



JESSICA ROUTIER IS RUNNING FOR ARMY GUARD SPC. CRYSTAL SANCHEZ

By Ricardo Torres-Cortez, Las Vegas Sun
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The satisfaction of serving her country as a National Guard soldier and working as a Metro Police officer couldn't compare to Crystal Sanchez's greatest joy: being a mother to a 6-year-old girl, who was her central inspiration in trying to beat terminal cancer.

Her loved ones were hoping she could fight a little longer, for her daughter, Evelyn, but Sanchez died Wednesday at the age of 30.

Sanchez was born and raised in Las Vegas. She experienced the early loss of her father, who died from cancer when she was 5, a feeling she could not shake when she was told in December that her death from the same illness was imminent.

“While we mourn the loss of our hero, we remember this optimism, positive energy, and selfless service to our community and country. Her family is forever grateful to this community for the compassion shown to our beloved Crystal,” her family wrote in a letter released through Metro.



At the time of her high school graduation in 2007, knowing her single mother could not afford her college tuition, she joined the military, seeking to shape her future. Four years later, she was in Afghanistan, serving as an information technology specialist.

It is believed Sanchez's cancer was caused by exposure to hazardous materials during her time in Afghanistan, her family said in the letter. “She hoped that her story would help raise awareness for cancer in young people and that perhaps, it would help save others by encouraging early screenings and advancement in treatment options.”

After she came back home, she became a police officer and, in 2017, met Officer Cameron Sims, whom she married just two weeks ago from a hospital bed.



It was love at first sight, Sims said last week. And although it wasn't the grandiose wedding they were meticulously planning earlier this year, as her diagnosis and a global pandemic stymied optimism, the hospital-room ceremony was just as special.

In photos posted online, the newlyweds flashed wide smiles and their rings. Sanchez appeared fully aware, and happy.

"It was just a beautiful ceremony, to see her smiling and aware and awake," Sims said. "I could see it in her eyes, you know, it gave her that hope, like, 'I'm not done fighting.' "

"Regardless of the setting," Sims said, "regardless of her condition at the time, I think all worries went away for that short five or 10 minutes we were going through that ceremony."

After Sanchez was initially diagnosed with lung cancer in 2018, she battled the illness and things turned favorably, when she went into remission.

Her family and work colleagues rejoiced for nine months, until a scan revealed that the cancer had returned, and traveled through her body — a death sentence.

In a video interview she gave recently, she spoke about approaching the footsteps of death, and choosing to experience life to the fullest extent.

Books and movies that discuss the end of life offer valuable lessons, she said. "How someone's on their deathbed and they're saying to love each other more, and pray to God more, go to church, be kind to one another," she said. "It's real. People say that for a reason."

She would laugh more and rid herself of trivial problems, she said.



Wimon Thompson weeps tears of joy as she hugs her daughter Army Guard Spc. Crystal Sanchez following a welcome home ceremony for the 422nd Expeditionary Signal Battalion at the Mandalay Bay Sunday, January 15, 2012. The Army National Guard soldiers entered field service on January 7, 2011 and have been serving in Afghanistan since March 28, 2011.



"I try to be more patient, more loving, be more forgiving," she said. "You don't have to wait until you're on your deathbed to do it. I do it now."

Her colleagues knew her as an overachiever who would have accomplished anything she set her mind to; a dying officer who, while on medical leave, offered to mask up and help find out who shot and critically wounded Officer Shay Mikalonis during a June 1 protest.

Officer Sims described her as the greatest mother and wife, who taught him so much. He said he was grateful that she and Evelyn came into her life. "Her daughter's been a blessing, you know. She just makes me laugh every day and smile, and that's her little bundle of joy, and you know that's what Crystal lives for, and that's what she's continuing to fight for," he said last week.

