PEOPLE

APPRECIATIVE
OF EACH DAY,
ST. JUDE
CHILDHOOD
CANCER SURVIVOR

**HAPPY TO
LIVE AN
ORDINARY
LIFE**

By **Karina Bland** - ALSAC





TALENT, Oregon

Pete is just an ordinary kid, and that's what makes him so special.

His early life was anything but ordinary. Pete was just 22 months old when he was diagnosed with pineoblastoma, a rare and aggressive brain tumor.

Now 18, he doesn't remember much of what he went through at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, though he's seen pictures and watched videos from the year he spent there.

"It's kind of bittersweet when I see those and see all the doctors and people who supported me and led me to where I am today," Pete said.

To this life. A life in which he finished growing up in Oregon, where he learned to ride a bike. A life in which he learned to drive a car, watched action movies and played videogames. A life where he attended a homecoming dance in suspenders and bow tie, sat nearly courtside at a Golden State Warriors game, hiked around nearby Crater Lake and saw Mayan ruins in Mexico.

"In a world where people are so caught up in all their own worries and fears and what they don't have, here is Pete, so appreciative of each day and just the happiest kid," said Jim Meyer, Pete's favorite teacher and principal of his high school.

"The fact that he is just so normal is what makes him so special."

'He had a good attitude'

Pete is obsessed with sneakers and owns probably 20 pairs, the more

colorful the better. At school, Pete received an award for "Most Drippy Shoes." (Drippy means cool.)

He hangs out with friends, studying in the library, playing videogames and shooting hoops.

Pete played for his school's basketball team until the pandemic hit in 2020.



Then he was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, which put him in the hospital for months and required six surgeries in the last year.

Even through all that, Pete was upbeat.

"He had a good attitude, which I think really helps with healing," his mother, Kellei, said. Pete never feels sorry for himself.

"He just deals with what he is given and continues on and makes the best of it," Kellei said.

"It's how he's always been."



‘He has this light about him’

When Pete was at St. Jude, staff marveled at his cheerful disposition even while undergoing lumbar punctures, blood transfusions and other procedures, Kellei said. He’d wake from sedation smiling.

That led to Pete being tapped for the annual St. Jude *Thanks and Giving*® campaign in 2006, his picture appearing on billboards nationwide, even in New York’s Times Square.

Over the years, his family has attended events to benefit St. Jude, and Pete met celebrities including St. Jude National Outreach Director Marlo Thomas, William Shatner and Selena Gomez. Always with a smile.

Pete still has that same attitude and it draws people to him. “He has this light about him,” Kellei said.

His principal sees that too, the gravitational pull of people to Pete’s positive attitude and his smile. Most don’t know what he’s been through.

“The funny thing is, he doesn’t try, yet that makes him all the more inspiring. He is just being who he is,” Meyer said. That’s enough.

“You get to choose happiness, and Pete chooses it every time.”

‘I’ve been through a lot’

It’s just who Pete is.

“I’ve been through a lot in my life and I’ve learned to deal with it,” he said. “Staying positive is important.”

He’s learned a lot from what he’s been through. “It showed me that I can be stronger than I think,” Pete said.

He appreciates each day because he realizes what could have been.

Pete was 2 when he met Grant during chemotherapy at St. Jude. The boys were the same age, going through similar treatment, and shared a love of Doritos and Matchbox cars.

“They were like peas and carrots,” Kellei said. The families

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▲
PETE

bonded, though they live in different states, visiting and vacationing together.

Grant's cancer came back when he was 7. The boys were 9 when Grant died.

Every year since, Pete has marked Grant's birthday in February by releasing balloons, always red, Grant's favorite color. This year, when Grant also would have turned 18, Pete donned a red sweatshirt and bought Doritos and 18 Ruby Red 7s lottery tickets. (He won \$3.)

“Even though Grant passed away, our friendship will never go away,” Pete said. The two families remain close.

Cancer still is the first thing Kellei thinks about in the morning and the last thing at night. It's hard to push aside.

“Going through something like this makes you realize exactly how short life is,” Kellei said. “You have to live it and cherish those good moments.”

It's what Pete does.

He thought hard about what to do for his senior project this year. He'd volunteered to manage the school's basketball team and at a local food bank.

“I hadn't really done anything that means a lot to me,” Pete said. So he started an online fundraiser for St. Jude and raised \$14,000.

“I wanted to give back to the hospital that did so much for me when I was a little kid and ultimately saved my life,” Pete said.

That gave him this life.

His graduation announcement features two portraits – one taken at St. Jude when he was 2, his scars visible under hair beginning to grow back after chemotherapy, and the other taken recently, his hair thick and dark and beard neat.

At 2 and 18, his expression is the same: blue-green eyes alight, the constant smile.

Pete has a lot to celebrate. At Southern Oregon University in Ashland, a 20-minute drive from home, he wants to study business or maybe film.

“I have so much to be thankful for,” Pete said. “It's kind of scary, but I'm excited for what the future holds.”

A future, a life – a wonderfully extraordinary life.



