

● ST. JUDE

inspire



SPRING 2026

Promising Approach

St. Jude pioneers groundbreaking in-utero treatment for rare neurological disease, improving survival for patients like March



Embracing Kinsley

After chemotherapy took her hair, Kinsley found a new confidence

Swinging back stronger

Dakota's relentless drive powers golf comeback after treatment

Family devotion

St. Jude helps Laylah's family recover after cancer upends life



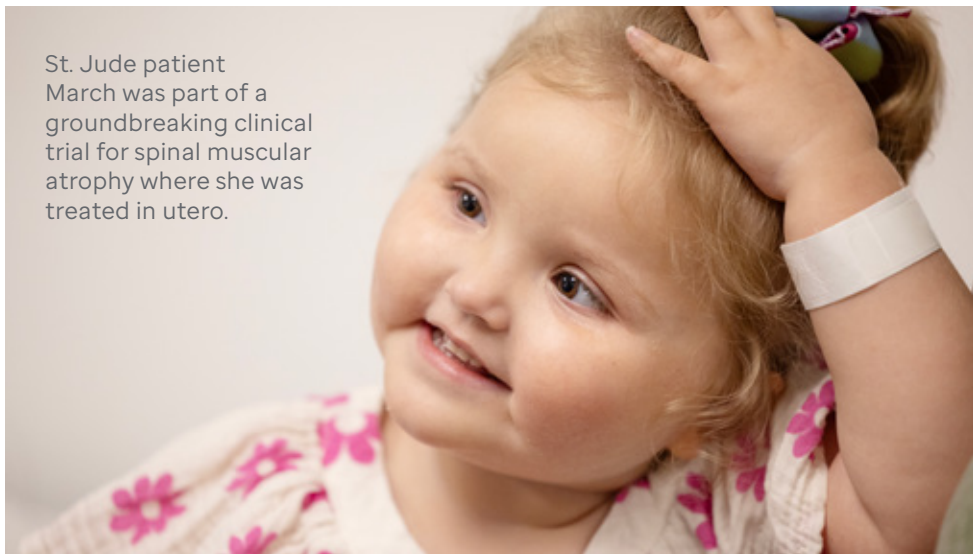
MISSION: HOPE

A new exhibit at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® features Hayley Arceneaux's flight-worn spacesuit – commemorating her journey from childhood cancer survivor to astronaut. Located inside the hospital, the museum-quality display honors Hayley's extraordinary path.

A childhood cancer survivor treated at St. Jude, Hayley is now a physician assistant at St. Jude. In 2021, she served as Mission Specialist and Medical Officer for Inspiration4 on the first all-civilian mission to orbit Earth and was the first person with a prosthetic to travel to space. The mission raised more than \$250 million for St. Jude.

St. Jude honored the mission by naming an eight-story, 625,000-square-foot research facility the Inspiration4 Advanced Research Center – a hub for transformative science and collaboration among more than 1,000 researchers and staff.

The exhibit celebrates Hayley's story and acknowledges the support of Jared Isaacman and the entire Inspiration4 crew, including Sian Proctor, PhD, and Chris Sembroski – reminding patients, families and staff that the sky is not the limit.



St. Jude patient March was part of a groundbreaking clinical trial for spinal muscular atrophy where she was treated in utero.

At St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, we are known worldwide for our work in pediatric cancer. But as you'll see in this issue of St. Jude Inspire, our mission reaches far beyond cancer. In fact, the most defining word in our name is "research."

Our very first grant, awarded in the late 1950s, focused on sickle disease – a blood disorder that affects about 100,000 Americans each year. Today, St. Jude is home to one of the largest and most comprehensive sickle cell disease programs in the country. That's great news for Bailey, an 8-year-old thriving thanks to hydroxyurea, a drug whose use in kids was pioneered here for the treatment of sickle cell disease.

The ripple effect of six decades of research is profound. And your support – whether as a volunteer or donor – fuels the breakthroughs we celebrate. These are discoveries shaping medicine and transforming lives for generations.

Consider the St. Jude Pediatric Translational Neuroscience Initiative (PTNI), launched in 2018 to improve the understanding and treatment of catastrophic neurological disorders. One groundbreaking clinical trial, led by PTNI, tested a new approach for treating spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) – a rare disorder that causes progressive muscle weakness in infants and, if untreated, can be fatal.

March, the patient featured on this issue's cover, received prenatal treatment and is now 3 years old.

Speaking about the development of this prenatal protocol, Paul Taylor, MD, PhD, said it best: "At St. Jude we could see the impact and value of this, and we could move fast."

From cancer to sickle cell disease to neurodegenerative disorders – these stories reflect the multiplier effect of research happening every day, around the clock, at St. Jude.

And we have you to thank. For decades, our supporters have enabled and sustained our mission-driven growth into a global leader in understanding, treating and defeating devastating pediatric diseases.

Like the compassion of our researchers, doctors and caregivers, our gratitude knows no bounds. On behalf of everyone at ALSAC and St. Jude, thank you for believing in our mission – and for helping create a world where every discovery and every scientific leap leads to another child saved.

Ike.

Ike Anand
President and Chief Executive Officer, ALSAC

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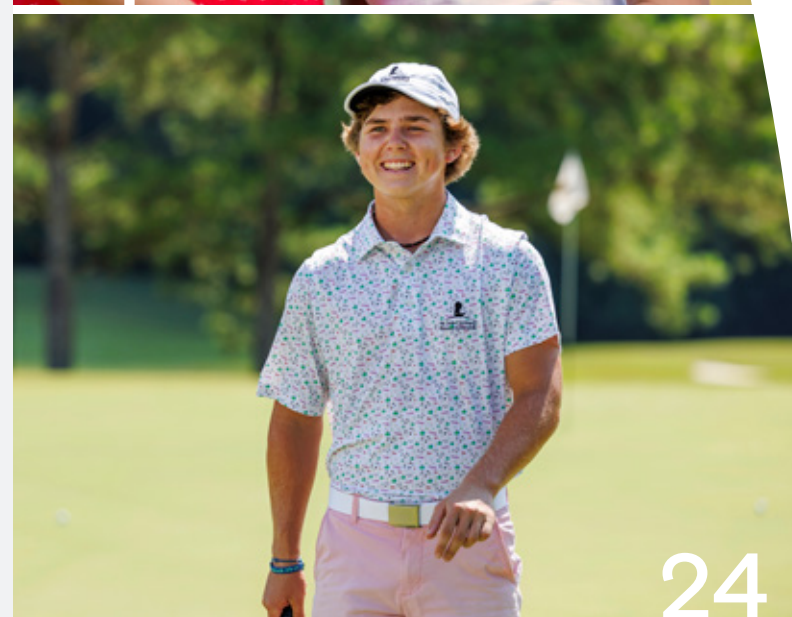
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St. Jude improves quality of life for young sickle cell disease patients like Bailey.



