

Hope rings eternal: Tulane student donates bell to help cancer patients celebrate recovery

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Inspired by her mother Wendy Jeshion's journey through cancer treatment, Tulane student Isabella Spar donated a symbolic bell to East Jefferson General Hospital Cancer Center through her family's nonprofit Project Bell.

Tulane undergraduate Isabella Spar was 12 years old when her mother, Wendy Jeshion, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Each day spent at Massachusetts General Hospital was difficult for Isabella and her family, but their hopes were

bolstered every time they heard a patient ring the large brass bell in the waiting area, celebrating a milestone in their recovery. When it came time for her mother to ring the bell after successful radiation treatment, Spar saw firsthand the empowerment such a simple ritual could bring to patients and their loved ones.

“Amidst all that fear, this bell brought a moment of joy,” Isabella said. “I realized if an object as simple as a bell could give my mom this moment of hope and accomplishment, that everyone going through this should have this experience.”

Now patients of the East Jefferson General Hospital Cancer Center will have the same chance to celebrate the triumphs in their treatment journeys after Isabella, now a senior at Tulane, donated a bell to hang in the hospital’s hall.

The bell is the latest to be gifted by Isabella’s nonprofit Project Bell, which she started with her family soon after her mother’s recovery. Over the past nine years, Project Bell has donated 130 bells to cancer centers and hospitals across North and South America, as well as the Caribbean, each marked with the same inscription:

*Ring this bell
Three times well
Its toll to clearly say
My treatment’s done
The course is run
And I am on my way.*

Isabella, a pre-med student, said her mother’s cancer battle inspired her interest in healthcare and dedication to community service.

“That love of service is what drew me to Tulane, and from the moment I chose it, I dreamed of donating a bell,” Isabella said. “This is for every patient who will stand here and ring it, for every family who will celebrate beside them, and for every person who needs to be reminded that they are stronger than they know.”

Dr. Stefan Grant, director of the Tulane Cancer Center, said the center sees approximately 2,400 new patients a year. For some of those patients, ringing the bell will provide a tangible symbol of odds overcome. But Grant said the bell will also serve as an important reminder of the mission at hand each day for the doctors and nurses caring for these patients.

“It’s a sign that we’ve had at least one small success in what for us is a lifetime commitment to improving the lives of patients with cancer,” Grant said.