

ST. JUDE

# inspire



WINTER 2025

## *Courageous* **STEPS**

Bridget found her inner strength at St. Jude



### **Twice the fight**

With the help of St. Jude, Brayden battled cancer twice

### **Remembering Phil Donahue**

A legacy of love and support for St. Jude lives on

### **St. Jude Global**

Improving survival rates of kids with cancer worldwide



# 25

## Celebrating 25 years of Target House

Target House is a home-away-from-home for families receiving lifesaving treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

Since it opened in 1999, more than 4,500 families from 45 states and 47 countries have made Target House home. Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food – so they can focus on helping their child live.

The long-term, apartment-style housing is one of four housing facilities for St. Jude patients and families. For them, Target House is a refuge from lab work, needle pokes and beeping monitors.

Your gift will ensure more patient families like Luna's have a welcoming place to heal and hope.

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St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® opened 63 years ago this February, and this Founder's Day — February 4 — is also World Cancer Day.

It's fortuitous these days share a date as the promise of St. Jude established more than six decades ago is today reaching farther than ever thanks to you, our dedicated supporters.

An estimated 400,000 children will develop cancer this year alone, and St. Jude Global intends to raise global survival rates for six of the most common forms of childhood cancer from around 20 percent to 60 percent.

It's a bold goal. An audacious goal. But one we know is possible thanks to you.

At St. Jude we believe — as I know you do — that every one of those children deserves the same chance at life as kids here in the United States and Memphis, the home of St. Jude.

Every child deserves the same chance as Bridget, the subject of our cover story, who was just 6 years old when she came to St. Jude to be treated for osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer. She underwent 10 weeks of chemotherapy and, eventually, amputation of her right leg below the knee.

It was a difficult experience, as you can imagine. But a lifesaving procedure. And Bridget's mom calls St. Jude "the best place for hope."

Over a lifetime of service to the St. Jude mission, I've been witness to a strength and resilience typically unexpected in young children. As you'll read, Bridget walked within six months, then ran. She joined a swim team, went horseback riding and took up golf.

"I want to do whatever everyone else can do," she said. And I know she will.

As we commemorate Founder's Day and advancements made over the past 63 years, we look ahead to the next 60 and beyond, and patients like Bridget of tomorrow. We vow, on World Cancer Day and every day, to do all we can to ensure the hope happening here at St. Jude is carried to the world.

As Dr. Beth Stewart says in this issue's Q&A: "Every single day when I'm walking into the research lab, I think of those patients that are on the receiving end of our hard work in the lab. I use that as motivation. It's not enough for us to stop when we've made progress, because our work is not done."

Richard C. Shadyac Jr.  
President and Chief Executive Officer, ALSAC

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You can help ensure families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food — so they can focus on helping their child live. Donate today at [stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)



*In Memoriam:*

# Phil Donahue

Husband of Marlo Thomas and legendary talk show host used his voice to support St. Jude.

By **Richard C. Shadyac Jr.**

**W**e lost a dear member of our St. Jude family last August with the passing of legendary television pioneer Phil Donahue.

The beloved husband of St. Jude National Outreach Director, Marlo Thomas, and son-in-law of St. Jude founder, Danny Thomas, Phil's life was one of advocacy and empathy. His legacy is built upon ideals of equality, equity and justice – all attributes seen in the mission of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

St. Jude, more than anything, was built on a foundation of family. Founded with the selfless support of Danny's extended family of Lebanese and Syrian immigrants, his own family and the 12 million supporters that, today, are fueling a growing global mission.

I saw this foundation built first-hand, dollar by dollar and brick by brick with my own family. My parents were asked by Danny to join his mission at the very start, and serving St. Jude is ingrained in the Shadyacs just as it is with the Thomas family and Phil himself.

“Donahue” – his genre-defining daytime talk show – had the power to change our lives as viewers even as it changed his own. It was on the set of that show in 1977 that he met Marlo. The spark was instantaneous and caught on celluloid in front of his national audience.

They married in a private ceremony at her parents’ home on May 21, 1980. At the wedding, Danny raised his glass: “Today, I haven’t lost a daughter – I gained a fundraiser!”

It was true. And the first time the newlyweds appeared in public together was at a benefit for St. Jude held in Los Angeles. Nearly 30 years later, he and Marlo testified at the U.S. House of Representatives about the crucial need for funding pediatric cancer research.

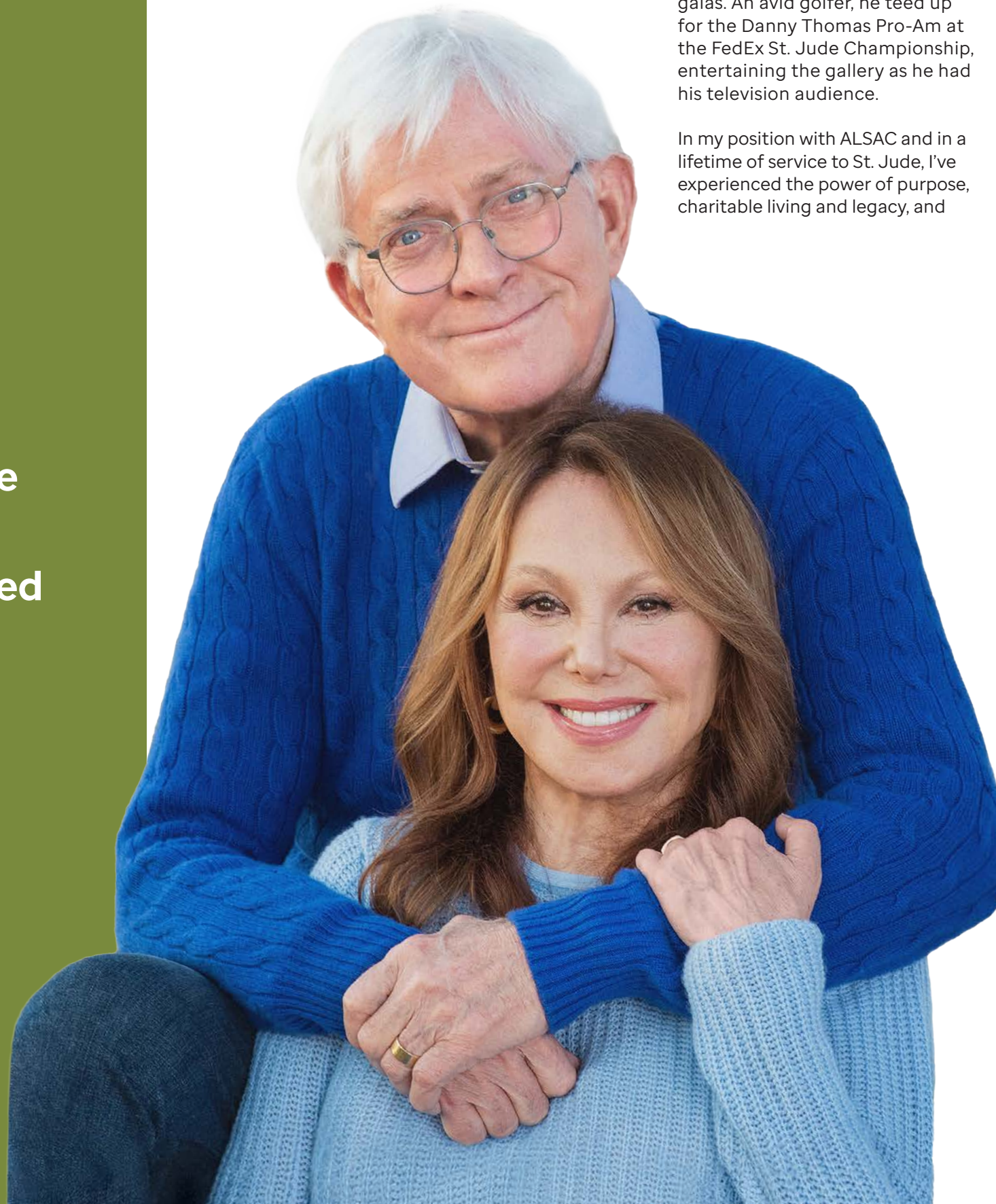
Over the years, Phil would generously lend his time, energy and celebrity to the mission that was just as much a part of the Thomas family as any single member.