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



Sisterly love & family devotion

After life is turned upside down by cancer, Laylah's family recovers with help of St. Jude.

By **Linda A. Moore** - ALSAC

It didn't matter to Maliyah that she was enrolled in college several hours away from home.

In 2024, when her then-10-year-old sister, Laylah, was diagnosed with cancer, she made a quick and decisive decision. She wasn't going back to school.

Being 11 years apart, the two already missed out on a lot of everyday occurrences: sharing opinions about hair and outfits, complaining about their parents or just making memories.

She refused to let this slip away, too.

"When I found out Laylah was sick, I was at home on summer break," Maliyah said.

She was there when Laylah was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

"It was a life-changing moment for her," Maliyah said. "And if she's going through that, I felt like I should be there for her."

A family just living life

Laylah, usually an active child, had started to limp. Her mom, Shayla, initially thought she had pulled a muscle. Laylah was running through the living room when she bumped her right leg on the coffee table.

After a few days, when the swelling didn't go down, Shayla made an appointment to see an orthopedist.

The night before Laylah's appointment, Shayla and her husband, LaDonn, were not thinking about cancer. They were busy planning a beach vacation to celebrate Maliyah's 21st birthday – and in the middle of a disagreement about which short-term rental to take.

"We were going back and forth on which one I liked, which one he liked and so we just kind of didn't make a decision," Shayla said. "Which was a good thing."

The next day, the orthopedist X-rayed Laylah and identified a mass on her right knee. They were immediately sent to the local children's hospital for an MRI.

Shayla rushed home to get LaDonn, Maliyah, her mother and grandmother – Laylah's grandmother and great-grandmother.

"She's my prayer warrior," Shayla said of her grandmother.

With something not right with Laylah, they needed extra prayer.

By morning, the news came – shattering and swift. The MRI confirmed that Laylah had a mass on her leg consistent with osteosarcoma. She was immediately referred to St. Jude for further evaluation.

It was too much to process. Overwhelmed, Shayla had to leave the room.

She stood quietly, staring out the window at the gray sky as rain came down in sheets.

“It was like a divine intervention. It was pouring down raining,” Shayla recalled. “And it just washed away all my fears. And I went back in the room and said ‘OK, what’s next?’”

St. Jude was next. Within days, Laylah was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, the most common type of bone cancer in children and teenagers.

Laylah’s treatment included chemotherapy and limb-sparing surgeries.

“She’s just so strong,” LaDonn said. “That’s what got us through.”

She didn’t cry, she didn’t complain.

Early on, Shayla said they explained to Laylah that the medicine would sometimes make

her feel bad but was necessary in order for her to get better.

“So, when she didn’t feel good, that was the expectation – that she wasn’t supposed to feel good,” Shayla said.

She did have to warn her mature, curious daughter.

“I was like, ‘OK Laylah, don’t be on the internet looking up anything,’” Shayla said.

Laylah told her mom she just wanted to see what her tumor looked like, what her prosthetic implant looked like.

Laylah was in treatment for nine months.

“You don’t think about it. You just take it one day at a time,” LaDonn said.

They couldn’t have made it without St. Jude, he said.

Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food.

“They took care of everything,” LaDonn said. “So all we had to do was worry about Laylah.”

Sister love

After Laylah’s diagnosis, Maliyah transferred to a college in her hometown in Tennessee to be closer to her little sister.

Their bond is strong, built on a lifetime of love and laughter. But it hadn’t started that way. When Shayla told 10-year-old Maliyah that a “surprise baby” was on the way, big sister wasn’t exactly thrilled.

“She was distraught,” Shayla said with a laugh.

At the time, LaDonn’s sons – now 29 and 26 – were living with their mother, leaving Maliyah as the only child in the house. “So, she was basically the only child,” Shayla said.

But Maliyah got over the shock of the new baby and has loved her sister ever since. And Laylah loves her big sister right back, along with being the youngest in the family.

“I get spoiled,” Laylah said with a grin.

But that’s not the best part of being the baby of the family. “There are a lot of older people looking out for you,” she said.

The sisters were close before cancer. Maliyah being there every day for treatment and surgeries and at home to help prepare meals and share cuddles has made them even closer.

And because Maliyah is Shayla’s “sensitive child,” she took Laylah’s diagnosis harder than the rest of the family.

Still, last year the family took that beach trip and celebrated Maliyah’s birthday.



New normal

After everything – the diagnosis, treatment, days in the hospital – Shayla wanted to keep Laylah close. She works from home and imagined homeschooling her youngest daughter, watching over her every moment, shielding her from anything that might hurt her again.

But Laylah had other plans.

She wanted to go back to school. To be with friends. To get back to things she did before cancer.

She wears a brace on her leg and has surgery scars. Maliyah played

on her college volleyball team and Laylah’s hoping to follow in her sister’s footsteps. It’s a sport they both love.

Shayla knows her daughter’s spirit is unstoppable – but she also knows the reality of recovery. She gently reminds Laylah that some of the things she enjoyed might not be possible anymore, at least not in the same way.

But Laylah sees no limitations.

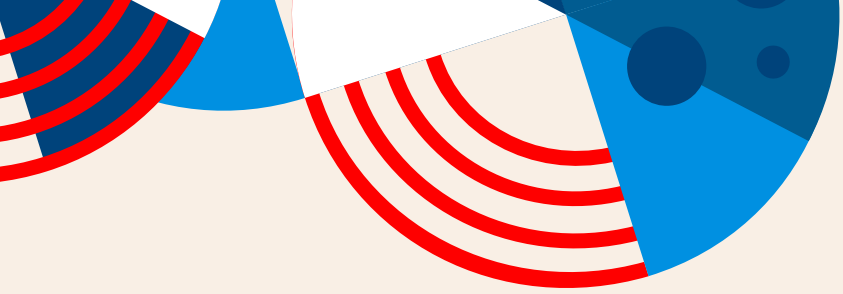
With clearance from her St. Jude physical therapist, she’s already

practicing volleyball training techniques at home.

“This child is not letting her knee slow her down at all,” Shayla said.



You can help ensure patients like Laylah get the chance to enjoy more family moments. stjude.org/ImpactGiving



INSPIRED GIVING

With sense of purpose, Domino's employees deliver for the kids of St. Jude.

By **Zack McMillin** - ALSAC

When curious patients peeked into the Domino's Event Center at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, Danish Dhedhi wowed them with a little pizza magic – tossing dough and spinning pies.

Little did the patients know that the pizza baker befriending them was among the largest Domino's franchise owners in the country. And that the Texas-based owner of more than 60 stores had decided to buy the Domino's location near Downtown Memphis so his team could proudly serve St. Jude families.