Ensuring more patients like Pete graduate is possible because of generous supporters like you. stjude.org/donate

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MORE THAN 'THE GIRL WHO HAD CANCER'

By **Ruma Kumar** - ALSAC



MEMPHIS, Tennessee

When Lauren thinks about it, seven years of competitive gymnastics and countless routines leaping off uneven bars prepared her for this milestone – graduating high school. There is a moment of adrenaline and uncertainty she relishes when she flips from one bar to the other, suspended mid-air, having left the safety of one bar to reach for the next with swift, powerful grace.

"I love it. It feels like you're flying," Lauren said.

In some ways, this jump from childhood under the care of her watchful, prayerful parents to graduation and the independence she'll have in college four hours away from her Memphis home feels like that, too, she said.

And Lauren is ready to embrace this new leap with the same verve and determination that won her accolades and medals at gymnastics meets from Ohio to Texas.



“She has this attitude of can-do and that anything is possible,” her father said.

A consummate planner, Lauren has it all mapped out: She’ll take classes at Alabama A&M University, her mother’s alma mater, that focus on political science and lay the foundation for a career in law. She’ll look for theater clubs that indulge a budding interest in acting, and the amateur designer will continue drawing and curating fashion collections. She’s also a self-professed introvert who says she’ll “work to grow as a person and go out there and talk to people.”

Her steely focus as she prepared to go off to college in Huntsville, Alabama, was not surprising to anyone who knows her.

Lauren displayed this even as a toddler when she was diagnosed with stage IV neuroblastoma, a difficult-to-treat cancer which occurs in the sympathetic nervous system and



Lauren dreams of music and college. Help more St. Jude patients realize their dreams by giving today. stjude.org/donate

temporarily robbed her of the ability to walk.

When Lauren's parents, Benita and Ken, brought their 17-month-old for treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in 2005, they feared the worst. The parents, who'd already lost a son years earlier to a heart defect, knew Lauren's prognosis was not good.

But Lauren displayed a kind of defiance that surprised her anxious family. Mere days after a surgery that removed the grapefruit-sized tumor wrapped around her lower spine, Lauren was walking around the research hospital and its campus in Memphis. Even after long days of chemotherapy, Lauren was joyful, keeping her exhausted parents up late into the night with giggling and jumping on beds with her older sister, Kennedy.

"To have Lauren graduate this year. It is a joyous time. It's a moment that 17 years ago we could not envision," Benita said.

Lauren is now out of treatment and returns to St. Jude for annual check-ups amid a busy life. She's a classical pianist, performs in her church band and was a competitive gymnast for seven years while juggling a rigorous curriculum her mother developed for homeschooling.

"I think it's important to define myself as something other than the girl who had cancer, because there is a lot more to me than that," Lauren said. "And even when I think about when I had cancer, I don't really think of it as me being a victim of anything or I don't want people to feel bad for me. I think of it as something that I've overcome."

“

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▲
LAUREN

In the years after her treatment at St. Jude, Lauren raised money for the place that saved her life by designing clothes and selling tickets to a fashion show. It was a natural way to give back: Lauren had expressed herself through style even in her toddler years, opting to wear her own color-coordinated ensembles around St. Jude instead of hospital gowns.

The first show, which the family named "Sewing into Dreams, with Stitches of Hope" took place on Lauren's 7th birthday and included designs by her and her older sister, a collection of flowy dresses in shades of blue. In subsequent years, the show drew designs from children all over the country. Tickets sold for the event, which took place annually between 2010-2020, raised more than \$30,000 for St. Jude.

"I want the world to see me as inspiring. Someone who perseveres, who goes through the tough, the hardships in life, (and) always works my way through struggles and somebody who is very open and caring," she said.



CHILDHOOD LEUKEMIA
SURVIVOR PREPARES TO
PURSUE A MEDICAL CAREER,

WANTS TO GIVE BACK

By Monsy Alvarado - ALSAC

JUAN SEBASTIAN



LA CALERA, Colombia

Juan Sebastián stands before his computer during a video conference call to the United States and enthusiastically shows his black school jacket given to final-year students at his high school in Colombia. The year 2022 is stitched on one arm.

The 18-year-old is preparing for graduation and the start of college. He's looking forward to the coming months when he'll go to Cancún with his classmates for a final school trip. A few days before the graduation ceremony, he will attend a formal dinner celebration with his parents and close friend commemorating the big milestone.

The activities are a culmination of years of long hours of studying, but also a reminder of all the hurdles Juan Sebastián has overcome. The teenager battled leukemia for years as a child, forcing him to miss school. When he had a relapse, he was treated in the U.S. at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and missed nearly a year of school as well as birthday parties, soccer games and a school trip to Canada.



STIÁN

"It's quite incredible to think there was a point in my life when I didn't know if I was going to get to graduate," he said. "Now a new stage of my life begins. There are so many stories, so many times when I couldn't go to school, so many moments that I could not go to class because I was in the hospital. But now I'm moving forward, that's all behind me. And that's something very beautiful and special."

Juan Sebastián, who ranked third in his graduating class, was accepted to the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá to study medicine. His dream is to become a doctor and one day work at St. Jude.

"St. Jude is hope, it's light and everything to me," he said. "They saved my life. I don't know how to explain what St. Jude means to me,

but it's just hope to be alive and to continue to grow."