At an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of St. Jude in Beverly Hills, California, in 2012, Phil marveled at the fundamental tenet that St. Jude shares protocols and research with the global scientific and medical communities to help further the advancement of care and cures.

“Nobody at St. Jude wants to covet whatever it is that they have discovered in the lab that will help a child who really is in a lethal situation. To see the pain and the terror on the faces of the parents who bring a child to this hospital and then to see the relief when they leave is a spiritual experience.”

“Phil Donahue’s pioneering work in his field and devotion to the mission of St. Jude has left a lasting legacy that impacted so many.”

– Richard C. Shadyac Jr.,  
President and CEO of ALSAC



He visited patients, employing his affable personality to put a smile on kids’ and parents’ faces alike. He attended, and occasionally emceed – a maestro with a microphone – fundraising dinner galas. An avid golfer, he teed up for the Danny Thomas Pro-Am at the FedEx St. Jude Championship, entertaining the gallery as he had his television audience.

In my position with ALSAC and in a lifetime of service to St. Jude, I’ve experienced the power of purpose, charitable living and legacy, and

I’ve had the opportunity to ask many young audiences to think about this question: What will your legacy be? Will it be the things you leave behind or the jobs listed on your resume or the awards you won?

Or will you be remembered for who you are, the kindness you offer and the ways you make a difference in this world, especially to the most vulnerable among us?

On the day Danny Thomas opened St. Jude in 1962, he said, “If I were to die this minute, I would know why I was born.”

It’s a quote my dad and I would often discuss. He looked up to Danny as a true servant leader and I believe he, having helped build St. Jude alongside Danny and others, could say he knew why he was born. I know in my heart Phil could, too.

Phil leaves a full and rich legacy of adoring fans, awards and innovation in his field. But there’s so much more – he was a kind, curious, compassionate person so willing to go the distance for those in need, especially the kids of St. Jude.

A famous son-in-law, but also a dedicated fundraiser. A devoted husband, and a brother to us all in our St. Jude family.

The ALSAC and St. Jude family is deeply saddened by the loss of Phil Donahue, but all the better for having known him, for having been inspired by him and for having his light as a beacon of hope shining for his adoring audiences to see. Our prayers remain with Marlo and the Donahue and Thomas families.

ALSAC writer Karina Bland contributed to this story.

# BRAYDEN TACKLES CANCER TWICE

St. Jude patient returns five years after first diagnosis.

By **Kelly Cox** - ALSAC

It's remarkably difficult to describe Brayden without using the word "sweet." His tender heart and good nature are what you notice first.

"He will cry if we kill a spider," said his mom, Kelli. "We always have to stop and save turtles from the road."

And "he is the absolute happiest child you will ever meet. His teacher told me one time that when she's having a bad day, she just looks at Brayden because he's always smiling. He's just this ray of light."

And yet to say this kid is sweet and happy and leave it at that would be to sell him very short indeed. Brayden, in his equanimity, is like that proverb about still waters. He possesses deep, deep reserves of strength and determination, and has had to draw on them.

"Cancer is hard," he said. "Cancer makes me feel angry. It doesn't make me act like that. But ... like how I feel on just the inside. I'm angry at it."

## The first day of kindergarten

In 2018, after some persistent headaches, Brayden was found to have a brain tumor. On what should have been his first day of kindergarten, he underwent surgery to remove it.

His dad, Leif, recalled their very valid fear of surgical complications, then the relief of seeing Brayden in recovery tempered by the pain of seeing their son in pain. That was followed by the elation of learning the surgery went well, which was erased by the horror of learning it was cancer. He describes their emotional state as "nervous breakdown."

Diagnosed with medulloblastoma, the most common malignant pediatric brain tumor, Brayden needed further treatment. Leif and Kelli pulled themselves together to look at options and sought a referral to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. Brayden was accepted as a patient at St. Jude because he fit the criteria for SJMB12, a clinical trial that would



Patient Brayden, seen here during treatment at St. Jude in February 2019, returned to St. Jude for additional treatment after he was diagnosed with a secondary cancer.



Giles Robinson, MD, examines St. Jude patient Brayden during one of his regular checkups in December 2023.

tailor chemotherapy and radiation based on his risk and the molecular composition of his disease.

Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food. But more importantly to Leif and Kelli, St. Jude had expertise in treating Brayden's disease.

When they arrived at St. Jude, additional scans indicated the cancer was also in Brayden's spine, which made his cancer higher risk.

After eight long months of treatment, which included chemotherapy and proton therapy,

Leif and Kelli were shown Brayden's pre-treatment scans compared with his end-of-treatment scans. Leif said the early scans of Brayden's spine "looked like the Rocky Mountains," there were so many tumors. In the end-of-treatment scans, those mountains were leveled. Brayden showed no evidence of disease.

And in the meantime, Brayden had started kindergarten as a student in the St. Jude Imagine Academy by Chili's.

### Five years later

After successfully completing treatment for medulloblastoma,

Brayden went home and resumed something close to normal life.

For five years, his family relished the joy of the everyday. Pushing Brayden on the swing, playing baseball in the backyard – these things became priceless. "Just to be able to go for a walk or sit down and do homework with him, and he's healthy enough to be able to do that," said his dad. "It's a great time."

Every few months, Brayden returned to St. Jude for checkups. "St. Jude doesn't say, 'Okay, we've finished the job,' you know, 'on to the next patient,'" said Leif. "They

"St. Jude doesn't say, 'Okay, we've finished the job,' you know, 'on to the next patient.' They continue caring and making sure that he's good. It's comforting."

