



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School Essay Contest

Adelaide Stromberg

Ring the Bell

Honorable Mention

DINGGG. DONGGG. DINGGG. DONGGG. The beautiful sound echoed through my 10-year-old brain. The sun's rays danced through the sun catcher and bounced around the room. Tears streamed down my mom's face leaving a sparkling wet trail. Watching her made me feel so proud and sad too. I remember it like it was yesterday – the day my mom finished chemotherapy and rung the bell.

The car ride down to the city felt exceptionally short that day. Maybe it was because I did not have to go to school or maybe because I knew my mom would be better soon. Not many words were spoken, just the music filled the car. I felt the speakers vibrate against my calf as my little sister's head laid down on my shoulder, her eyes struggling to stay open. Before long, the sun was blocked out by the sky-scraping buildings of the University of Pennsylvania Hospital as we pulled into the parking garage.

We entered the massive structure, and I was immediately overwhelmed. There were people everywhere: wearing lab coats, or scrubs, or face masks, or the sad expression of a

difficult journey. I had no idea where to go, but my parents led the way with a confidence from familiarity. We hopped in the elevator and pressed the button for the third floor. Then we walked down a long and curvy hallway. I lagged behind, trying to take it all in. Windows extended from the floor to ceiling, capturing a perfect city skyline.

I suddenly realized my dad was calling to me, “Adelaide, please keep up. We have to be on time!” I could tell he was stressed, yet excited for this chapter to be over.

We finally arrived at the dull, gray room where Mom sat in the hard leather chair. Her hands rested subtly in her lap, no longer trembling with uncertainty. She had done this too many times. The hum of the heater was interrupted by a nurse that opened the door softly, gently alerting her presence.

“Hi Christina, I see you have brought the whole family today!” she exclaimed.

Everyone was here, my brother, sister, dad, grandparents, and me. The nurse quickly glanced around the room, but I caught her eye.

“You must be Adelaide; I have heard so much about you,” she commented.

Nervously, I replied, “Yeah, that’s me.”

She smiled as she hurried around the room, gathering the items needed to start the treatment. She grabbed a long and sharp needle, and as gently as she could, injected it into my mom’s hand. Sitting there next to her, I could practically feel the pain that she expressed on her face. Almost immediately after the lifesaving, yet poisonous medicine started flowing through her body, I could see the exhaustion on her face. My dad snuck us out of the room to explore the

city as she dozed off. He showed us all the special places him and my mom went on dates, and even where they first met. We explored Drexel, where Dad went for college, and even saw their first apartment together.

After six long hours, it was finally over. It felt wonderful, and scary, and sad all at once. When my mom got the strength to stand and walk, the nurse guided us to the prominent bell in the lobby. It sat upon the wall glistening, begging to be rung. It was calling her name, and everyone could feel it.

“Whenever you are ready” The nurse said while motioning to the bell.

I stood there looking down at my blue dress with a fluffy rainbow in the center, then looking up at my mom. She took a deep breath then grabbed the thick, braided rope. The nurses who cared for her over the last six months, gathered around. Most had tears in their eyes, and so did she.

I heard voices in the back exclaiming, “Congratulations!”

My heart, beat faster to the rhythm of the bell. The sound filled the whole room like a song that I never wanted to end. Standing there staring at her, I felt a tear trickle down my face. It was just one light tear, but it carried the weight of 1,000 pounds.

She did it, I thought with a smile.

I know the medicine made her sicker before she could get better, made her lose her hair, and made some days really hard. I hated seeing her like that, but I always knew that she was



going to win this fight. My mom is not just a survivor but a warrior and as she rang the bell that day, you could see her resilience shine brighter than ever. I will never forget that sound.