Juan Sebastián was 10 years old when he was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, the most common type of childhood cancer. He received grueling chemotherapy in Bogotá, which often left him weak and tired. At times, his parents didn't think he was well enough to go to school, but a dedicated student, Juan Sebastián did not like to be absent.

On some tough days, his father, Luis, recalled, his son would mix water with baking soda and lemon juice in a container that he would carry with him in school to help him through headaches and bouts of nausea.

Juan Sebastián was in remission for a few weeks before an analysis



on his bone marrow showed that his leukemia had returned. Doctors in Colombia began a new round of treatment, but his prognosis was poor, his parents said. While Juan Sebastián organized a fundraising concert to help other children with cancer, friends urged his family to look elsewhere and to seek help at St. Jude because of its work with childhood cancers. Eventually, he was referred to the research hospital and traveled to Memphis.

When they arrived, it was cold and gloomy, Juan Sebastián recalled. But as soon as they entered the hospital with its bright lights and colorful wall art, they felt a sense of ease and hope that he would get better.

"They welcome you with a smile," he recalled. "My dad told us that here at St. Jude they were going to save his son's life."



He received a bone marrow transplant as well as chemotherapy and radiation therapy. While at St. Jude, Juan Sebastián missed nearly a year of school. The relapse, though, didn't stop him from learning, so he took extra classes while away. He also continued his piano lessons in Memphis, an activity which he started earlier to help reduce the neuropathy in his hands caused by earlier chemotherapy. When he returned to South America, he studied extra hours to fill in learning gaps and remain in the same grade as his friends.

"Despite all the difficulties of his illness, he managed to get excellent grades," Luis said. "He is very excited about his academic achievements, but the biggest emotion for us is to have him with us."

A few months ago, Juan Sebastián and his mother, Maria Clara, went to a tattoo artist and got matching tattoos on their left arms. The tattoos are of the St. Jude logo. Juan Sebastián said the tattoo is his constant reminder to not get too hung up on little things.

"There are times in life when one forgets a bit of what happened and everything they suffered and the really hard moments they lived through, and one begins to worry about things that are not worth it," he said. "It's also a reminder of that goal that I want to reach of trying to help and give other people opportunity, like St. Jude gave me the opportunity of life."

“
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SAVE HIS
SON'S LIFE.”

▲
JUAN
SEBASTIÁN

”



St. Jude helps kids the world over. Please give today, because no child should die in the dawn of life.
stjude.org/donate



WOMEN



GUILFORD, Connecticut

In June 2013, Moira was almost done with fourth grade. She liked math and soccer. She had two dogs and two cats, and was losing her long, red hair to chemotherapy.

When she was diagnosed, Moira, a smart and serious child, reviewed what she thought she knew about cancer. “The first thing I said to my mom was, ‘I thought it would hurt more than this.’ And she responded, ‘It’s the treatment that hurts.’ But there’s so much more to it. There’s a lot of growth through it.”

In June 2022, Moira – volunteer, honor student, cancer survivor – received her high school diploma and started the next chapter of a life that could have ended at 8 years old. A life that Moira believes has been shaped not just by cancer, but by the experience of being treated at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

GIVING BACK FOR THE GIFT OF A LIFE

By **Kelly Cox** - ALSAC

A rare and aggressive subtype

Moira's mom, Erin, describes Moira as "very involved." It's an understatement. Class president, captain of the rowing team, seats on the school's climate committee and community service club. 4.1 GPA. Moira stays extremely busy.

But in 2013, Moira had early precursor t-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia has a greater than 94 percent survival rate today, but for this very rare subtype of the disease, the odds are much different. "She needed a bone marrow transplant early," said Erin. "The relapse rate is so high and it's so aggressive ... transplant was her only chance." Moira's sister, Emily, was not a match, and the donor registry yielded few options. St. Jude, however, had pioneered the haploidentical, or half-matched, bone marrow transplant and this is what Moira received with her mother as donor. When Erin says Moira is like her "mini-me in so many ways," their immune system is one of them.

Bone marrow transplants require a lot of isolation to avoid infection. "It basically involved kind of taking away my immune system so I could accept her bone marrow without my immune system really aggressively trying to fight it and me getting very, very sick — on top of being very, very sick," said Moira. She remembers at one point having one fully collapsed lung and one partially collapsed lung, vomiting, weakness, fever, rash.

Perhaps significantly, the emotional state Moira most remembers from her time in treatment is boredom. And the respite from it. Like when members of her care team brought in syringes filled with paint and launched her on an art project.

Almost nine years out from treatment, Moira leaves no room for boredom now.

"You can learn from anything."