– Leif, Brayden's dad

continue caring and making sure that he's good. It's comforting."

It was during one of these routine checkups at St. Jude that scans revealed something in Brayden's neck.

"You always know there's the possibility that the cancer can come back, or that another cancer can happen," said Kelli. "It just devastates you."

Brayden was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. Childhood cancer survivors are at an increased risk of developing additional cancers.

Kelli hopes that with further research, treatments can be found that won't cause these serious side effects. "In a perfect world, kids wouldn't get cancer," she said. "But there also wouldn't be all of these long-term side effects that come up from the treatment itself."

When they asked if he was scared, Brayden told his parents, "No. I trust St. Jude."

Were Leif and Kelli scared? "Yes," said Kelli, "but we know that he's getting the best treatment that he possibly could."

With the second diagnosis, Brayden underwent surgery and radiotherapy.

When Brayden was a baby, his parents called him "Turtle." The way he craned his little neck upward during tummy-time inspired the nickname, and it stuck. Maybe that's why Brayden insists they stop the car to help turtles cross the road. Or maybe he sees himself in their dogged determination to reach greener grass ahead.

Faced with cancer treatment a second time, Brayden's attitude was, "I just gotta get through it." And he did.

In 2018, Leif said, "My son has amazed me. I'm the proudest father in the world, just to watch how strong he is." Imagine how proud Leif is now.

"I think a lot of people can learn from him," said Leif. "I have."

## SECONDARY CANCERS



Childhood cancer survivors are at an increased risk of developing additional cancers.



St. Jude researchers are working to determine which childhood cancer survivors are at greatest risk.



Researchers are seeking to develop treatments that minimize the long-term effects of the treatment while effectively treating the cancer.



St. Jude clinical trials aim to gather data to evaluate the long-term effects of cancer treatments because researchers know these treatments can lead to a range of other medical complications or new cancers.



Your gift can help support treatment for patients like Brayden.  
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# St. Jude Global and Childhood Cancer AROUND THE WORLD



Did you know? World Cancer Day is celebrated on February 4, which is the same day that St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® was founded.



## St. Jude Global Mission:

- The mission of St. Jude Global is to improve the survival rates of children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases worldwide through the sharing of knowledge, technology and organization skills.



## Global Challenge:

- 90% of children with cancer live in low- and middle-income countries.
- Only half of the estimated 400,000 children who develop cancer yearly are diagnosed.



## History:

- The global work of St. Jude began in 1993 in Central and South America at Benjamin Bloom Children's Hospital in El Salvador.
- Through this collaboration, the survival rate for children in El Salvador with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) rose from near zero to 50% in three years, leading to the creation of the St. Jude International Outreach Program, now St. Jude Global.



## Growth:

- Since 2018, the St. Jude Global Alliance has grown to include 483 medical institutions and foundations from 89 countries.
- ALSAC partners with more than 140 foundations in over 60 countries to share expertise in fundraising and marketing to help raise revenue in the communities for St. Jude Global Alliance hospitals.

### EURO:

The Euro Regional Program is at work in 15 countries across Europe and Central Asia focusing on capacity building, education and research to improve care and outcomes for children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases.

### EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN:

The Eastern Mediterranean Program includes 28 countries working to increase access to quality care by supporting the creation of partnerships and cooperative networks of health care providers.

### ASIA PACIFIC:

The Asia Pacific Regional Program leverages partnerships across 15 countries to support a region that now bears nearly half of the known global burden of childhood cancer.

### MEXICO:

There are 38 partners working to improve quality, modernization, research and collaboration to raise survival rates across the country.

### CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA:

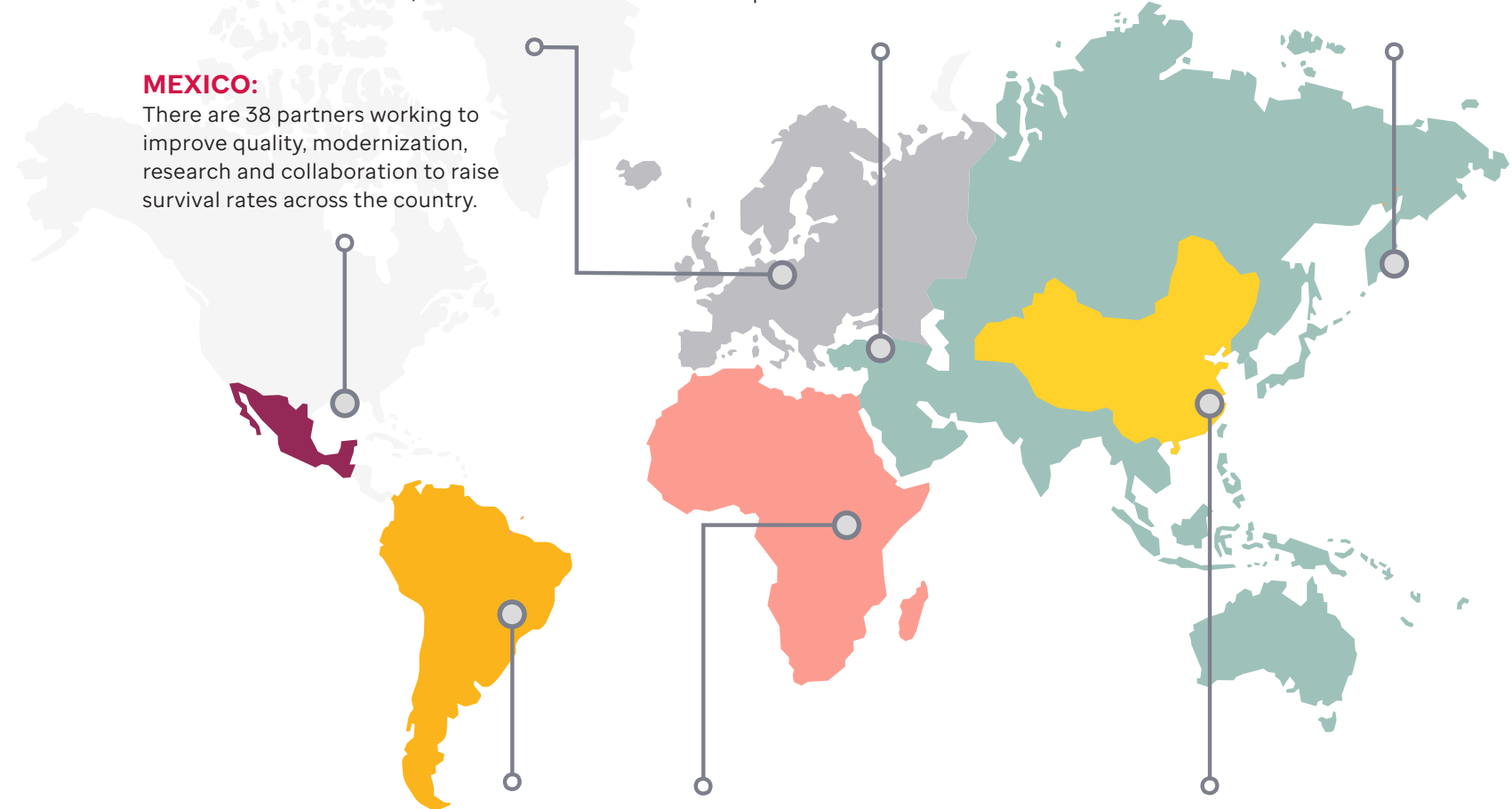
The Central and South America (CASA) Regional Program includes institutional collaborators in 18 countries working to raise the level of care for children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases.

### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:

The Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Program includes 14 countries working to expand capacity to treat and manage childhood cancer in a region where nearly a quarter of the world's children ages 0-14 now live.

### CHINA:

The China Regional Program utilizes a foundation of strong relationships to improve outcomes for the nearly 50,000 children diagnosed with cancer in the country each year through access to clinical trials and reducing the burden of care.







# A Brother's Special Moment

St. Jude patient Pepe played an important role in his sister's quinceañera.

By **Monsy Alvarado** - ALSAC

**D**ressed in a purple vest, black shirt and tailored slacks, Pepe stood poised, cradling white strappy heels on a satin pillow. His family and friends watched with eager anticipation. On this Sunday, his family had gathered in Tennessee to celebrate his oldest sister's 15th birthday, her quinceañera.

Pepe, who had battled cancer as a baby and was treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, had been chosen to play a key role in the quinceañera, a traditional coming-of-age celebration in Latin American cultures. He stood by his older brother, Daniel, while his sister, Joana, who he affectionately calls Jojo, sat front and center in her lavender ball gown, decorated with butterfly appliques.

A cherished tradition of the festivities was about to unfold – the changing of shoes, a symbolic passage into womanhood. Joana had chosen her little brothers for the important role of carrying the shoes to her and placing them on her feet.

As Phil Collins' "You'll Be In My Heart" played, Daniel, 12, knelt before Joana and removed her white sneakers. Then Pepe, 9, walked over and presented Joana the heels. His eyes welled up. His emotions spilled over. Joana, equally moved, whispered, "Don't cry."

"It feels great to have Pepe here with me today," said Joana, who had requested that she have a special dance

with her brothers. "I remember when I was little, I didn't understand what he was going through, but I knew he was really sick, and that scared me a little bit. But I knew Pepe was going to get better and it makes me feel really good that he gets to be here with me."

When Joana's heels hit the floor as she stood up from her chair, her brothers were beside her. Then she gently took their hands and turned to each of them, one by one, as they began to dance. Pepe twirled his sister around, her dress swirling as well.

"I just want them to know that they can count on me to be there," Joana said.

Pepe has always been close to his siblings. When Joana was a little girl, she often climbed into Pepe's crib to steal a hug or two. When Pepe was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a cancer of certain types of nerve tissue, and began treatment at St. Jude, Joana was another caregiver. She seemed to always be with him at home, worrying about his well-being.

"My sister is special to me because she always helps me with stuff, and does stuff for me, and she cares about me," Pepe said.

Pepe was just 6 months old when he developed a persistent cough. After several visits to the hospital, a CT scan revealed the presence of a tumor. Pepe was immediately referred to St. Jude.

Pepe's family had heard the word cancer before. They had also heard of St. Jude. At the time of Pepe's diagnosis, his maternal aunt, Heather, was also a patient of St. Jude, where she was receiving treatment for leukemia.



“It was painful when my grandson Pepe was diagnosed,” said Sonia, Pepe’s grandmother. “But we knew how wonderful St. Jude was.”

The family was counting on St. Jude to provide the crucial care needed for their two loved ones.

At St. Jude, Pepe’s treatment included chemotherapy. He finished treatment in 2016 and returns for annual checkups.

Pepe doesn’t recall receiving treatment. He remembers fun visits to St. Jude for checkups. There he was given coloring books, toys and always enjoyed eating at Kay Kafe.

“He doesn’t remember going through cancer, but he was only 1,” said his mom, Tiffany.

Tiffany had spent months preparing for the quinceañera. Tiffany didn’t have a celebration of her own when she turned 15, but she really wanted to make it special for oldest daughter.

Her sons were also looking forward to the celebration, she said.

“Pepe asked questions about it, like if he gets a quinceañera when he’s 15,” Tiffany said with a laugh.

When Joana asked them to carry the shoes in and dance with her, they were ecstatic. They even practiced the anticipated dance. Pepe said he practiced the twirl and got it down in a few minutes.

*“I am happy,  
and thanks  
to St. Jude  
I have both  
my grandson  
and daughter  
with me.”*

– Sonia, Pepe’s grandmother

Before the party was scheduled to begin, Tiffany walked around the venue, ensuring tables with white cloths and lavender accents were perfect.

Tiffany’s sister Heather and her son were also among the guests who arrived early to help. Heather, who completed treatment at St. Jude and is doing well, said when she was a patient of St. Jude, she wondered about her future, so family celebrations and life’s milestones mean that much more to her.

“Today is a special day for me because I didn’t think I would get chances like this, I didn’t think I would be able to attend my niece’s quinceañera and I didn’t think that I would be able to have children,” she

said, adding that she was confident that when Pepe was diagnosed that St. Jude was going to take good care of him. “Everything I’m able to do in this lifetime is such a blessing because of St. Jude.”

Sonia said she was full of happiness because her granddaughter was celebrating a special birthday and because Pepe and Heather were present enjoying the special day with the rest of the family.

“When they told me first about Heather and then later about Pepe, and when you hear the word cancer it’s difficult and you think the worst, but seeing both of them together, and that they are well and growing and making their life, I am happy, and thanks to St. Jude I have both my grandson and daughter with me,” Sonia said.

Daniel and Pepe, who also wore purple bow ties, hauled ice for the cold drinks to the kitchen prior to the party starting. They also opened the venue doors for Joana to make her grand entrance before her mother presented her to the guests.

Pepe admitted he was a little bit nervous before he took to the dance floor. Though, he said, he was also happy to help for the “big party,” and be an important part of the celebration.

“I’m excited for Jojo dancing, and I’m excited about just having fun,” he said.



You can help ensure families like Pepe’s have the chance to celebrate more special moments together.  
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St. Jude patient Pepe in 2017

# Courageous Steps

A young woman with long blonde hair, wearing a sparkly, sleeveless, tiered dress and high-heeled sandals, stands on a sandy beach at sunset. She has a prosthetic leg on her right side, which is covered in a white, sparkly material. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows the ocean and palm trees under a warm, golden light.

When you lose a leg to cancer, St. Jude patient Bridget learned you don't get to be shy.

