



GLENDALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Daughter Accepts Dad's Diploma

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Loss, but also love, pride in accomplishment

Juliana Mandile recently earned two GCC degrees, an Associate in Arts and an Associate in General Education. But it was receiving the third diploma that touched her heart even more deeply. Yet the third diploma wasn't even hers; it was that of her father, Mark Anthony Mandile.

Juliana accepted her father's diploma in May, when his degree was awarded posthumously.

Despite failing health, Mark had been studying radio engineering at Mesa Community College, aiming for the associate's degree his daughter ultimately accepted on his behalf. Even before Juliana was born, her father had developed a love for everything geeky. He got into radios and made them his hobby. He kept his HAM radio license up to date and was interested in learning other formats.

After driving haul trucks at the Morenci mines in southern Arizona, Mark decided he wanted to work as one of their radio operators. So he quit his job in December 2012 and moved the family to Phoenix so he could pursue his degree at MCC.

Just a few months before embarking on school, he started feeling ill. Not long after he had surgery for a pacemaker, his own father passed away, beginning a time of great stress for Mark, who was also juggling a full-time academic load. In June 2014, he became ill again. Cardiology appointments, scheduling delays and hospitalization followed.

Finally, the date was set for open-heart surgery. As the time approached, Mark spent a beautiful two months with his wife and his daughter, enjoying for the first time in his life not having school or work to think about. On the day of surgery, they all drove to the hospital together, laughing together along the way.

As the time of surgery neared, the family said their goodbyes. Mark talked, joked, and shared smiles; everyone exchanged hugs and kisses. Juliana was the last to talk to him. He hugged her tight, gave her a kiss and whispered

"I love you, so much."

"Those were the last words I would ever hear my father say," said Juliana. "After a difficult surgery, he still wasn't out of the woods." The family spent two weeks coming and going from the hospital, sleeping on the floor when they were able to sleep. Mark passed away in mid-April, after nearly two weeks in a coma. "It was the hardest thing I've ever experienced," said Juliana.

Juliana will be entering A.S.U.'s New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences this fall. She's exploring the possibility of attending Barrett, The Honors College, and pursuing a major in English and possibly a minor in Library Sciences. Her dream job is to be a librarian in a private library, an editor for a book or magazine publisher or maybe an English teacher.

Being able to attend the graduation ceremony for her father's class at MCC and to accept his diploma on his behalf meant the world to Juliana and her family. "Knowing he was still able to 'walk,' even though he wasn't there physically, is a special memory we'll always hold close to our hearts," she said.

Juliana was touched by the respect shown to her father and by the care and attention extended to her family by the Veteran's Services department and faculty members. "It has meant the world to us," she said.