

Galo Villamil: A TEACHER'S COURAGE

by Annie Schwechheimer

Galo Villamil lives in Zamboanga, Philippines with his elderly mother. Her pension is just enough to cover the cost of everyday living—but not much more. If Galo were an ordinary 26-year-old man living in a developing country, the situation would be challenging enough; but unfortunately, Galo has hemophilia and must deal with its added financial and emotional stress.

Galo was diagnosed in 1994 after falling on wet pavement and experiencing severe pain in his right leg. He couldn't walk for two months. Realizing that the injury would not heal, Galo went to Cebu Doctors Hospital in Cebu City. He informed the attending physician of his family's medical history—his brother had hemophilia and died in 1988 due to complications from a bleed. Galo was immediately tested, and received the ominous news: he also had hemophilia.

Since then, with hard work and determination, Galo has managed to excel. He earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and passed his teacher certification examination. During his time in school, Galo experienced bleeds that were serious enough to require hospitalization; this interfered with his studies, but he never lost the focus he needed to fulfill his dream. In order to pay some of Galo's medical costs, his mother was forced to sell a small parcel of land that she had inherited.

photos: the Villamil family



Humiliation, suffering, poverty:
Galo's disfiguring tumor.

photo: the Villamil family

Nearly three years ago, a fist-sized tumor appeared on Galo's buttocks. Since the tumor was relatively small, Galo's doctor advised him to go home and watch for any changes. By June 2002, the tumor had increased significantly and Galo began to have problems walking and standing. His life was now in danger, and, because of the pain and discomfort, he had to make the difficult decision to stop teaching. When Galo's doctors explained that he would need 120,000 IUs of factor VIII for his surgery, he became depressed. *Where would he get this medicine?* Only temporarily disheartened, Galo was soon bolstered by friends and family, who encouraged him to ask organizations outside the Philippines for help.

One of these organizations was Project SHARE. In January 2004, Project SHARE was contacted by Dr. Mary A. Chua, chief hematologist for the Santos Tomas University Hospital in Manila, and also a founder of the national hemophilia organization of the Philippines, HAPLOS (Hemophilia Association for Love and Service, Inc.). Fortunately, Project SHARE was able to donate 60,000 IUs of factor VIII and broker the donation of the remaining 60,000 IUs through a private donor.

This factor donation enabled Galo to have lifesaving surgery. Today, still recovering in the hospital, Galo remains positive about his ordeal. He is truly a testament to the merits of hard work and determination, and a teacher to us all. ☺

To learn more about Project SHARE and how you can help patients like Galo, please visit www.kelley.com/iha/projshare.html or contact Director Annie Schwechheimer at (978) 352-7657 or annie@kelley.com.

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