



# Abuela's Swim

## April 21, 2018

### **ALS**

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as “LouGehrig’s Disease,” is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that attacks nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, resulting in muscle weakness and atrophy. It is a terminal illness for which there is presently no cure. Although it varies from person to person, the typical patient diagnosed with ALS can expect to live 2-3 years. As the voluntary muscles stop working, patients gradually lose the ability to move, and eventually to breathe or swallow. ALS is a cruel disease in which the mind remains virtually unaffected while the body decays, thus enabling the patient to bear witness to all that is lost.

### **Mercedes Silva**

Rosa Mercedes Silva was the 65 year old wife of Jorge Silva, mother of four, and grandmother of four. She arrived in New York City from Nicaragua over 50 years ago with her family and soon became a United States citizen. She and her husband lived in Gaithersburg for 30 years and were active members of the community and the Catholic Church. They served as leaders in the Spanish-speaking branch of the Catholic Marriage Encounter program, and they pioneered the introduction of Spanish masses in our area in the 1970’s. Up until her diagnosis, Mercedes worked as an assistant on a Montgomery County school bus, helping students with disabilities.

All four of the Silvas’ sons graduated from Gaithersburg High School, where they participated on varsity teams and played in the marching band. Mercedes’ son, Jorge, is the owner of the Hydro-sonic Tiburones, a year round swim club based in Gaithersburg. The Silvas’ small home in old town Gaithersburg is packed full of pictures of the children, family, and friends they mentored and loved through 40 years of marriage.

### **ALS and the Silvas**

In Mercedes’ case, ALS progressed at a diabolically rapid pace. In December 2008, Mercedes began to notice that she was starting to trip frequently. She commented that her feet did not seem to be doing what her brain ordered. By June of 2009, she could no longer stand at all and had lost muscle control over her right hand and arm as well. That summer, the Silvas visited specialists at John Hopkins who diagnosed Mercedes with ALS. She passed away in the fall of 2009.

### **Abuela’s Swim**

Beginning in 2009, the Hydro-sonic Tiburones swim club has staged an ALS research fundraiser honoring Mercedes’ memory. This spring, the TIBU boosters will host the seventh Abuela’s Swim. Thus far, over \$68,000 dollars have been raised for both ALS research and to assist a local family currently dealing with a loved one with ALS. More than 550 Tiburones swimmers have swum nearly 1,000 miles supporting this important local fundraiser.

### **A Win-Win Situation**

Your decision to advertise your business or donate goods to Abuela’s Swim, in addition to being humanitarian, is financially wise. The Hydro-Sonic Tiburones club represents a variety of schools and neighborhoods in the upper Montgomery County area. As you reach out to help with ALS research and assist a local family dealing with ALS, you simultaneously introduce the name of your business into the homes of many potential customers.