There was never any question childhood cancer would change Moira. The question was how. "I used to worry that it would be

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MADE ME A LOT
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▲
MOIRA

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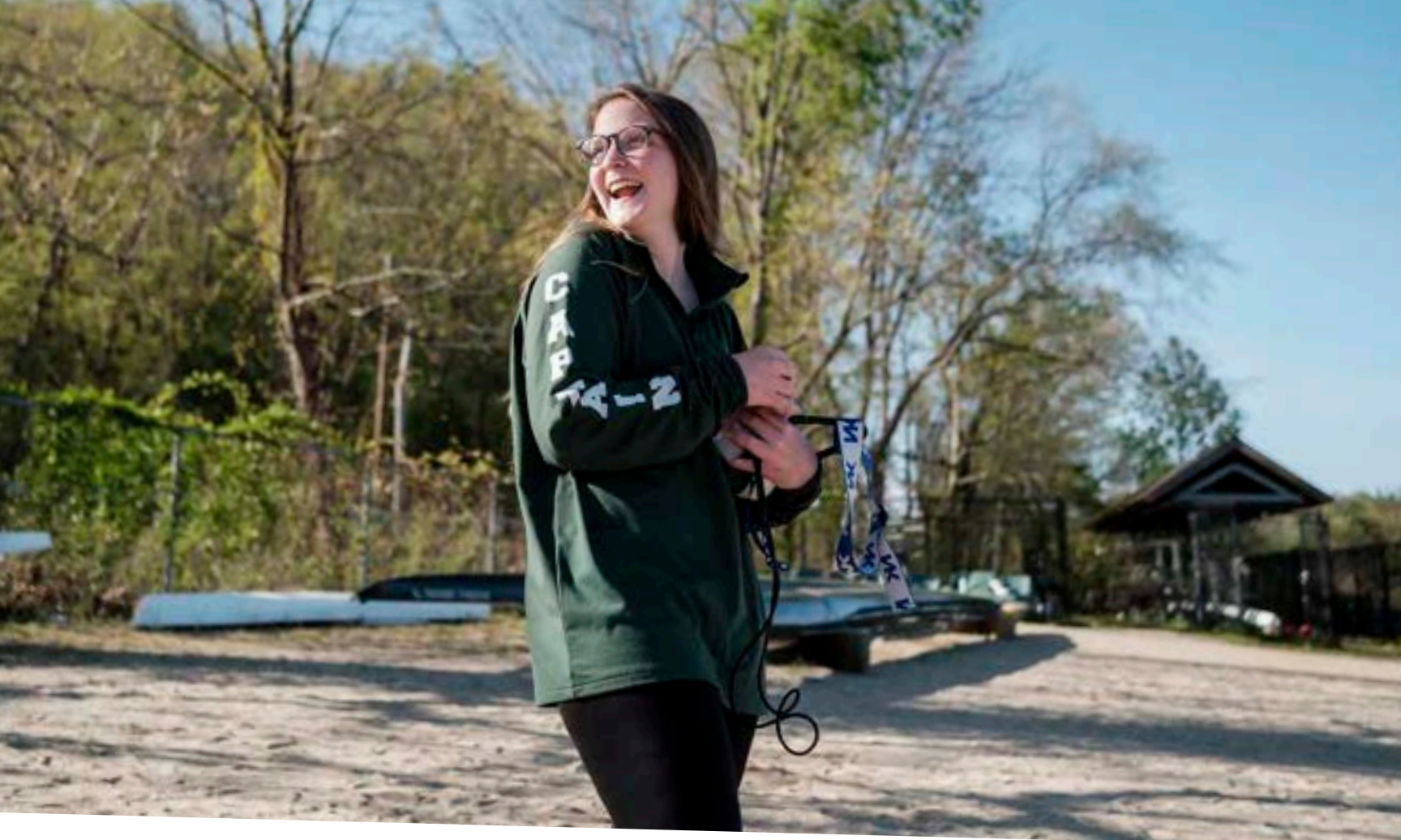
traumatizing," said Erin. "I think she is much more compassionate than she was before, and much more grateful for a lot of things."

It's true.

"You can learn from anything," said Moira. "I was fortunate to go to St. Jude. Obviously, I was there because I was very sick, but I saw a



December 2013



lot of people who were sicker than I was and who were going to be more affected later in life than I was necessarily going to be. And I think that forces you just to be humbled and to have a perspective that is how lucky you are. So when I see things that I view as injustice or as inequality in any way or just people who need help, I try to help.”

And that’s why the volunteer service section of Moira’s resume reads like that of someone about twice her age.

A sampling: She has helped with outreach and meals for people experiencing homelessness in Boston and built a home for a local family with Habitat for Humanity. She has traveled to South Africa

to assist with rehabilitation and release of indigenous wildlife and helped with reef restoration and sea turtle protection in the Dominican Republic. She has served as a junior camp counselor at an environmental education center close to home. A few weeks before graduation she had just returned from Puerto Rico where she was patching roofs damaged by Hurricane Maria.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, with group volunteer projects on hold, Moira was seeing social media posts by Navajo teens describing the unavailability of necessary supplies in the Navajo Nation. She responded by collecting \$5,000 in cash donations and hundreds of boxes of essential

items like hand sanitizer, masks and school supplies. Shipping the items proved logistically out of the question, either too slow or nearly impossible. So Moira, with her mother, drove the supplies 2,300 miles” on a tight turnaround in August 2020.

“I think cancer made me a lot more motivated in life to seize an opportunity when I see it and to really appreciate what I have,” said Moira. An opportunity to help; an opportunity to grow. Sometimes those are one and the same. Moira started college this fall, where she aims to study the impact of climate change on ocean ecosystems as the next step in a life of purpose, and of gratitude.



Kids like Moira grow up and give back. Your support of the St. Jude mission helps impact St. Jude patients and the world. stjude.org/donate

Daniela Arce, MD,
a St. Jude-trained
pediatric oncologist,
on rounds to check
on patients.