"When you wear the Domino's uniform at St. Jude, so many people stop and say thank you," said Dhedhi, whose Domino's journey began as a customer service

representative. "To be with these kids and to know what they are going through, to see them smiling and to talk to them about their lives – you can't help but get inspired."

That grand re-opening of the Domino's Event Center in summer 2025 marked another milestone in Domino's unprecedented support for St. Jude. Growing from an initial \$191,000 in support in 2004, Domino's has generated more than \$165 million in support – thanks in part to leading the way with innovations like asking customers to donate during online checkout and inviting them to round up their purchase total to support St. Jude.

On the pathway to the Domino's Event Center, an engraving reads: *"Those who work for the good are as those who do the good."*

That quote from St. Jude founder Danny Thomas reflects his belief that everyone could contribute to the St. Jude mission – a principle Domino's, the world's No. 1 pizza maker, has embraced.

Domino's has committed to reaching \$300 million in support for St. Jude by 2034, the 30th anniversary of the partnership. A new patient family residence, The Domino's Village, opened in 2023, and the St. Jude campus also includes the Assessment and Triage Clinic Delivered by Domino's.

As Domino's CEO Russell Weiner said, being part of the St. Jude mission adds extra meaning to the Domino's entrepreneurial motto, "Sell more pizza. Have more fun."

"The thing I think about every time I come here," Weiner said, "is that when we sell more pizza, we make a bigger difference here."

In recent years, the partnership has strengthened in new ways, including Domino's bringing franchisee conferences and strategy meetings to the St. Jude campus.

For Casey Barile, a Domino's national marketing director based in Tampa, the connection with St. Jude began in college when she helped her Tri Delta sorority grow St. Jude support. She cherishes a photo taken at her first

St. Jude fundraising event with Domino's at a St. Jude Walk when she was "very pregnant" with her now 11-year-old daughter.

A few years later, Barile's first visit to the St. Jude campus came near the holidays.

"It was just really special to see all the decorations and the positive energy," Barile said. "You know about the care and research, but also then to realize what St. Jude tries to do for these families who may be missing special experiences at home."

Longtime Domino's employee Erick Ortiz, based in New Jersey as East region vice president of franchise business, once counted 14 family members working with the company. He has seen how supporting St. Jude has enhanced Domino's culture and amplified a value he considers essential.

"It gives that sense of purpose and being part of something bigger than ourselves," said Ortiz, who like so many leaders and owners at Domino's got his start



St. Jude patient Faith tries her hand at tossing pizza dough to make the perfect crust during one of Domino's events hosted for St. Jude patients and their families at the Domino's Event Center on the St. Jude campus. Assisting her is franchise owner Danish Dhedhi.

delivering pizzas. “This is about helping save lives, about making an impact on families. I am so proud to be part of a brand with a purpose that transcends business.”

For the colleagues and franchisees who visit, Ortiz said St. Jude becomes much more than a donation button at checkout: “It becomes an experience, and very meaningful to them.”

When Sean Jamieson, an area supervisor, visited with teammates from Washington’s Yakima Valley region, he brought personal insight into the impact childhood cancer has on a family. His nephew survived neuroblastoma after receiving treatment closer to home in Seattle.

“How can you not get behind such a worthwhile cause that changes not just young people’s lives, it changes generations?” said Jamieson, who had a career



You will hear us say we have pizza sauce in our veins. Well, let’s also say we have St. Jude in our hearts.

– **Danish Dhedhi**, *Domino’s franchisee*

in ministry before moving into Domino’s store management. “There’s such a family-style partnership with Domino’s and St. Jude that I didn’t expect to experience outside of my vocational ministry career. If helping kids with these diseases isn’t a ministry, then I don’t know what is.”

On the final day of his St. Jude visit, Jamieson learned that the next event at the Domino’s Event Center

would be the St. Jude Teen Formal. As impressed as he was learning about the lifesaving care and research at St. Jude, Jamieson found it especially moving to witness how Domino’s support helps create joyful experiences for kids on difficult journeys.

“That’s big, to be able to explain the *why* behind the *what*,” Jamieson said. “I know we can’t take everybody to St. Jude, but I can share what I learned, what I saw firsthand.”

Dhedhi, the owner of the franchise nearest to St. Jude who had entertained patients with the “dough show,” said that for many of the “Dominoids,” as employees often refer to themselves, the connection to a larger mission runs deep.

“You will hear us say we have pizza sauce in our veins,” Dhedhi said. “Well, let’s also say we have St. Jude in our hearts.”



Your donation helps support the lifesaving work St. Jude is doing to help kids with cancer around the world. stjude.org/ImpactGiving



Domino’s and ALSAC leaders cut the ribbon recently on the newly renovated Domino’s Event Center after Domino’s committed to raise a total of \$300 million for St. Jude by 2034. The event center hosts a wide range of functions including the St. Jude Teen Formal and St. Jude High School Graduation.

Best Friends for LIFE

Romeo got his dream dog – then came a nightmarish diagnosis.

By **Kelly Cox** - ALSAC

Romeo wanted a dog and nothing else would do.

There was some resistance. His dad, Juan, was not a fan of dogs in the home. But Romeo prevailed. And this was lucky according to Romeo, who believes the dog he begged for, now named George, played a role in saving his life.

Normally, Romeo would have slept in that weekend morning in 2024, but it was time to pick up his new best friend. On the drive, Romeo alarmed his mom with staring spells and trouble speaking: symptoms of what was found to be a brain tumor later the same day.

Following two surgeries to diagnose

perspective,” said Romeo’s mom, Allison. “I’ve learned to look at things as, my glass is half full. It’s not half empty, because we caught everything in time.”

Romeo’s treatment at St. Jude included six weeks of proton beam radiotherapy. Throughout his treatment, Romeo couldn’t wait to get home to his puppy and asked about him all the time.

Now, Romeo has returned home, where George greets him ready to play every day after school. Seeing how happy his son is, Juan has altered his stance on dogs. “Now I feel like he’s part of the family, too.” Romeo and George are growing up together. “He’s probably almost older than me now,” said Romeo. “In dog years.”

and remove the tumor, Romeo was referred to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital®, where he was treated for a form of brain cancer called ependymoma.

“When you first hear that your child has a diagnosis like this, it puts everything in



PROMISING APPROACH

St. Jude is improving the understanding and care for rare neurological diseases – helping patients like March.

By **Ruma Kumar** - ALSAC

March was colicky and screamed her first three months of life. But her parents, Wes and Kelly, were thrilled.

“I mean, her ab muscles were working overtime,” Kelly said with a laugh.

March was strong enough to cry loudly.

It was a reassuring sign that she wasn't showing symptoms of spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a rare neurodegenerative disorder

that causes progressive muscular weakness in infants. Spinal muscular atrophy is caused by a lack of survival motor neuron protein and occurs in around 1 in every 11,000 births in the United States.

