

*To my dear friends,*

*Before I explain my mom's illness and what my family went through during this difficult time, I would like to share a few things my mom taught me.*

*My mother was a happy and active human being. She was a selfless person who always put "us" before "me" and was willing to help everybody she crossed paths with. She would sacrifice for the greater good, regardless of the consequences or what people would think about her. Family and friends always came first. I can't even remember how many times people would tell me nice things about her, even if they just met her. In the United States, she would make people feel special even though she could barely speak English. I was always impressed by her. She had something special.*

*My mother taught me to never give up in life, to always smile against adversity and to enjoy and appreciate the gift of life. I remember that even when she was suffering, she wanted to live longer to be able to see her children and grandchildren grow up and be by our side to help us. One of her last words to me was "I won't ever lose this battle, because I will never surrender." That's how it happened, cancer took her away from me, but I will always remember her smile feeling proud that she never gave up.*

*And that says a lot about my mom. If I would have to define her in just two words, I would probably use: sacrifice and family.*

*In August of 2012 I was in Spain enjoying vacations with my family and friends while recovering from a knee injury that keep me off the court for more than 9 months in my first season in the NBA. The team let me go home under one condition: I had to go back to Vail, Colorado where I had surgery 6 weeks after to check with Dr. Richard Steadman to see if my rehab was working and my knee was healing. It was a 15-hour flight to stay two days in US and then the same trip again back home. My mom didn't even hesitate to say she was coming with me.*

*When we got back home, even though we were exhausted, she wanted to celebrate with the rest of the family that my injury was progressing well. While we were having lunch, my mom's leg felt swollen, and it bothered her so much that we decided to go to the doctor. The first diagnosis revealed a blood clot in her leg, so they kept doing more tests to see if there was any other issue. My father, my sister and I were sitting in the waiting room to get the second test results when Dr. Charle (a good friend of the family) entered the room with a serious expression. I had never seen him like that. That's when he told us my mom had a lung tumor. My dad's face changed completely. I was positive that the tumor would be benign, that my mom had too much to give to us still and that we would get through this for sure.*

*She had surgery 2 weeks later to remove the tumor. The surgery went well,*

*but the bad news was the tumor was malignant and it was open and had possibly spread. At that point, she had to make the first decision: the easy one, and trust that no other carcinogenic cell would be around her body, or the tough one which was getting a round of chemotherapy to make sure nothing was left behind, with the side effects of that devastating treatment. As you may know her by now, she picked the tough one.*

*The following months were really difficult for her. I know she suffered a lot, but she never complained. She knew her goal was to live longer and that she couldn't give up. She had to fight, be happy and be positive to keep us all together in the battle against her cancer. And that's what she did. She taught us something unique: the importance of family in every situation of life.*

*The treatment went well, and she started getting positive results within the first three months. However, I wanted to do more. That is why in August of 2015 I decided to take my mother, along with my father, to Rochester (Minnesota), to get a second opinion at Mayo Clinic. We met with Dr. Molina, a well-known oncologist and specialist in lung cancer. His attitude towards her cancer and optimism about treatment solutions gave my mom a lot of hope. However, during the screenings they detected something on her spine. This was a punch to the gut. We came back to Minneapolis and waited four days to do a second round of tests. That night was really hard*

*for all of us. She realized her case was getting worse and for the first time I heard my mom crying all night long. It was the first time I heard her cry so I knew she was scared. It's tough to see your parent's weak side, especially for her, she was good at hiding her emotions to not affect the family. However, we weren't even close to giving up so the next visit at Mayo we started a new treatment that made my mom feel better. We decided to continue her treatment in Spain so she could be surrounded by her family and friends.*

*In December 2015, as with every Christmas holiday since I moved to Minneapolis, my whole family came over to spend some time together. The only requirement the doctors set was that she continued the chemo treatment at Mayo Clinic while in Minnesota. And so she did. The 23rd we drove to Rochester to get the treatment. The surprise came the 26th, game day at the Target Center, when I stepped out on the court for warm ups and she was already in the stands, just 2 days after a chemo treatment (I lost the count after a while). We all knew she wasn't feeling well, but once again she wanted to show us how strong she was during the process and that family should stay together. She made it clear that the illness wouldn't limit her to enjoy her time with her kids. At halftime I walked over to her and told her to go home or I would get mad. Once Christmas was over, she flew back home to finish her treatments in Spain.*

*As soon as the 2015/2016 season was over, I flew straight back home to check on my mom. She was in the hospital, her body defenses were down and that forced the doctors to stop the treatment. I spent the following 2 nights in the hospital, and I remember I had an amazing time with my mom. I missed my mom, I was jetlagged and she couldn't sleep because of meds. We hung out, walked around the hospital together and I helped her do things because she had all these things that I couldn't figure out connected to her body. That was one of the most meaningful moments I remember. After that, the doctors let her go back home where she spent 6 more weeks until her body couldn't stand it any more, although her mind and will to live never went away.*

*The 26th of May of 2016 my mom passed away happy and at peace, knowing she did everything on her end to spend more time in this world. That's why I have the honor to say I had the best mom in the world. Thank you Mom.*

*I also want to mention my dad in this letter. During this whole journey, 4 entire years, my dad never left her side. He took care of her, accompanied her to any appointment she had and never showed her a sad face. My dad met my mom when he was 17 and since that day they were the perfect couple. I would never forget the way my dad would look at my mom, since day one until the end. For that, and everything else, Thank you Dad.*

*I don't want to forget my brother, Marc, and my sister, Laia, for being the strongest warriors in this battle and for taking care of my mom when I wasn't able to. I'm sure she is really proud of you two.*

*Why am I telling you all of this? Because once I experienced this tough moment, I wanted to share it, hoping I can help other people who might be going through a difficult time as me and my family did. I want you all to know that you are not alone and neither are your families. And to those who are not in this situation, and I hope you would never have to experience this, take a moment to think about it, be aware of it and try to help as much as you can.*

*Thank you, mom, for your unconditional love and kindness. I will try to follow your steps.*

*Love you,*

*Ricard Rubio Vives*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'R. Rubio Vives', written in dark ink on a white background.