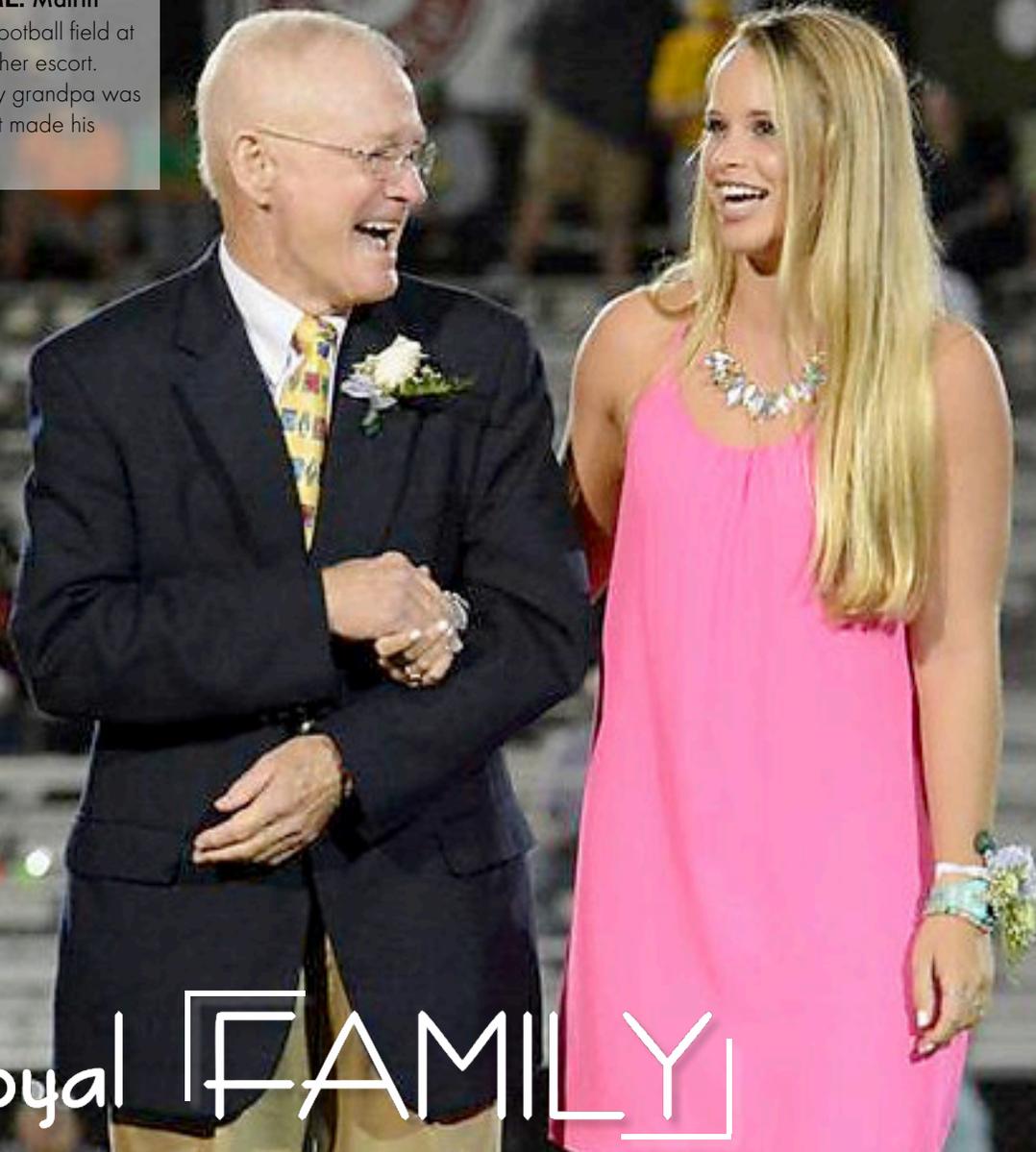


GRANDDADDY'S LITTLE GIRL: Mairin

Noonan, 12, walks across the football field at halftime with her grandfather as her escort. "When they called my name, my grandpa was more excited than I was. I think it made his night," Noonan said.



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Noonan shares crowning spotlight with grandfather

photographer m. fleming

The shock in her eyes.

The pride in his.

The homecoming crown **Mairin Noonan**, 12, was about to receive would be nothing compared to the memory that she would never forget.

Mairin's grandfather and homecoming escort, **Bill Noonan**, had been diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2015.

"When I first found out he was diagnosed with stage 4 lymphoma, I was really mad. I was mad at the doctors and pretty much everyone else. I didn't understand why this was happening to my family," Mairin said.

She was not alone. With this being the first case of cancer in the close generations of the Noonan family, they were all in shock. However, his sickness would not keep him out of his oldest granddaughter's life.

In the fall when Mairin was nominated for homecoming queen, the first thing that came to her mind was her grandfather.

"He has always been a huge role model of mine and I knew it would mean a lot to him to be my escort. So when I found out I was nominated, I called him... and asked him. He was so happy he couldn't even speak. He got all choked up and we both started crying," Mairin said.

It would mean the world to him.

"Mairin and I have always been very close and I was pleased immensely when she asked me to be a part of her homecoming night. I've never been more thrilled in my life," Bill said.

This night would mean just as much to Mairin.

When she was lined up with the other nine contestants before the game, Bill leaned over to Mairin.

"(Being) our first grandchild, she is very special to us. (So) I told her before the game that no matter the outcome, she was the most beautiful girl in the land," Bill said.

But Mairin would be awarded the crown just a few minutes later.

The announcer called her name, but she didn't hear a thing. All she heard was her grandpa's words ringing in her ears, "That's you Mairin. You won."

The crown and sash didn't matter. She had just made a memory with her grandfather that she would always remember.

"It was a big deal to have (Bill) escort Mairin. Especially at the time, as he was about half-way through with chemotherapy and very sick. It was a struggle for him to be there, but it was very special to him," Mairin's father and Bill's son, **Jimmy Noonan**, said.

"Ever since I had my first Catholic communion, my grandpa has always been there for me. He told me that whenever I needed someone to be there for me at any special moment in my life, I could count on him. I've always remembered that," Mairin said.

The crowns and sashes and glory of winning the title of homecoming king or queen are all temporary. All to be passed on to the winners of the next year. But the experiences and the relationships within a family are to last a lifetime. Especially those between a grandfather and his first granddaughter.

"He told me 'nothing can make me sick now Mairin; I love you,'" Mairin said.

-Brooke Fletcher

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