March, who was diagnosed with SMA when Kelly was 20 weeks pregnant, was the only patient in a groundbreaking clinical trial led by St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® that explored treating SMA in utero with the orally administered drug risdiplam. This clinical trial, which now serves as a beacon of hope for other families, grew out of the family's own heartbreaking history with SMA.

'No hope they could give'

When Wes and Kelly started their family, “it was all like a Norman Rockwell painting,” Wes said. They had a new home with a picket fence in a nice subdivision and had no trouble conceiving. The pregnancy was smooth.

They had their first child, a son named Graham, who was a robust little boy with Wes' cheeks and Kelly's eyes. Everything seemed to be going well until they noticed signs of weakness at 4 months old. Graham didn't roll over as he should. By the time he was 6 months old, he had trouble holding his head up and sometimes had trouble swallowing. They received his SMA type 1 (SMA-1) diagnosis at his six-month checkup, when their pediatrician sent them to neurologists at their hometown hospital.

“They told us there was nothing they could do, no hope they could give,” Wes said. “They did have clinical trials that were running, but there were age cut-offs, and we'd gone past those, so we left that appointment that day in hospice care.”

SMA-1. They'd never heard of it. And they hadn't known that each of them carried genetic traits that increased the chances of their

biological children having the debilitating disease.

SMA-1 is the most common and severe form of the disease. Left untreated, it results in progressive muscle weakness that leads to death typically before the 2nd birthday.

Kelly stayed home with Graham, caring for him as he began to lose the ability to cough and swallow, and hooking him up to breathing machines when he began to lose the ability to breathe on his own. After the diagnosis, they had 10 months with him until he passed away in August 2016.

“I wish this wasn't my story. I wish I didn't know what SMA was. But since it is, I feel like we have to tell it, we have to let people know,” Kelly said.

Losing Graham left them so bereft they relied on family and faith to get through, and the online SMA community of friends, some of whom they'd never met, but who understood their grief in a way few others could.

New possibilities

The couple adopted twins two years later. They'd done enough reading on the genetic impact

The groundbreaking clinical trial at St. Jude that included treating March in utero grew out of her family's heartbreaking history with spinal muscular atrophy.



their combined traits would have on biological children, so they felt it was safer to adopt.

Wes and Kelly were gradually building the kind of happy, full family life they'd dreamed of. The twins turned 4, and their lives were busy with preschool, playdates, church and family. Kelly remained active in online SMA groups and began seeing more posts about promising treatments and improving research. She felt encouraged by families posting photos of children meeting milestones at 5 years old, living, even thriving, with a disease that used to take lives before the age of 2. Kelly started to wonder if they should try having another baby. Soon, she was pregnant with March.

Because of their family history with SMA, Kelly had an amniocentesis test done at 20 weeks which confirmed her baby had SMA-1.

Kelly said she used her experience of caring for Graham as inspiration to pursue every possible avenue

of therapy for March. She found the answer in the online SMA community, where Dr. Richard Finkel's name appeared as an empathetic caregiver who'd spent decades caring for children with catastrophic neurological diseases.

"If you're going to get one man's opinion, it's Dr. Finkel's. We knew that he was the expert," Kelly said.

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This has opened up a new era for treatment, so that we can prevent the long-term consequences of these genetic mutations before they even start.

– **J. Paul Taylor, MD, PhD,**
*St. Jude Executive Vice President,
Scientific Director and
Director of the Pediatric
Translational Neuroscience
Initiative (PTNI) (pictured left)*

Finkel had been working at St. Jude for only one year when Kelly reached out to him.

Kelly said Finkel scheduled a video call where they discussed the latest treatments and their pros and cons. He explained that approved treatments for SMA-1 are not cures but they improve survival and motor function in infants, and the outcomes tended to be better the earlier the child started taking the medicine. Babies with SMA-1 typically have symptoms that begin at birth or in the first 6 months of life and left untreated, the disease progressively worsens over time with further breakdown of neurons (the body's signal pathways).

Ultimately, Finkel suggested trying risdiplam, a drug that had been effectively used in infants, and he suggested starting treatment during the prenatal period because emerging research showed it might be effective in utero.

Richard Finkel, MD, Director of the Center for Experimental Neurotherapeutics



"We were ready and really wanted the opportunity to try something that could help," Wes said. Kelly took risdiplam during her third trimester, and March continued to take the drug after she was born.

The approach seemed to pay off: when March was evaluated at 18 months, she had no identifiable features of SMA. From that time she has continued treatment with risdiplam and also received another approved SMA therapy. She is now 3 years old and still has no symptoms of SMA. She feeds herself, plays with toys and loves tickling her twin big sisters, Pippa and Hogan.

"This has opened up a new era for treatment, so that we can prevent the long-term consequences of

these genetic mutations before they even start. It is incredible," said J. Paul Taylor, MD, PhD, Executive Vice President/Scientific Director and Director of the St. Jude Pediatric Translational Neuroscience Initiative (PTNI).

Taylor said there were a lot of people at St. Jude involved in coordinating all the logistics for this to happen, including managing the high-risk pregnancy care for the mother and working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the pharmaceutical company to allow the prenatal use of the medicine. St. Jude was able to quickly marshal these resources because of generous donations, Taylor said, that allow the kind of staffing, collaborations and influence that can propel research

forward. "You know, it wouldn't have happened without St. Jude ... we could see the impact and value of this, and we could move fast."

Hope for more families

The couple was among the first families to be part of the research conducted by the St. Jude Center for Experimental Neurotherapeutics (CENT). CENT, which is led by Finkel, is the clinical research arm of PTNI.

PTNI was launched in 2018 to improve the understanding and treatment of catastrophic neurological disorders in children. Many of these diseases are driven by a single gene mutation. While scientists are uncovering the molecular roots for these neurological disorders, unlike

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One of the things that caught my attention when I was being recruited to come to St. Jude was what Danny Thomas is famous for saying, that ‘no child should die in the dawn of life’.

– **Richard Finkel, MD**, Director of the Center for Experimental Neurotherapeutics

SMA-1, most still lack any effective treatments. Finkel sees an opportunity to accelerate the development of novel therapies for seriously ill children.

“St. Jude is well known for its research in cancer, so it had all the infrastructure. It had everything I needed, all the building blocks to be able to use as resources, as I build out our neuroscience program,” Finkel said.

PTNI is a collaborative ecosystem that drives basic research on the underlying causes of catastrophic pediatric neurological diseases, facilitates the rapid clinical development of promising treatments for those diseases and pursues the collaborations and advocacy necessary for those novel therapies to reach patients.

“One of the things that caught my attention when I was being recruited to come to St. Jude was what Danny Thomas is famous for

saying, that ‘no child should die in the dawn of life,’” Finkel said. “To be able to take that view I think is really something very very special ... particularly when dealing with children with catastrophic diseases, many of whom have no treatment and aren’t going to get into the adult years unless we identify a drug, try to develop it and hopefully help them.”