By **Karina Bland** - ALSAC

A limousine waited at the airport for 7-year-old Bridget when she arrived home after 10 months of treatment for bone cancer at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

Friends surprised her in baggage claim. Her neighborhood streets were lined with hundreds of people chanting her name and waving signs that read, "Welcome home, Bridget!"

For Bridget, it was overwhelming to be the focus of so much attention. "I'm shy actually," she said.

But when you're a kid who lost a leg to cancer, you don't get to be shy. People stare and ask questions. "She doesn't have a choice but to be the girl with cancer," Bridget's mom, Jamie, said. There's no hiding it. Not that Bridget didn't try.

Now 13, Bridget has lived longer as an amputee than she lived with two legs.

While Bridget still doesn't embrace the attention, she has grown more comfortable with it. Instead of hiding her prosthetic leg, the socket of her sports leg sparkles with pink

glitter. The socket of her walking leg gleams with embedded crystals.

Sometimes, Bridget still wishes she was like everyone else. But while cancer took part of her leg, it did not take her life. Bridget got that — a life — and it's a great one.

So, it's fine if people stare. She makes it worth their while.

## A fateful kick

At soccer practice in late January 2018, Bridget got kicked in her right leg between the bottom of her shin guard and the top of her cleat.

At a game four days later, Jamie noticed Bridget favoring that leg. It still hurt.

At her pediatrician's office two days later, an X-ray showed that kick had fractured Bridget's tibia — and revealed something else. Bridget was referred to the local children's hospital for an MRI, followed by a biopsy.

In early February, the results confirmed a diagnosis. Jamie got down on her knees next to where Bridget was stretched out on the couch to tell her she had

*"I've learned that you have to try. You don't have to be perfect at everything, especially if you enjoy it. Do it anyway."*

— St. Jude patient Bridget

osteosarcoma. Bridget's eyes filled with tears. "No, Mommy. No!"

Bridget knew what cancer was. Her grandfather had died from cancer. A young friend had a brain tumor. In 2017, then 5-year-old Bridget had participated in Ride for a Reason, an indoor cycling fundraiser at a fitness center where Jamie teaches.

The event raised more than \$780,000 for St. Jude, and Jamie flew to Memphis to tour the campus. She left even more driven to help. In 2018, Jamie kicked off Ride for a Reason and then rushed from the event to catch Bridget's soccer game.

It was the last time she saw her daughter run on her own two feet.

### Best place for hope

Bridget was referred to St. Jude for treatment, arriving at the Memphis campus seven months after her mom had visited. "We believed it was the best place for treatment, the best place for care – and the best place for hope," Jamie said.

At St. Jude, scans showed Bridget's cancer was in her tibia and her

*"She still just wants to be like all the other girls, but she's not going to hide from it anymore."*

– Jamie, Bridget's mom

foot. Osteosarcoma is the most common bone cancer in children and teens. If the cancer has not spread to other parts of the body, the long-term survival rate is 70-75 percent. If the cancer has spread, long-term survival rates are around 30 percent.

Treatment started with 10 weeks of chemotherapy, which made Bridget nauseous and caused her hair to fall out. While Jamie prayed for those 10 weeks to end, she also knew each passing day brought them closer to April 23, 2018. On that day, Bridget's right leg below her knee would be amputated with the hopes of saving her life by preventing further spread of the cancer.

"I thank God we weren't given a choice because I would have made the wrong choice," Jamie said. "I wanted her to be healthy, but I also wanted her to be whole."

The name Bridget means "strength," and when she was born, Jamie had counted her tiny fingers and toes: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. Perfect.

The day before surgery, Jamie took Bridget for a pedicure, painting all 10 toenails purple. That night, Bridget, Jamie, dad Eric and brother, Brennan, who was 11, toasted to no more cancer with

sparkling apple cider. As Bridget slept, Jamie watched the rise and fall of her chest all night, studying her face and 10 perfect toes.

In the recovery room after Bridget's surgery, a nurse told Jamie she could lift Bridget's sheet. Jamie couldn't look. Not until a physical therapist later coaxed Bridget out of bed.

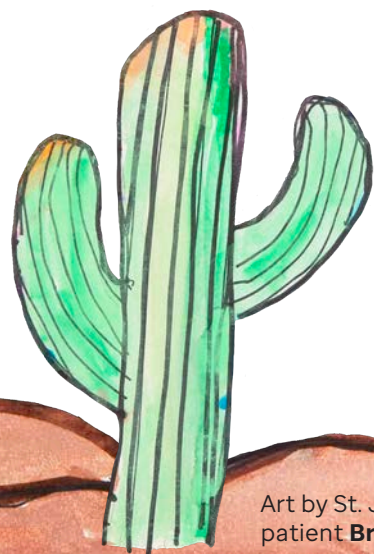
Bridget stood on her left leg, moved to a chair and back into bed. The physical therapist asked Bridget to do 10 leg lifts with her amputated leg. Bridget did 30. That same day, she got up on crutches.

1-2-3-4-5. Perfect.

### Magic of St. Jude

Bridget got a pink cast on her amputated leg four days after surgery and then frequent cast changes to help control swelling. She was fitted for her first prosthesis two-and-a-half weeks post-surgery. Three-and-a-half weeks post-surgery, Bridget was walking. At three months, she jogged.

After her amputation, Bridget stayed at St. Jude for seven months for more chemotherapy. With the treatment came complications – a blood clot in her heart, hearing loss caused by certain chemotherapy drugs, and osteoporosis, which left Bridget prone to a break in the femur of her amputated leg that required another surgery.



Art by St. Jude patient **Bridget**



“She works her tail off,” Bridget’s local physical therapist Kelsi Rempe said. Rempe also coaches at a volleyball club in Arizona, so she incorporates volleyball skills into Bridget’s twice-a-week sessions.

“I don’t want her to have any physical limitations,” Rempe said, not in volleyball – or life. “I want her to feel confident that she can do anything.”

“Even with all that, I saw the magic of St. Jude,” Jamie said. The medical staff became like family. Bridget turned 7, lost her first tooth and was delighted the Tooth Fairy found her at St. Jude. Then Jamie got to take her daughter home. Not all parents get to do that.

### You’re wrong

At home in November 2018, Bridget jumped on a stationary bike for the kickoff for Ride for a Reason. But shortly before the actual event in March 2019, Bridget slipped at home and broke the femur of her amputated leg again.

Told she’d likely walk again but probably never run, Bridget said, “You’re wrong.” The phrase became her mantra if anyone suggested she couldn’t do something.

Bridget walked in six months – and then she ran. During the 2020 Ride for a Reason, then 8-year-old Bridget pedaled furiously on a stationary bike along with other participants. She raised \$25,000 to add to the event’s \$2.7 million total.

Bridget joined a swim team, went horseback riding and took up golf. At 10, she figured out how to balance to ride her regular pedal bike again. Bridget played two seasons of basketball before deciding she liked volleyball best.