*In Memory of **Claudia Blanco:***

One mother's life's work still helping children with cancer in **MEXICO**

By **Kristina Goetz** - ALSAC

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Claudia Blanco was 7 years old and had never seen snow.

It was almost Christmas, 1994, and her family's bags were packed for a trip to Pinetop, Arizona. Claudita – little Claudia, as the family called her – was the youngest of five and her mother's namesake. She was tense with excitement, ready to trade the Alamo trees and balmy weather of her home in Culiacán, near the western coast of Mexico, for Ponderosa pines and a wintry wonderland high in the White Mountains.

But Claudita's grandmother noticed something about the little girl. She ate as much as the big kids but seemed emaciated. Claudita tumbled in gymnastics and plied in ballet, yet her skin was noticeably pale.

At school, Claudita had fallen playing hide and seek under some construction materials. She knew she wasn't supposed to be there, but it was too tempting a hiding spot. The cut on her chin needed stitches, but the one on her knee wasn't as deep. Yet somehow, the cut kept bleeding.

Claudita's aunt, a pediatrician, insisted Claudita be taken for bloodwork. If she was anemic, high altitude could be dangerous.

Claudita's doctor found she was anemic and had a high white blood cell count –

a sign there might be a problem with her bone marrow. She also had purplish spots on her neck.

Claudita needed a pediatric oncologist, but this was 1994, and there weren't many in Mexico. The Blancos found one named Dr. Eduardo Altamirano.

Claudia, Claudita's mother, noticed how rundown the hospital looked. Doctors were skilled, but all she saw in the makeshift ward were dark stairwells and dirty sheets.

If the family stayed in Culiacán, there was no guarantee the hospital would provide chemotherapy. And the Blancos might've had to find – and buy – everything from IVs to cotton balls to support her treatment.

Claudita had acute lymphoblastic leukemia. They weren't staying.

When Dr. Altamirano arrived in Culiacán in 1988 to set up a pediatric oncology unit, there was no chemotherapy, antibiotics or equipment – not even a blood bank. Practically nothing to treat children with cancer in any comprehensive way. Even pediatricians there believed children with cancer would simply die. Change had been slow, despite his best efforts.



Claudia Blanco, founder of GANAC, and her daughter, Claudia, a St. Jude cancer survivor.



Patients are treated by the best pediatric oncologists in the state, such as Dr. Echavarría, at the Pediatric Hospital of Sinaloa.

When Dr. Altamirano was a pediatric resident, he'd seen Dr. Donald Pinkel, the first medical director and CEO at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in the United States, speak at a conference. It was the first he'd heard of the research hospital's reputation for successfully treating kids with cancer. There was a doctor in Mexico City who'd done a rotation at St. Jude. She'd know who to call for a referral.

St. Jude accepted Claudita as a patient.

Since it was so close to the holiday, she'd fly on December 26. The Blancos celebrated Christmas in Culiacán.

"She was beginning to have a bit of fever," her mother remembered. "And she didn't understand how the suitcases where she had put everything for the trip to the snow – I was changing them to go to a place I didn't know."

A strange city and a familiar saint

Claudia worried. But she didn't focus on the "why," but the "what for?"

That answer wouldn't come until years later when she was back in Culiacán, long after their time at St. Jude.

The Blancos arrived in Memphis late on December 26. They got lost using a paper map to find the hospital. But when they finally arrived, Claudia felt as if she'd stepped into the lobby of a five-star hotel. It was clean and bright, with signs directing patients.

And there was the statue of St. Jude Thaddeus, the patron saint of hopeless causes. Claudia's grandmother had a deep devotion to him, and Claudia kept his holy card.

Friends back home asked Claudia what they could do to help the family, but the Blancos had all they needed at St. Jude. Claudia asked them, instead, to support families at their local pediatric hospital. They went, but so many children died, they didn't want to go back.

Children with cancer in Culiacán deserve to live, too

They would support her with whatever she needed from home. "But don't ask (us) to go there," they told her.

"And that was when I felt even more that we had the need to support the hospital."

Dr. Altamirano called it Grupo de Amigos de Niños Afectados de Cáncer – Group of Friends of Children Affected by Cancer. GANAC, for short. Their first office was a tiny room in the hospital. They'd focus on buying chemotherapy drugs because that was the most urgent need.

It was a start.

By the end of 1995, Oscar was still traveling back and forth to Memphis, so he couldn't commit to the cause full time. And Claudia was in Memphis, too, with their other children while Claudita continued treatment.

There was the statue of St. Jude Thaddeus, the patron saint of hopeless causes.



"What better way to have him," she said. "To be at a hospital named after St. Jude."

The first big decision Claudita had to make was whether to have a central venous line. She wouldn't get stuck with needles all the time for chemotherapy, but it also meant she couldn't be in the water. She loved the pool, so she decided against it.

Chemotherapy was hard, and so were bone marrow aspirations. Claudita fought with her mother because she didn't like milk but she needed to drink it for the calcium.



Around the start of Claudita's treatment at St. Jude, Dr. Altamirano began to draft articles of incorporation – first by hand and then on a typewriter – for a group that could raise money for children with cancer in Culiacán. For years, he realized that going to conferences meant nothing without funding.

