

21 February 2009

E60

My Military Hero:

Grandpa Tatay

When people think of a hero – especially a military one – we often imagine a soldier, with his clammy skin and eyes stinging from sweat, fearlessly throwing every ounce of his weight forward into battle despite the sun’s slicing heat. However, my military hero, my grandpa, is not fearless. Upon reflection I believe that is one of the effects cancer demands from a person. The moment Grandpa Tatay was informed he was already suffering from nasopharyngeal cancer stage three, I stared as his long and sinewy muscles, still powerful despite his age, seemed to give way. As he crumpled into a nearby loveseat, I peeked at his russet face – and realized for the first time that he was petrified.

Before he was diagnosed with nasopharyngeal cancer, I have always known my grandpa as a kind, considerate man. My mother once told me, under a kerosene lamp’s warm glow, that when she was a child and he took leave – whether in Saudi Arabia, Amsterdam, or Africa – Grandpa Tatay made certain to send her young sisters, brother, and herself small parcels of Toblerone each week. When I was growing up, Grandpa Tatay was always the first to wake up in the morning and cook breakfast. As I fumbled out of my Hello Kitty pajamas and into my pink plaid school uniform, the delicious smell of sizzling spam and eggs and seasoned fried rice would waft from the kitchen.

Furthermore, my grandfather has always been diligent. He was the type of man who grew restless if his body (and mind) was not constantly preoccupied with laborious work. Even when my family lived in Spangdahlem AFB, Germany, my grandpa would relentlessly push his way through “mild” blizzards, just so he could work at the commissary. I playfully teased him about his “Asian roots,” commenting “Grandpa works just as hard as if he was tending a rice patty or

catching catfish in it." Now my smile broadens whenever I think about this; Grandpa Tatay was so traditional, his continual attempt to appear masculine was hardly necessary.

After he was diagnosed with nasopharyngeal cancer, my grandpa was clearly afraid, but he was also brave. I would often sit with him late at night and just spent time with him. Grandpa Tatay preferred to be left alone to brood then, but even though neither of us spoke, he knew I loved and supported him, as I knew he stayed just as kind and considerate. And still, he would trudge his way to work the next day.

Before he passed away, Grandpa Tatay treated the family to dinner at an Italian restaurant. The way he smiled and talked more than usual, I wanted to believe he was miraculously cured, but deep down I knew he was just happy to be surrounded by the people he so dearly loved. My grandpa is my military hero, because of his considerate, kind, and hardworking nature. He may not have been fearless, but he was definitely a fighter.