“I want to do whatever everyone else can do,” Bridget said. She works hard to make that possible.

*“If there’s something Bridget can’t do, she finds a workaround. That will serve her well in life.”*

– Cindy Kirk, Bridget’s coach

After volunteering as a counselor-in-training at a volleyball camp from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and then physical therapy, Bridget headed to a two-hour volleyball practice. At a tournament a week later, Bridget dove for balls and delivered powerful serves that gave opposing players little time to get under them.

Coach Cindy Kirk treats Bridget like every other player, meaning she’s tough on her. Bridget made the team because she’s a solid player.

“She belongs here,” Kirk said. “If there’s something Bridget can’t do, she finds a workaround. That will serve her well in life.”

### No hiding it

At 13, Bridget just wants to fit in. “She still just wants to be like all the other girls, but she’s not going to hide from it anymore,” Jamie said.

Bridget first walked in a fashion show to benefit St. Jude in October

2022. She met a model who coached her, and in November 2022, Bridget was invited to walk in a fashion show at the Bentley Scottsdale Polo Championships with dozens of professional models on a 250-yard catwalk before 1,200 attendees.

Bridget loves fashion, but in magazines and advertising, she said, “I don’t see many people who look like me.” For kids like her,

Bridget said, “I hope they see me and think, ‘If she’s doing that, I can do that.’ I hope they don’t let anything hold them back.”

Bridget has realized, “I can’t blend in anywhere,” so she may as well stand out.

Bridget still ignores the stares and lets her mom answer people’s questions, though when a young girl at volleyball camp asked what happened, Bridget jokingly told her she got bitten by a shark.

Prosthetic legs like Bridget’s can cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 and are typically only partially covered by private insurance. She has two, one for walking and one with a blade for sports, both provided by St. Jude.

Her prosthetist used spare components to make Bridget a prosthesis for swimming with stainless steel parts that don’t rust and a perforated foot that

drains water. A nonprofit also gifted Bridget a prosthetic foot with an adjustable ankle so she can wear high heels like other girls. It screws into the metal pylon on her walking leg and locks into place.

Bridget wears her prosthesis all the time except when sleeping. “It’s a part of me,” she said. Sometimes she even forgets about it.

At her brother’s basketball game, Bridget overheard a teenager say, “That must be Brennan’s sister.” She told her mom, “Brennan must talk about me a lot.” Jamie reminded her, “Look down.” “Oh, yeah,” Bridget said, laughing.

### Never give up

Bridget wears hearing aids provided by St. Jude and must sit at the front of the classroom to hear her teacher. Her amputated leg doesn’t grow like her other leg, requiring more surgeries. Last year, she had surgery on her left leg to stop its growth so she wouldn’t be any more off kilter. (The femur of her left leg is 2 ½-inches longer than her right.) If she has an injury or ache, she wonders, is the cancer back?

Bridget said, “Cancer sucks.” But cancer taught her a lot, too.

Bridget spoke about those lessons in July at the fifth annual St. Jude New Jersey Golf Classic and Dinner Party, an event her grandparents host. Bridget has attended plenty of St. Jude fundraisers, listening as her mom – who now works as a fundraiser for St. Jude – speaks about their experience. This was the first time Bridget told her own story. She did it because her granddad asked – and because she was ready.

Bridget stood at the podium in high heels, her pink hair bow matching her sparkly pink

prosthesis, and told the 300 attendees, in part:

“I’ve learned that you have to try. You don’t have to be perfect at everything, especially if you enjoy it. Do it anyway.

“I’ve learned to never give up – even if that means finding a different way to accomplish your goals. Practice – and keep practicing.

“I’ve learned I can do anything.”



Join St. Jude in our mission to cure childhood cancer and allow patients like Bridget to achieve their dreams.  
[stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)



# Honoring a LEGACY OF GIVING

In the wake of loss, one Idaho donor makes good on a shared promise.

By **Bethany Horton** - ALSAC

**G**loria Bryngelson is still sorting through the terrible, paperwork-heavy side of becoming a widow.

“It’s like Whac-A-Mole. There’s the finances and all the red tape of the government and everything that you have to deal with,” she said. But of all the tedious work completed in a haze of grief, one task has never felt like a burden – finalizing her estate plan to include a bequest to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital®, just like her beloved husband wanted.

Gloria’s husband, Larry, lived an extraordinary life. His early years were spent in more than a dozen foster homes, often going without basic needs, including healthcare. His first pair of new shoes were the boots he received at 17, when he enlisted and served three tours in Vietnam. His heroic service earned him a Combat Operations Medal, a Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts.

Always selfless, Larry returned home and began to build a career as a public servant. Settling in San Diego, Gloria and Larry met through work. They married and raised their two independent and generous children to love and give to the people around them. Over the years, their family grew to include four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Cancer became an unwanted companion in their life as the couple lovingly supported three parents through cancer treatment. Gloria, who built a thriving career in child and family services, struggled to navigate healthcare systems devoid of clear protocols and support services for families. She often wondered how families without her unique skills managed to find the help they needed.

When Larry and Gloria retired, they moved to Idaho and reconnected with their friend, Charlie, who had also relocated from San Diego. Happily putting down roots and enjoying the closeness of their dear friend again, they never expected another brush with cancer. At only 13 years old, Charlie’s young son developed brain cancer. Though treatment was long and difficult, he survived. “After that, we wanted

“  
**St. Jude was (my husband’s) choice for legacy – and I’m honoring that. I’m making it my legacy as well.**

– Gloria Bryngelson,  
St. Jude donor

to support cancer research,” Gloria said. “He’s 34 now, cancer free for over 20 years. They were fortunate, and I want the same results for everyone.”

Gloria and Larry became familiar with St. Jude as Charlie’s son recovered. Although Charlie was not a St. Jude patient, his diagnosis caused Gloria and Larry to want to give to research. They bought tickets to a local St. Jude Dream Home®, made extra donations around the holidays and watched how, little by little, St. Jude has helped increase the overall survival rate for childhood cancer.

“One of the things that Larry and I both valued about St. Jude

is how they share their research,” she said. “The fact that St. Jude does the research and shares it means that they’re advancing the cure for everyone. And that’s really important.”

In 2019, Gloria and Larry were enjoying retirement and began having conversations about more ways they could give to others. Then, Larry was diagnosed with cancer. Then another cancer. Then another. He had been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam and as they built their beautiful life, cancer had silently waited in the shadows.

Throughout treatment, Gloria and Larry sorted through records and their history of giving. They

realized most of their philanthropic efforts were directed to cancer charities. “We felt strongly that we wanted our legacy to be based on best practices, which St. Jude has. We wanted it to be research based. And it was really important to us to continue our giving to St. Jude because we really thought it was a proven organization. So, that’s when we started to dig deeper and started to think more strategically about how we wanted to structure and focus our giving,” Gloria said.