"Association" was a bit too formal, he thought. After all, they really were a group of friends. A friend who owned a print shop. An accountant friend. Dr. Altamirano also invited Oscar Blanco, Claudita's father, a businessman. Oscar and Claudia had large, prominent families in Culiacán. They'd offer support, too.

Over the next two years, GANAC held fundraising runs and made connections with partners and other foundations. Little by little, this group of friends gained more sponsors.

Meanwhile, Claudita slumped along in treatment. She developed severe osteoporosis, broke one ankle, then the other, then the first one again. First, she walked with crutches and was later confined to a wheelchair. She couldn't walk for a year and was sometimes terrified to try. Instead, she crawled.

Some tears were from pain but mostly from fear she'd break another bone.

But Claudita was improving. She would survive. The Blancos were

so thankful they wanted to give other children in Culiacán the same chance their daughter had.

Nothing is coincidence

“We longed to do something,” Claudia remembered. “A project ... on something. But look, God sets things up for you, for something and toward something, right? I’m so glad that I focused on: For what are we living and going through this part of our lives?”

It wouldn’t be long before her answer became clear.

By June 1997, Claudita was in remission, and soon the Blanco family headed home.

Shortly after their return, with Claudita feeling well, Claudia began

“Now, I understand that I have to work hard and raise money to be able to equip the hospital.”

▲
Claudia Blanco, co-founder of *Grupo de Amigos de Niños Afectados de Cancer (GANAC)*



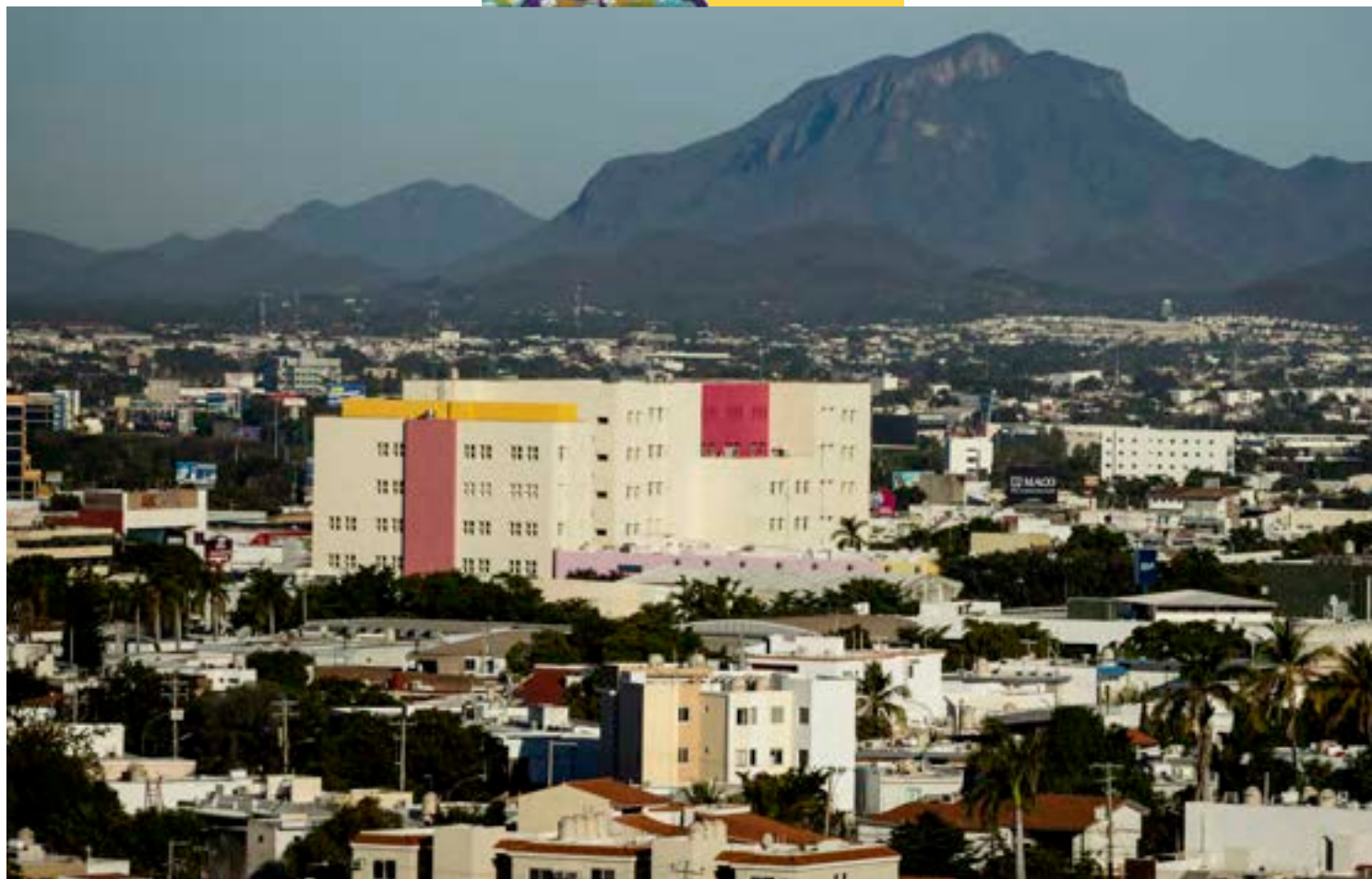
volunteering at Hospital Pediatrico de Sinaloa, the same place her daughter was diagnosed with cancer.