Finkel tapped into that mission to help Wes, Kelly and March.

Looking back, Wes and Kelly said they’re grateful for their experience at St. Jude.

“We’re starting to see how our journey has helped other people,” Wes said. “It’s like St. Jude has been great at kicking cancer’s butt. If they can start to do for these neurological disorders what they’ve done for cancer, then we’re just at the beginning of some really exciting times and saving a lot more kids’ lives.”



St. Jude patient **Valentina**, pictured with her mom



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more
moments*

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**St. Jude Children’s
Research Hospital**
Finding cures. Saving children.



EMBRACING KINSLEY

After chemotherapy caused Kinsley's hair to fall out, she discovered a new confidence.

By **Karina Bland** - ALSAC

Five-year-old Kinsley's braids clung to her head by just a few strands of hair, and she was ready.

Child life specialists at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® had gently explained everything about her cancer treatment in words the newly graduated kindergartener could understand, including that chemotherapy might make her hair fall out.

"Daddy's going to cut his hair with you," her dad, Julian, told Kinsley. Her mom, Kimberly, offered to do the same, but Julian teased that it wouldn't be a good look for her.

He sat in a folding chair to let Kinsley

shave his head first, turning a tough moment for her parents into a fun one for Kinsley. "I told her dad's hair might not grow back," Julian said. They promised that hers would.

Then it was Kinsley's turn. "It was hard in the moment," Julian said. Her diagnosis in May 2023 of T-cell acute lymphoblastic lymphoma, a cancer of the lymph nodes that usually forms in the area between the lungs, shattered her parents. It was unbelievable that their bubbly, bouncy child could be so sick. Other moments followed that brought more heartache. Surgery to place a medical port in her chest. The harsh side effects of chemotherapy.

Six weeks into her treatment, this was one of those moments. "It was the realization that this is really happening," Julian said. He'd teared up as he carefully shaved his daughter's head but didn't let



“

She gave me most of my strength from day to day. We didn't really have time to be sad. Her spirit would take your mind off what was going on.

– Kimberly, Kinsley's mom

Kinsley see. Afterward, Kimberly asked Kinsley, “How do you feel?” “Awesome!” Kinsley said.

Kimberly crocheted a hat for Kinsley adorned with long brown yarn braids. Kinsley wore it everywhere, an armor of sorts against curious stares and questions. The hat somehow made her brave.

‘A lot to process’

In the weeks before Memorial Day weekend 2023, Kinsley wasn't her usual energetic self – just slightly off, nothing that caused any alarm. A cough that the pediatrician thought was likely allergies. A laid-back Kinsley on their family vacation. An outing to the movies with friends Kinsley loved spending time with cut short because she wanted her mom.

Julian, a registered nurse, noticed Kinsley's breathing was labored and, with his pulse oximeter, that her heart rate was high. The family rushed from their Tennessee home to the hospital, where an X-ray and then a CT scan revealed a mass in Kinsley's chest, as well as the buildup of fluid making it hard for her to breathe. Tests on fluid drained from the mass indicated T-cell acute lymphoblastic lymphoma, and she was referred to St. Jude for treatment.

Kimberly couldn't take it all in. To her, all the medical talk sounded like the wah-wah voice of the teacher in those Charlie Brown shows.

“I was just in caretaker mode,” she said, watching over her little girl. Julian is a dad first, but he had to go into

nurse mode. “I was just trying to wrap my brain around it,” Julian said. With Kimberly so emotional, he tamped down his feelings to take notes and ask questions. “It was a lot to process,” he said.

Because Kinsley was too young to know what was at stake, she was adorably upbeat. “That's probably what kept us strong, her upbeat attitude,” Julian said. “We really had no choice but to be the same way.” Kinsley still wanted to play, painting pictures, sewing and driving remote-controlled cars down the hallways. They put on music and danced.

For sure, Kimberly and Julian had tough moments, worried, afraid and sending up prayers, but they took their cues from Kinsley. “She gave me most of my strength from day to day,” Kimberly said. “We didn't really have time to be sad. Her spirit would take your mind off what was going on.”

‘Braver than you believe’

A few weeks later, Kinsley got to go home. The family lives close enough to return to St. Jude for treatment twice a week. Taking Kinsley home gave Kimberly and Julian hope. Not every family gets to do that. So, they still danced each time Kinsley went back for chemotherapy, her yarn braids flying as she twirled.

Kinsley was homeschooled for the first half of first grade, pulling on her hat when the teacher came to their house twice a week. When Kinsley returned to school after Christmas break, she wore the hat, no matter the weather.

Kinsley felt empowered in her hat, confident, even when she got teased.

When Kinsley was invited to share a quote over the school's intercom during morning announcements, she chose what Christopher Robin famously told his friend Winnie the Pooh in the 1997 film, “Pooh's Grand Adventure”: “You are braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

That summer after first grade, Kinsley would take off her hat at camp but only to go swimming. She tentatively handed her hat over at a friend's birthday to play on a splash pad but put it back on as soon as she came out of the water.

Even as Kinsley's hair grew back, she insisted on wearing the hat. “It is her security blanket,” Julian said, a layer of protection between her and the world. “It's comfort for her,” Kimberly said.

Her parents encouraged her to go without it when they went together to public places, out for dinner or to the movies, and she would. But no way would she go to school without her hat.

“You're not ready?” Kimberly asked. No, Kinsley told her, not yet.

No more chemo

Kinsley is 8 now, back to her bouncy self. She finished chemotherapy treatment in January with a No More Chemo party, a tradition at St. Jude. She returns regularly for checkups.

She started swimming and track. (Her mom's a runner, twice running the 10k in the St. Jude Memphis Marathon® Weekend, raising more than \$11,000 for St. Jude.)

She's in third grade. Recess and math are her favorite parts of the school day.

On the Monday morning after spring break in March 2025, Kinsley frantically searched the house before school but couldn't find her hat. Julian helped her look with an eye





That's probably what kept us strong, her upbeat attitude. We really had no choice but to be the same way.

– Julian, Kinsley's dad

on the time. They would have to leave without the hat.

"I need you to remember this," Julian said, repeating the quote Kinsley recited on the school intercom for the morning announcements in first grade.

Arriving at school, a staff member noticed Kinsley wasn't wearing her hat and said, "Oh, I like your hair!" Kinsley beamed.

When Julian picked up Kinsley that afternoon, she was all smiles. "Guess what, Daddy?" she said. "Everybody liked my hair!"

Kinsley has left the hat at home ever since. "She's ditched the hat and hasn't looked back," Kimberly said.

Kinsley was ready.