As the couple began making estate plans, Larry’s worsening health added an urgency. “One of the things that you do when you’re staring death in the face is talk

about your legacy and how to make your life’s work extend beyond your death,” Gloria said.

In fall 2023, Larry, who was a Navy corpsman, a police officer, an attorney, an advocate, a father and a husband, passed away. Now a widow, Gloria doesn’t know what a life without Larry will look like. “I will probably spend time at the V.A., possibly reading to hospice patients. We have cancer centers in Boise, and I may start volunteering. I don’t know. It’s too early for me to tell,” she said.

But there was one thing Gloria knew she needed to do. Just months after the greatest loss of her life, she packed a suitcase and traveled to St. Jude with her dear friend Charlie. In a remaining act of love, she toured the place that meant so much to Larry and saw where her name is etched next to his on the Legacy Wall.

“Raising our children was the greatest joy of our life,” Gloria said. “Family has always been our priority. That joy has shaped our legacy. We want other families to be healthy and whole and to feel the love and joy we have shared with ours.

“St. Jude was Larry’s choice for legacy – and I’m honoring that. I’m making it my legacy as well.”



Join donors like Gloria and Larry, and help advance cures for pediatric cancer and other life-threatening diseases.  
[stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)



# QUEST for a CURE

Losing a childhood friend to cancer brought Dr. Elizabeth Stewart to St. Jude, where she studies high-risk, hard-to-treat solid tumors.

**E**lizabeth Stewart, MD, is a pediatric hematologist-oncologist and Associate Member at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® in the Solid Tumor Division of the Department in Oncology.

She splits her time between treating children with solid tumors in the clinic and doing research in her lab that focuses on the recurrence of pediatric solid tumors, which tend to be aggressive. Her lab harnesses the power of advanced disease modeling to better understand the cellular and molecular mechanisms that explain why some tumors are hard to treat and return. Here's what she had to share about the impact and scope of her work and role at St. Jude.

**Q: What brought you to St. Jude?**

A: For me, being able to work at St. Jude is much more than a job. For me, it's personal. When I was a child, one of my best friends in grade school was a patient at St. Jude. He used to talk about his relationships with his doctors and nurses and how much he loved going to the hospital to interact with them. He just loved his care team so much, and it was his dream to be able to come back to St. Jude and be a doctor.

Unfortunately, when he was in seventh grade, he relapsed from leukemia and never got that chance. While St. Jude

gave us more time with him, unfortunately he passed away. And somehow that dream that he had to come to St. Jude, sort of morphed into mine. And I thought, "Wouldn't it be cool if I could come back and sort of live out his dream?"

I got the opportunity to come to St. Jude and be a physician in 2010. I carry my friend's memory and his hopes and dreams with me every day. When I walk through the doors of St. Jude, he is my motivation. His friends that went through treatment with him are my motivation. The patients that I see every day in clinic are my motivation, and we're not going to stop until every single one of them gets a chance for a cure.

**Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the work you do in solid tumor research?**

A: I have a unique job at St. Jude where I get to spend part of my time taking care of patients in our solid tumor clinic and then part of my time in a research lab working to come up with new therapies for those very same patients. We're working hard to try to better understand some of these high-risk solid tumors.

We're really trying to find ways to design new combinations of therapies that are not only going to treat these cancers better, but hopefully also come up with treatments that are going to be less toxic.

**Q: What is a solid tumor?**

A: Solid tumors are really any sort of solid mass that occurs outside of the brain. When you think of the different types of pediatric cancers, you probably know about liquid cancers like leukemias that are in the bloodstream. You might know about brain tumors which are masses inside the brain. But solid tumors represent a spectrum of disease, which could be muscle tumors, bone tumors or any sort of solid mass that happens outside of the brain.

**Q: What specific cancers do you work with, and can you describe the work you're doing to improve survival rates?**

A: My expertise is in sarcomas and particularly patients who have high-risk disease. These are cancers that have either spread to other parts of the body or high-risk cancers in which patients have gone through therapy once and then unfortunately their cancer has returned. Those cancers are harder to treat.

I work with cancers such as rhabdomyosarcoma, Ewing sarcoma, osteosarcoma and a whole spectrum of other solid cancers that happen within the body.

For patients who have relapsed disease – where their cancer has returned – our survival rates are not nearly good enough. We're working diligently in the research lab to better understand the makeup of these tumor cells and to understand why some tumor cells respond to therapy and why others don't. Unfortunately, it's those tumor cells that don't respond to therapy, that stay in the body and lead to recurrent disease and end up taking the lives of some of our patients. So, we're digging deep and trying to understand the vulnerabilities of those particular cancer cells that are left behind so that we can come up with new therapies and new combinations of therapies that we

think are going to be better for these patients and ultimately, improve those survival rates.

We're not going to stop until every single patient has got hope for a cure. And it's not just patients that are here at St. Jude. It's every child, everywhere.

**Q: Can you think of a St. Jude story or moment that really sticks out in your mind?**

A: Within my research lab, we came up with a new therapy for patients with Ewing sarcoma who had relapsed that we were able to move forward into clinical trials.

We worked on this, going back and forth, from clinic to the lab and back again to constantly perfect the drugs that we're putting together to help improve the cure rates for these patients. And sure enough, we began to see positive responses in patients. When you have something you discovered in a lab that is yielding such positive responses, it's just a priceless moment.

To have all that hard work by all of the clinical and laboratory teams actually work out is an amazing feeling that you can never recreate. I always said, if I could help just one patient, that it would be enough. Once you've helped one, you want to continue to help more. So, every single day when I'm walking into the research lab, I think of those patients that are on the receiving end of our hard work in the lab. I use that as motivation. It's not enough for us to stop when we've made progress, because our work is not done.

**Q: You are known as a physician scientist, so what you do in clinic informs what you do in a lab and then back again. Talk to us a little bit about that and what makes St. Jude unique with that.**

A: Being a physician scientist gives me a unique perspective. Because



of my time in clinic, I understand what it's like for these kids that are going through therapy. I understand the side effects that they have. I understand the challenges of taking care of some of these patients and the diseases that are hard to treat. And I take all that information with me back to the research lab, and I use it as motivation to develop better, hopefully less toxic therapies.

**Q: How long does it take to go from the work you're doing in the lab to taking it to the bedside to work with patients?**

A: When working in the research lab, we're searching diligently to come up with new therapies, and it's our goal to cut down on the amount of time it takes to get those therapies to the patients who need them the most. Sometimes, because of the resources that we have from grants and generous donors, we are able to propel these treatments forward faster. As soon as we find something that we think is going to be better or less toxic for these patients, we move that forward as soon as possible, sometimes even within a matter of months.

**Q: How do donors and supporters help you do the work you're able to do?**

A: The support that we get from our donors to St. Jude means everything. I would not have the tools and resources I need to effectively do my job without the support of every single person that's giving to this institution. I've been a

fundraiser myself. I've been a St. Jude supporter. I know what it takes and it's a lot of hard work and it's a lot of dedication.