She became fond of a little girl, maybe 5 or 6 years old. She wasn’t shy or embarrassed like some of the others. One afternoon, after they’d been playing, Claudia left to talk to a nurse.

“All of a sudden, I heard this girl who had been smiling, laughing out loud with me, crying out in pain – such a wail – so I asked, ‘What happened to her?’ And that was when they told me: ‘We just did the marrow aspiration on her, and so...’

So?

“‘No,’ she says. ‘It’s without anesthesia. We don’t have it.’”



Pediatric Hospital of Sinaloa as seen from La Lomita Church.



Pediatric Hospital of Sinaloa patient Andrea at home moments before ringing the bell to signify the end of treatment.

Claudia ran out of the hospital, haunted.

"Oh, God," she told herself. "This can't be happening. It can't be that in 1997 I'm seeing this in a hospital."

Claudia felt angry, powerless and a great sense of injustice. She told her family what she'd witnessed and then everyone she knew.

"This is it," she told herself. "Now, I understand that I have to work hard and raise money to be able to equip the hospital."

Claudia had always volunteered. This mother who'd gone to school to be a kindergarten teacher had walked the streets

with a donation can for the Red Cross and wielded a brush when the church needed a new coat of paint. But this was different. Doctors had little more than the basics. They needed an anesthesia machine, chemotherapy drugs. The need seemed endless.

"It was inconceivable," she said. "I couldn't believe one could ask for — raise — so much money. ... But I also realized I couldn't stay in my comfort zone, just volunteering and leading other volunteers."

Not long after Claudia witnessed the young girl's suffering she was invited to a religious retreat. She listened to a priest talk about how hard his work was, how discouraged he became at times.

She felt the same way, she told him.

But she confessed: "I feel that there is so much to do, but I don't know how to get it done. ... How am I going to get this money? My husband told me, 'Well, it has to be asked for.' And I said no, I'm very embarrassed to ask for money."

Not asking, the priest replied, was a lack of humility.

That single comment changed Claudia's thinking.

Claudia began to see the heartbreaking moment with the little girl and the conversation with the priest as not as coincidencias but Diosidencias. That is, not coincidence, but Providence.

Not the why, but the what for?

They would raise the money for that anesthesia machine so no child would ever again have to suffer the pain Claudia witnessed in the little girl during a bone marrow aspiration.

Improvements and impediments

GANAC raised half the money and another organization put up the other half – \$20,000 to \$30,000 U.S. dollars. The state-of-the-art machine was so out of place, Claudia remembered, that one doctor said it looked like a Rolls-Royce.

GANAC began to raise more money and hired staff. The foundation also received a large donation to have a real office where people could work.

In 2000, Hospital Pediatrico de Sinaloa in Culiacán joined the International Outreach Program established by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The program was designed to address the global disparity in pediatric cancer survival rates by using a "twinning" model to foster one-on-one relationships with hospitals. In 2018, St. Jude Global was launched. This model, which replaced the outreach program, is focused on more regional collaboration.

GANAC also partnered with ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude. The best healthcare fundraisers in the world have trained GANAC staff how to raise money at home, themselves.

Since its humble beginning as that first group of friends who



Pediatric Hospital of Sinaloa patient Andrea ringing the bell to signify her end of treatment.

wanted to help children with cancer in Culiacán and all 18 municipalities of the state of Sinaloa, GANAC has grown exponentially. Today, the foundation provides funding for medication, patient care, transportation and housing. It also supports the hospital by funding medical equipment, supplies, professional training and salary support for medical oncology staff.

GANAC also works with the local school system to raise awareness about the early signs of cancer.

administration. So GANAC now must cover those costs in full again in addition to everything else.

"If it weren't for the donors who trust in GANAC, the children wouldn't have their chemotherapy," Asminda said.

For decades, the Blancos have dedicated their lives to the hope and care of children with cancer in Culiacán and all of the state of Sinaloa. Claudia remained a driving force behind the GANAC operation even after she herself was

leaving your children with a good example rather than words?"

Despite the continued difficulties children with cancer face in Culiacán – and her own health struggles – Claudia said in her last interview with Inspire that she had reason to be encouraged.

"I have a great team, there at GANAC, with great willingness, drive and enthusiasm to work," she said. "I admire and respect them. Never have I felt so satisfied and happy."



“Donors, they place a lot of trust (in us) when we say that we have an agreement with St. Jude.” ◀ Claudia Blanco

"Donors, they place a lot of trust (in us) when we say that we have an agreement with St. Jude," said Asminda Zazueta, GANAC's director. "Donors are assured that their social investment is really going to be invested well."

But the needs of children with cancer in Culiacán remain vast.

‘Never have I felt so satisfied and happy’

For several years, the government offered a federally backed health insurance program that covered chemotherapy drug costs, but it is no longer available under the current

diagnosed with cancer. She died in August after a long battle with the disease.