Your gift helps patients like Kinsley have a chance to embrace their inner strength.
stjude.org/ImpactGiving



When Tyler was a little kid, he had leukemia. He was in so much pain he couldn't walk.

Now Tyler runs marathons.



Listen to Tyler share his story on *St. Jude Storied Lives*, the award-winning podcast hosted by St. Jude cancer survivor Joel Alsup.

stjude.org/tyler

St. Jude
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Podcast



Swinging back Stronger

Dakota's relentless drive powers return to golf after treatment at St. Jude.

By **Betsy Taylor** - ALSAC

It's 4:30 a.m., and Dakota is already in motion – stretching and rehearsing the rhythm of a game that demands skill and stamina. Each tournament day is a 6½-mile walk. He warms up. Plays five hours. Then practices more.

This is the life of a Division I golfer. But Dakota's journey to college athletics didn't start on a fairway. It started at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

At 11, Dakota was unstoppable – soccer player, snowboarder, black belt in Taekwondo.

Then, he started to have swelling in the lymph nodes around his neck and a sore throat. His primary care physician suspected an infection and prescribed antibiotics. The swelling improved temporarily. Then in the middle of a soccer match, Dakota's neck just seemed to vanish – with swelling so intense his jawline ran straight into his shoulders without a taper to indicate where a neck should be. "It happened that fast," Dakota said.

Scans at his local hospital revealed the swollen lymph nodes were compressing his trachea. Dakota was breathing through a space

as narrow as a coffee stir stick. He was referred to St. Jude for more testing.

His father, Steve, spiraled, repeating to Dakota's mom, Trish, "I need a diagnosis. I just need a plan."

The diagnosis was acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). The plan: Dakota would be treated with two-and-a-half years of chemotherapy on Total Therapy Study 17, a clinical trial protocol based on each patient's DNA analysis and built on a foundation of more than five decades of St. Jude clinical trials treating ALL. Steve recalls the moment Dakota's doctor laid it out. "OK," he thought, "I don't have to worry about this anymore. He's got it."

But the road through treatment to recovery was hard. Dakota lost more than 15% of his body weight. He experienced chronic back pain, pancreatitis and symptoms of peripheral neuropathy such as foot drop, a difficulty in lifting the front part of the feet.

Golf became his way back. "I used golf as my physical therapy," Dakota said. "It rebuilt me."

“

Without St. Jude, we wouldn't be standing here talking about Dakota going to a D1 college playing golf.

– Steve, Dakota's dad

Near the end of treatment, at 14, Dakota told his dad that he wanted to play D1 golf. Division 1 golf – the highest level of collegiate golf. Steve, a former mini-tour player in golf's regional circuits, didn't hesitate.

He hired a trainer and Dakota worked with St. Jude physical therapists. His golf game improved.

Then it happened: The coach at the University of Louisiana at Monroe called. He hadn't seen Dakota play and didn't know about the cancer. But he'd seen the stats.

Dakota had his full ride.

"Without St. Jude," Steve said, "we wouldn't be standing here talking about Dakota going to a D1 college playing golf."

St. Jude had a plan built on decades of research. And Steve has always appreciated a good plan.

"Without St. Jude, do you honestly think he'd be able to walk 6½ miles on tournament day, wake up at 4:30 a.m., warm up for an hour, play five hours and practice again?"

Next to him, Dakota answers quietly: "No."

Steve nods.

"But he does."



Your gift gives pediatric cancer survivors like Dakota a chance to excel – on the golf course and in life.
stjude.org/ImpactGiving



Meet the Artist: *Hazelle*

Hazelle was about 8 years old when she sat down at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® to draw a creature from mythology. She did a lot of art at St. Jude, attending the frequent art-making pop-ups, often with a theme, that gave kids a place to spend some time between appointments. Hazelle was referred to St. Jude for treatment of rhabdomyosarcoma, a soft-tissue cancer that presented in the orbit of her left eye.

"It's good to get those creative juices flowing. It's a good way to get feelings out," said Hazelle, now almost 18. "Even if it's just scribbling, it can be an outlet to release stress."

Captivated by stories of Hercules and ancient beasts, 8-year-old Hazelle began sketching a monster with three heads. It was meant to be a hydra, but the piece evolved – first into something she wasn't satisfied with, and then, after starting over, into something that simply felt right.

