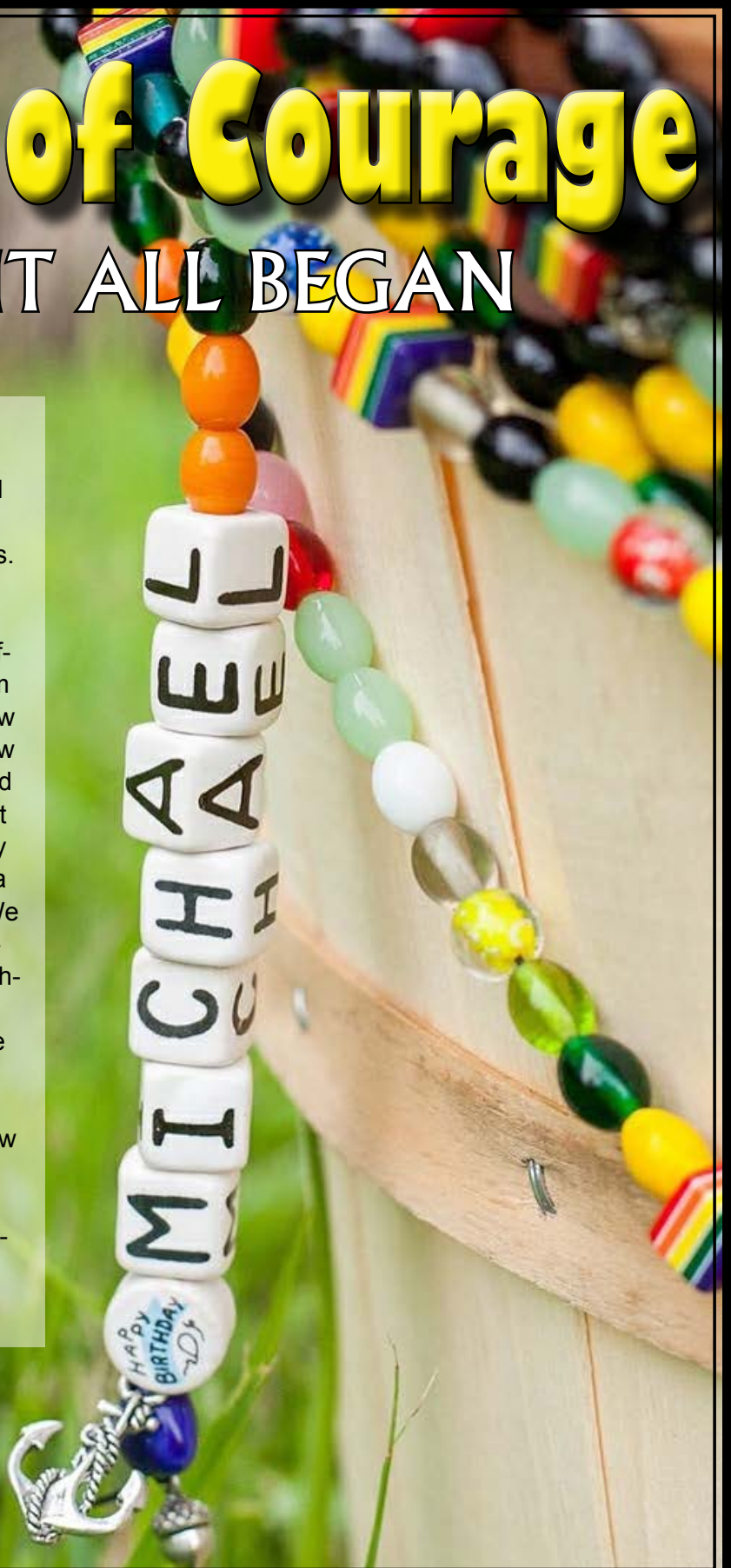


Beads of Courage

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Jean Gribbon, PhD, RN

The year was 1979 and I had just turned five years old. I loved to visit my friend Miles. He lived on a horse farm and we would have fun exploring the outdoors and watching the horses. After one visit, I was told by my mom that Miles had cancer. I didn't know what that meant exactly, but I knew that it was something to be worried about. As time passed, I knew that cancer was slowly taking away my friend. With each visit, there was a dramatic decline in his function. We would no longer play outside. I remember how tired he was and within a short period of time, he could no longer sit upright in his bed. He would watch me play on his Atari and although at five years of age there wasn't a lot I could do, I knew that my visits made him happy. It gave me comfort that he wasn't alone during a time that was clearly very scary for us both. Within a year, Miles died.



