

# Strength through grief: The personal journey leading one Valley woman back to the hospital



Leigha Wolf becomes nurse at Banner Gateway Medical Center.



By: Nicole Valdes

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With her high school anatomy homework in hand, she sat on the side of a hospital bed where nurses cared for her mother, who was just diagnosed with stage 4 esophageal cancer.

"All through my life, she was my number one supporter, my cheerleader," said Wolf.

Her nearly two-year, hard-fought battle ended in hospice care in 2016. She passed the week Leigha turned 18 years old.

"I think I get more emotional when there's a big event like especially my graduation was big and yesterday was big," added Wolf. "It's just kind of harder to not have them there."

Unexpectedly, Wolf's dad suffered a heart attack. Wolf recalls finding him in his room unresponsive, and the toll the loss of her mother had taken on him.

"It was the worst day of my life," she said. "I think that he honestly died of a broken heart just because he couldn't live without my mom."

Losing both her parents, Wolf sometimes felt lost. She gave up her plans of going to Arizona State University, and instead attended Mesa Community College to have more time with her family, and grieving brothers.

Still, she pushed forward, and started a CNA job at Banner Gateway, in honor of her mom, who before she passed worked as a respiratory therapist there.

"It's like this added comfort," she said. "I want nothing more than to live out my mom's legacy because she was a rockstar. I think a lot of people see that and it makes me really happy that people see her and me."

school.

Thursday was Wolf's first day as a registered nurse, a milestone she knows would have made her parents proud.

"I wish I could tell you how I do it," she said. "I think I just have this internal drive and like I feel like my parents are still a part of my life and I see them in little things in my life."

"I just want to give back to people the way that you know those nurses took care of my mom. I want to be that nurse that walks into that exact room that my mom was treated and I want that patient to feel the way that those nurses and those that care for my mom made her feel."

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