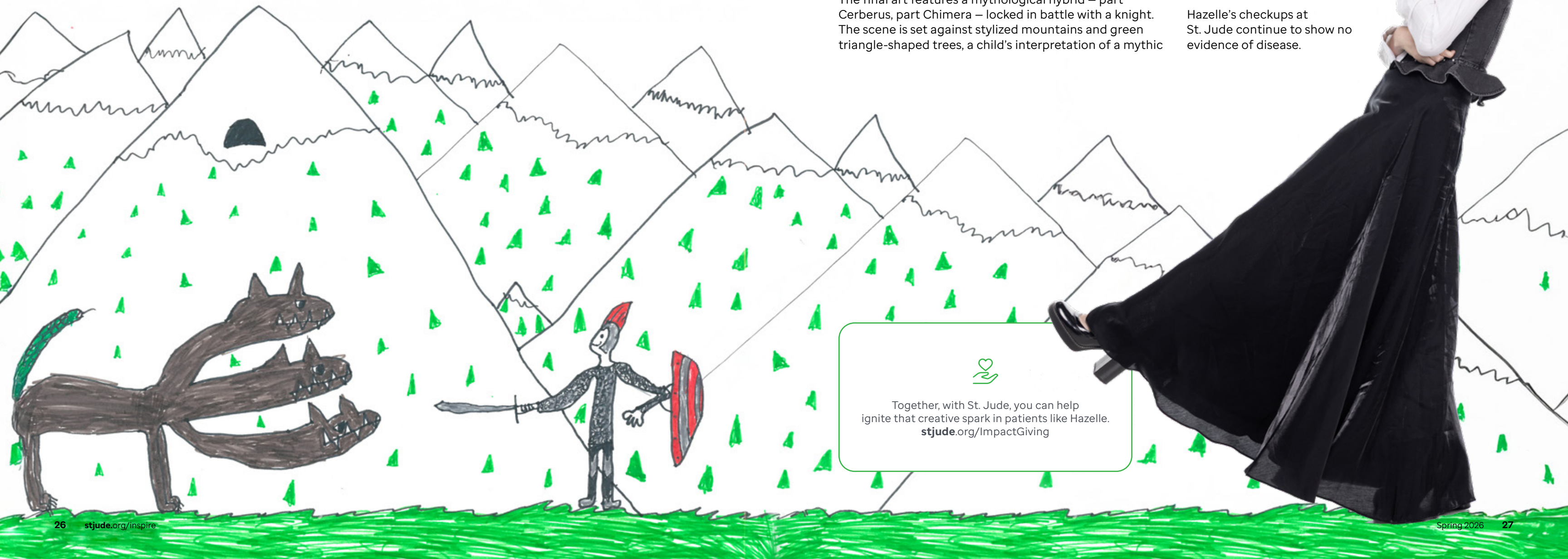
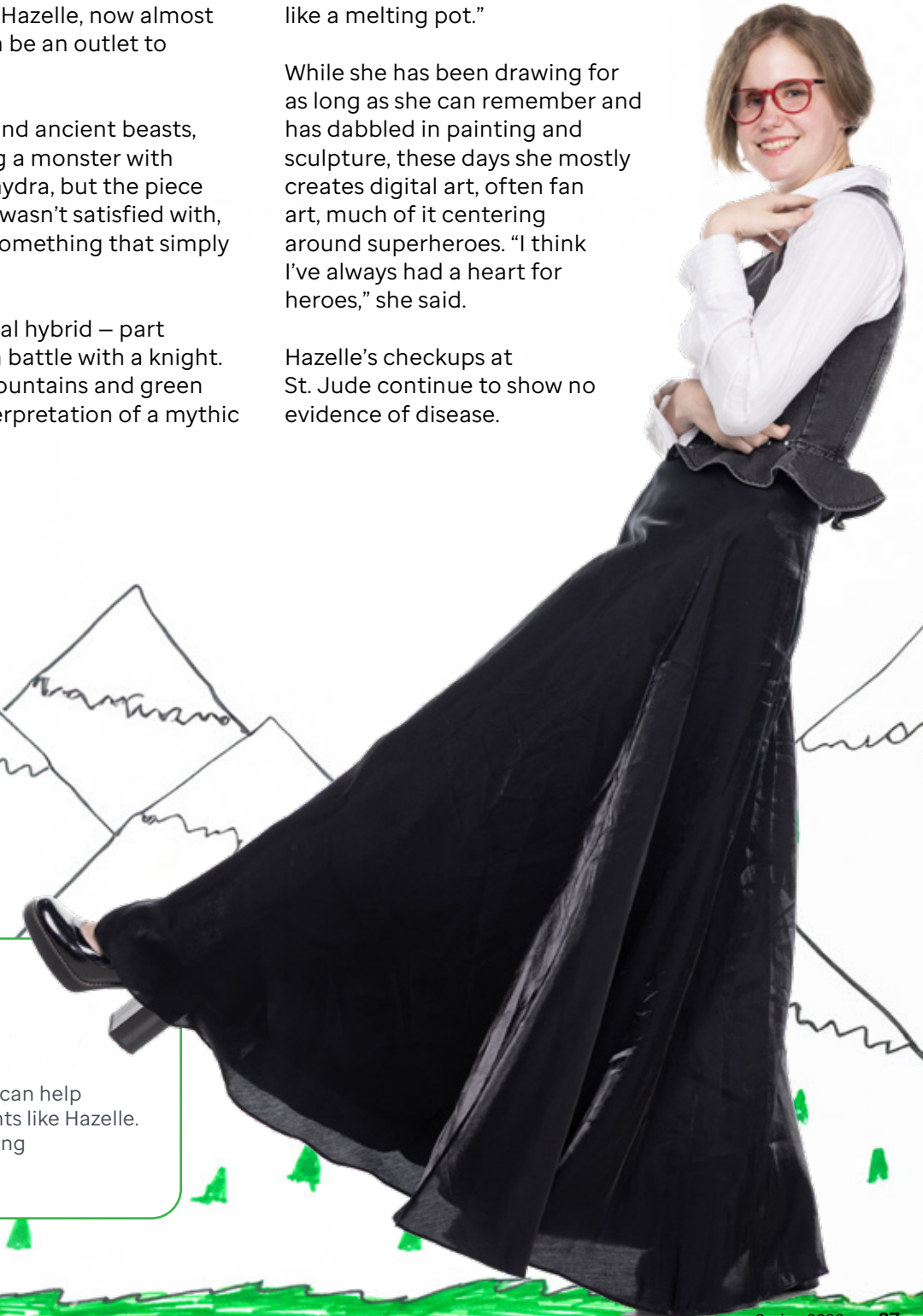
The final art features a mythological hybrid – part Cerberus, part Chimera – locked in battle with a knight. The scene is set against stylized mountains and green triangle-shaped trees, a child's interpretation of a mythic

landscape. She doesn't remember exactly why she was happier with this version, only that it felt more like the story she wanted to tell.

The hero knight perhaps reflects Hazelle's enduring love of both ancient legends and modern superheroes. She is a fan of history, Shakespeare's plays and comic books. "You're kind of just blending these influences that you have, these things that you see," Hazelle said. "It's like a melting pot."

While she has been drawing for as long as she can remember and has dabbled in painting and sculpture, these days she mostly creates digital art, often fan art, much of it centering around superheroes. "I think I've always had a heart for heroes," she said.

Hazelle's checkups at St. Jude continue to show no evidence of disease.



Together, with St. Jude, you can help ignite that creative spark in patients like Hazelle.
stjude.org/ImpactGiving

A Brother's Tribute

Heartfelt gift to St. Jude honors his beloved sister.

By **Keith Crabtree** - ALSAC

Robin Rymers gave her younger brother Steve the key to her most treasured toy – a battery-powered plastic engine mounted on her bicycle. Popular in the 1960s, it mimicked a real motorcycle with revving sounds and transformed her bike into a thrilling ride of imagination, all within the neighborhood.

Steve safeguarded the key while his sister underwent surgery in Philadelphia to resect a brain tumor, a glioma, which doctors believed was operable. Robin survived the surgery, but she tragically passed away two days later. Steve was just 5 years old.

On the day of Robin's funeral, Steve remembers standing alone, squinting up into the bright sun.

At such a tender age, facing a new, overwhelming reality, he made a promise to Robin that he would create something beautiful to honor her life, though he did not know what or how.

"Robin and Steve were best friends," Steve's wife, Karen, said, explaining her husband's devotion to his sister. Steve remembers little things, like scooting his playpen across a shared bedroom so Robin and their brother could joyfully roll off their bunk bed into it, incurring the wrath of their mother.

Not long after Robin's passing, Steve took a family trip to Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, where he first learned of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. The TV show "That Girl," starring Marlo Thomas – daughter of St. Jude founder Danny Thomas – was a family favorite. Steve never forgot the lifesaving mission of St. Jude.

He kept his sister's key and embarked on a life driven by purpose. "Robin inspired me to want to help others," said Steve, a retired anesthesiologist. Helping others is a family affair. Karen is a retired respiratory therapist, and the Rymers' daughters, Kim and Kelsey, are a pharmacist and a biomedical engineer.

In early 2025, Steve and Karen made a generous stock donation to St. Jude in honor of Robin, choosing to name two research spaces in the Inspiration4 Advanced Research Center on the St. Jude campus. They opted for a stock donation due to the tax benefits. "We were welcomed as family by everyone we met at St. Jude," Steve said about the donation process and St. Jude.