You make cures happen by your support of St. Jude. You are making it so that the next family that walks through the doors here at our hospital is going to have that hope.



Your gift helps researchers like Dr. Stewart continue their lifesaving work. [stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)



# BUILDING A LEGACY



Pioneering Black pharmacist at St. Jude fosters a family legacy of support.

By **Betsy Taylor** - ALSAC

**R**obert Spence Jr.'s life has been a circle, bringing him and his family ever back to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, the place where he launched himself professionally more than 40 years ago.

He's part of its legacy.

Robert had won a place among a small handful of African Americans in his roughly 150-student University of Tennessee pharmacy program.

It was 1980, and despite civil rights progress, opportunities for African Americans were still slow to open. "The university was like most aspects of society – it was a work in progress," Robert recalled.

In Memphis, the St. Jude mission had always loomed large since opening in 1962 to become the South's first integrated children's hospital for both patients and providers – bringing critical help amid stark racial disparities in health and access to care.

A lifelong friend and classmate, Wendall Cheatham, told Robert of an opening. Robert began working as a student pharmacist. He became a full-time employee at St. Jude when he graduated in 1982.

"It was an amazing place," he said, recalling being struck by the urgent and cutting-edge care in a place of equality where families never receive a bill for treatment, travel, housing or food. "There

was an overwhelming sense that we were on a mission, trying to achieve something that hadn't been done."

Each day, Robert prepared chemotherapies for children battling cancer, delivering medicine to doctors and nurses. He met brave young patients, sharing meals with their families and forming lasting friendships that are a defining feature of St. Jude.

"It changes you to be around children who are struggling with life-threatening illness, and they do it with such courage," he said. "I was pretty young. It changed me forever."

Robert left St. Jude, if reluctantly, after feeling called to attend law school. He went on to become a prominent Memphis attorney.

That included serving as city attorney from 1997 to 2004 under six-term Memphis Mayor Willie Herenton. He guided the legal work to bring the Memphis Grizzlies basketball team to town and construct the FedExForum. Later, he became a private trial attorney. He fought for justice in cases ranging from civil rights to personal injuries.

In 2009, St. Jude suddenly returned to Robert's life when his niece, Sabrina, became a St. Jude patient after being diagnosed with a soft tissue cancer called rhabdomyosarcoma.

"Having made the chemotherapy agents, and treated the side effects of those drugs, knowing the success rates... it was an anxiety-filled time," he recalled. "But the support of the medical community was outstanding. I felt good that she was there."

The Spence family, tight-knit and supportive, rallied around Sabrina.

"From the moment I walked into St. Jude," said Emmanuel, Robert's

son, "I was astounded how it didn't feel like a hospital. It felt like family."

Sabrina got better, and today she's working toward her master's degree in creative writing.

Several years later, when a friend told Emmanuel about a job opening at ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude, he didn't hesitate.

"I thought about Sabrina. I thought about the opportunity to raise funds for families like ours. I thought about my father... I thought about a place

**"St. Jude is a calling. It's part of my life journey, and my family's life journey."**

– Robert Spence, former St. Jude pharmacist

that really embraced people from all different backgrounds," he said. "It's not just a pediatric cancer hospital. St. Jude is a part of my family."

Emmanuel has worked at ALSAC for seven years, recently taking on a larger role as the principal advisor of inclusive philanthropy. His work focuses on engaging African American donors.

He oversees the partnerships with Kappa Alpha Psi and Sigma Gamma

Rho, which each made historic commitments of \$2 million in 2024.

Robert, now in his sixties, has also reconnected with St. Jude, helping cultivate African American donors and participating in events, such as Spirit of the Dream and St. Jude Call to Service, that celebrate the hospital's legacy.

When Emmanuel spearheaded the Dr. Rudolph Jackson campaign, helping raise \$2 million to honor the trailblazing sickle cell disease doctor who passed away in 2021, Robert donated and encouraged others to do the same.

The campaign culminated in a laboratory naming ceremony attended by Dr. Jackson's family and Robert, creating a poignant connection between one of the first Black pharmacists and one of the first Black doctors at St. Jude.

"Dr. Jackson paved the way for my father. And now, 40 years after my father, I work for St. Jude," said Emmanuel. Danny Thomas's courageous decision to be inclusive back then still influences so much of what we see today."

After Robert's mother – and Emmanuel's grandmother – passed away from leukemia recently, Robert and his wife made a significant commitment to St. Jude by naming a leukemia research space in the Danny Thomas Research Center in honor of his parents, Alice and Robert Spence Sr.

"St. Jude is a calling. It's part of my life journey, and my family's life journey. We're blessed to be a part of it," Robert said.



Make St. Jude part of your legacy. Choose the planned giving option that is right for you, and your generosity will help children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. [stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)



# About the artist Cameron

Cameron discovered a love for painting while receiving chemotherapy.




Cameron, who goes by Cam, loves nature and animals of all kinds. He is the proud pet parent of a five-foot ball python named Django and aims to be a marine biologist one day. His love of animals extends even to some mythical ones: specifically, dragons.

Cam was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor at 7 years old, and while undergoing treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, he found that painting was something he could do while receiving chemotherapy. He

Painted a whole family of dragons, giving them names like Firoh, Fireball, Earthquake, Magmo and Sola. "This dragon in space is named Luna," he said. "Each of my dragons has a different personality. Luna is powerful and wise."

Cam also made abstract paintings using medical tape, acrylics and watercolors. For in-patient stays at St. Jude, he would bring some of his art and stuffed animals to decorate his hospital room. His dragons were kind of like his protectors.

In 2022, after almost a year of medulloblastoma treatment, Cam went home. He is now 10 years old and thriving.

 Your gift helps allow patients like Cameron to keep creating masterpieces. [stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)

Art by St. Jude patient Mondreas

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## Taking care of Khaz

Khaz was a year old and starting to take steps in 2023 when he began to lose his balance. Soon, he stopped walking altogether.

His parents took him to the hospital, where tests later revealed a brain mass. He was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a brain tumor of the cerebellum.

Khaz underwent surgery to remove the tumor at a local hospital in Mississippi and was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. Khaz's treatment at St. Jude included chemotherapy and a second surgery to resect his tumor. He returned home in January 2024 where he was gradually learning to walk again.

"I feel St. Jude is a place of miracles," his mom Akemi said. "All the nurses know my baby. The therapists know my baby. I feel St. Jude took care of our family, and we only had to worry about Khaz."



You help bring hope and healing to patients like Khaz when you support St. Jude. Did you know many ways to give with non-cash assets – like stocks and IRAs – may present unique opportunities to save on taxes while furthering the St. Jude mission? Donate today at [stjude.org/ImpactGiving](https://stjude.org/ImpactGiving)