Claudia's commitment to the cause remains an inspiration to staff, Asminda said. She often reminded them to stay close to the families.

Claudia watched all five of her own children grow to be happy and healthy. Claudita got to experience snow for the first time in Memphis – just a month after they arrived for treatment. Now, Claudita is married and has two children of her own. All of Claudia's children, in some way, are dedicated to GANAC.

Claudia didn't see the foundation as her legacy but rather a good example to leave her children about the gift of service.

"As we say, we don't take anything with us the day we leave this world," she said. "What better than

And still, she looked for Diosidencias, not coincidencias. Providence, not coincidence.

Never the why, only the what for.

St. Jude Global launched in May 2018 to train clinical staff in hospitals and clinics around the world, share cutting-edge research and strengthen partner health systems so even more children receive quality care across the globe. At ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, we teach foundation members of The Global Alliance best practices in fundraising, marketing and communications. There are more than 200 hospitals and medical institutions from 65 countries, and more than 55 foundations in 50 countries that participate.

GANAC, in Culiacán, Mexico, is one of those foundations.



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E.

F.



B.



C.

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B. I Love St. Jude Fuzzy Socks

741400000.....\$14.00

C. St. Jude Brown Leather Backpack

656700000.....\$90.00

D. Chevron Striped Sherpa Blanket

471600000.....\$55.00

E. St. Jude Heathered Hoodie

8432GRY.....\$42.00

F. St. Jude Heathered Joggers

8433GRY.....\$40.00

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St. Jude patient **Lucas**
pictured with his mom

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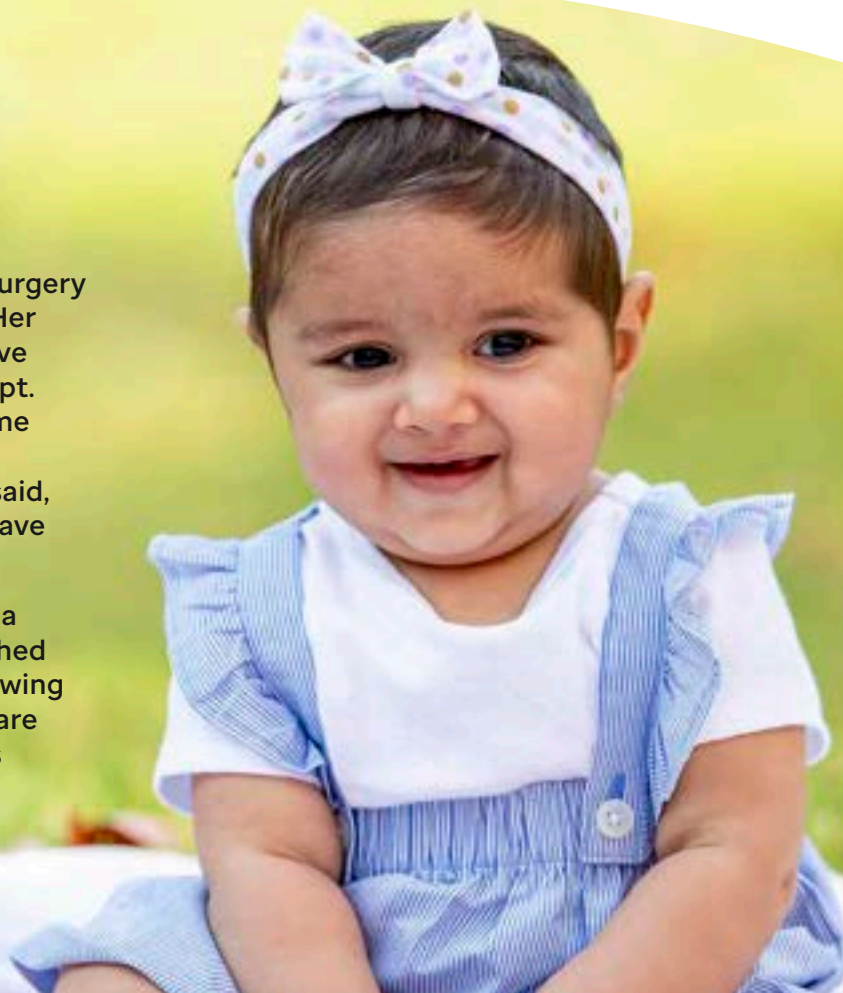
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Thankful and Blessed

Imani was in hospice, declining after brain surgery for glioblastoma. She was just 5 weeks old. Her parents, both doctors, were powerless to save her. Said her father, Khurram, "I prayed. I wept. I purchased my baby's burial plot." Then came a phone conversation with an oncologist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, who said, "I've treated this before, and some people have even been cured."

After several months of chemotherapy and a complicated surgery at St. Jude, Imani finished treatment and went home, where she is growing bigger and stronger every day. Her parents are filled with joy and thanks for the milestones they've celebrated, milestones they once thought they would never see.



Thank you for helping St. Jude children – like the ones in this magazine – through your generous monthly gifts as a loyal Partners in Hope friend. St. Jude won't stop until no child dies from cancer – we hope you won't either. To help get us closer to that day, please consider giving an additional, one-time gift by scanning the QR code.