The Rymers came to St. Jude in 2025 to learn more about one of the world's leading brain tumor programs and to see the plaque bearing the inscription commemorating their gift. Kim held a cherished framed photo



of Robin and Steve together. In it, Robin, a head taller, sits close to her brother, her arm gently encircling a laughing Steve.

The inscription reads: Dedicated to all children – A Gift of Love and Compassion – From Robin Rymers.

Upon seeing these words, Steve said he felt overwhelming joy and gratitude. "Something very beautiful came from my sister's life," he said.

"Robin had such an enormous effect on Dad," Kim said. She

recalled a concept that has always resonated deeply with her father, the domino effect – how a single moment, a single life, can set off ripples far beyond what anyone could ever imagine.

Robin's life, though heartbreakingly brief, was indeed the beginning of something beautiful. It was a gift that continues to spark a cascade of love, compassion and hope in places and lives she never knew. Her legacy is a testament to the profound ways in which one life can touch so many others.



Join Steve and Karen Rymers in making 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

UNSTOPPABLE SPIRIT

St. Jude improves quality of life for young sickle cell disease patients like Bailey.

By **Ruma Kumar** - ALSAC

Bailey is a quintessential 8-year-old girl. She's vivacious and energetic, an active member of her Cub Scouts troop. She likes to paint her nails and try on frilly dresses. Around her house, Bailey likes to style her hair like her mother's and click-clacks through the halls in her mother's heels, which are too big for her, but that's not the point. She wants to be just like her mother.

For a few moments every day, Bailey does something that sets her apart from most 8-year-olds. She takes a pill to treat sickle cell disease, a debilitating condition with which she was diagnosed a week after she was born. When she takes it, Bailey hears her mother's words.

You are resilient. You are strong. Stay mindful and positive.

When Bailey's parents Monica and Tony first received their daughter's sickle cell diagnosis, they were wracked with worry because everything they knew about the disease, a disease that affects approximately 100,000 Americans every year, was not good.

They knew they carried the trait for the disease. They also knew how sickle cell disease affects red blood cells, causing them to warp and become rigid. And how this distortion hinders those cells' ability to move through the body and supply major organs with oxygen, leading to a host of potential lifelong health complications, including organ damage, stroke, frequent infections and pain crises. Even now, with advancements in modern medicine and screenings, the life expectancy of a person with sickle cell disease is typically 20 to 30 years shorter than those without the disease.

"We did a lot of crying, a lot of praying. Just a lot of seeking advice from other people, but it was hard news to receive," Tony said, recalling the early days of his daughter's diagnosis.

But then their pediatrician referred Bailey to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, where Monica and Tony say they not only found solutions for treatment, but hope as well.

They learned that St. Jude has been researching and improving standards of care for people with sickle cell disease for

“**Most people think St. Jude is a cancer hospital, and that's what we thought, too, before bringing Bailey here.**

– **Monica**, Bailey's mom

more than 60 years. They learned how St. Jude has one of the largest sickle cell programs in the country, serving more than 850 children. After talking with doctors, nurses and other patient families, they learned St. Jude has helped lead

major advances in sickle cell disease treatment, while exploring new curative therapies for the disease.

All that training and knowledge has helped Bailey avoid the serious infections and pain crises commonly associated with sickle cell disease thanks to the daily medicine she takes, Tony said.

Doctors at St. Jude were pioneers in the use of the medicine Bailey takes, hydroxyurea, for children with sickle cell disease. Initially developed in the 1960s as a possible anti-cancer agent, hydroxyurea has since been shown to reduce episodes of severe pain and improve





Until you really see it and are immersed in the St. Jude world, you don't know the extent of all they do.

- Monica, Bailey's mom



patient quality of life by increasing production of fetal hemoglobin, a form of the oxygen-carrying protein that is unaffected by the mutations that cause sickle cell disease, and reducing the sickling of red blood cells.

The drug had been underutilized as treatment for sickle cell anemia in children until a groundbreaking study published by St. Jude physician, the late Winfred Wang, MD, in 2013. Earlier studies had demonstrated that adults and adolescents with the disease

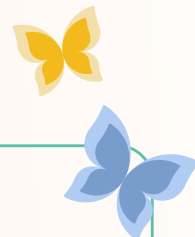
benefited from hydroxyurea. But research led by Wang showed the medicine, which is inexpensive and easy to administer, was safe and effective for young children, sharply reducing episodes of acute pain and pneumonia-like illness, decreasing the need for blood transfusions and cutting hospitalizations for infants and toddlers with sickle cell anemia.

"St. Jude took care of (Bailey), not just with medicine," said Bailey's mother, Monica. "They've also been able to instill in her what her disease is so that she knows, and can let others know, if something is going wrong. She's able to recognize when she's not feeling well and identify triggers."

For instance, Bailey knows she has to hydrate well and be mindful of sharp temperature transitions; she can't get too hot or too cold too fast or it could trigger a pain crisis. Continuity of care is important for patients with sickle cell disease. Therefore, in addition to returning to St. Jude regularly for checkups

until she turns 18, Bailey will also go through a transition program that will help prepare her for adult care, pair her with a physician at a local clinic, and teach her to identify the start of an acute pain crisis.

"Most people think St. Jude is a cancer hospital, and that's what we thought, too, before bringing Bailey here," Monica said. "But they treat all kinds of diseases, including blood disorders. Until you really see it and are immersed in the St. Jude world, you don't know the extent of all they do."



Your support helps ensure families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food. Please consider giving an additional gift at stjude.org/ImpactGiving

A Symbol of Support

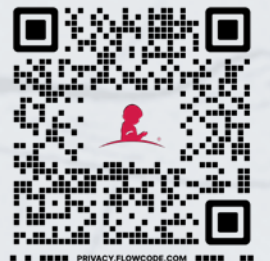
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Support for Isaac

Isaac was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) in March 2025. His parents took him to a local hospital because they suspected a lingering respiratory virus was causing him to have body aches. His bloodwork was concerning for leukemia, so he was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. At St. Jude, doctors offered Isaac's family not only a diagnosis but also a sense of calm and reassurance.

"They told me, 'We got you, everything is going to be fine. This is your team, and we have a plan,' and that made me feel good," his mom, Andrea, recalled.

Isaac, a twin who has five siblings, underwent treatment on a St. Jude clinical trial called AML23. The trial is testing a combination of conventional chemotherapy alongside a newer targeted treatment – a combination that worked to get his cancer in remission. Isaac has a high-risk subtype of AML that can relapse, so following the AML23 protocol, Isaac also had a bone marrow transplant to minimize the chances of relapse. He continues treatment at St. Jude.



You help bring hope and healing to patients like Isaac 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