Twenty years later, I was taking my first courses in the PhD Program in Nursing at the University of Arizona. It was while I was in Dr. Jody Glittenberg's ethnonursing course that my career in pediatric oncology nursing took shape, which would become my life's work. She asked everyone in the class to reflect on our lives and answer, "Why are you pursuing the type of nursing that you are?" and, "What life experiences have shaped you to become the nurse you are today?" It was an amazing life-in-full-circle moment as memories of Miles came flooding back. In that moment, I was keenly aware that I had found my life's purpose: to help children with cancer cope.

At the time I was already working as a night nurse in pediatrics, taking care of children coping with cancer. While working at the bedside, I often struggled with how best to meet the emotional needs of my patients. After working a 12-hour shift, I would go home feeling defeated, knowing that my life would return to normal – but, for my patients, they would spend countless more nights hospitalized while receiving treatment. I wondered why I didn't know what to say or do, yet feeling so compelled to recognize their courage that I bore witness to while caring for them. I wanted to provide something other than the cheerful and encouraging disposition I would impose upon them with every painful procedure or during relentless side effects from treatment.

It was while I was a summer camp nurse at Paul Newman's therapeutic recreation camp for sick kids that curiosity got the best of me. I witnessed the joy children had making things to wear with beads during the arts and crafts rotation. When I returned the following summer, those same children were wearing a beaded bracelet or necklace they had made in camp the year before. I thought, "They still have those beads? I lose stuff all the time. How could they still have those beads?" As a lifelong learner, I asked myself, "What are beads and why do humans care about beads?"

One child who was interviewed said, "You know, I have been to war and back - and if I had gone to war, I would've gotten a purple heart."



Jean Gribbon,
founder of Beads of Courage

Those initial inquiries got me back to the literature, where I soon discovered that Boy Scouts gave beads as symbols of accomplishment, and that there was a Bead Museum in Glendale, Arizona just a short 120-mile drive from Tucson. At this same time, my then-mentor Dr. Joan Haase had just published a paper from her research with children completing treatment for cancer. The results of her study surprised everyone in pediatric oncology. At a time when one would think children were celebrating being done with treatment, her results instead showed that children were struggling. In fact, children were worried about recurrence, separation from their medical family, and were seeking what Dr. Haase referred to as "something tangible." One child who was interviewed said, "You know, I have been to war and back – and if I had gone to war, I would've gotten a purple heart."

I thought, "If beads, similar to how Boy Scouts were using them, were given as symbols of courage and accomplishment to children receiving treatment for cancer, would they provide that 'something tangible' to show and tell their courageous journey?"

It was during my visit with Christy Puetz, the Bead Museum educator, that I was amazed to learn that beads are the earliest art form known to humans, and that beads have been used for thousands of years as symbols of honor and accomplishment. She asked, "What are you thinking of doing?" and I said, "Designing a program for children coping with cancer and giving them beads that symbolize moments of courage that they must call upon in a fight for life." Christy joined me in my pursuit and remains a part of our program team today.



Beads of Courage member Addi



Top photo: Jean with Danielle (7) and her mother, Amy. Bottom photo: Danielle at age 16, visiting Jean in Tucson for her 16th birthday. They went hiking together.



What is the Beads of Courage® Program?

Children who are diagnosed with a serious illness are thrust into a confusing world of needle pokes, medical treatments, and long hospital stays away from the comforts of home.

These children face daily challenges with strength and courage. But they need something to hold onto on tough treatment days – something that reminds them how far they've come, and encourages them to keep going.

That's where Beads of Courage comes in.

The signature Beads of Courage Program uses colorful beads as meaningful symbols of courage that commemorate milestones during treatment.

Each bead represents something a child had to endure, but also gives them a way to say, "I did it!"

The Beads of Courage Program makes children happy. It helps them cope with treatment and restores their confidence and self-worth. It encourages them to stay strong and feel proud of what they have accomplished. It gives them a way to record, own and tell their stories of courage.

Thank you for supporting Beads of Courage and the 60,000+ children we serve.



Thank you for making healing happen!

I was soon introduced to Jean Donaldson, Carol Saker, and Cheryl Cobern-Browne, who were instrumental in helping me source beads for the program I was creating, which included an introduction to the Arizona Society of Glass Beadmakers. I was keenly interested in sourcing a nice purple heart bead that would become the completion-of-treatment bead, based upon Dr. Haase's research. This began a legacy of giving that has evolved into a full endorsement of Beads of Courage by the International Society of Glass Beadmakers.

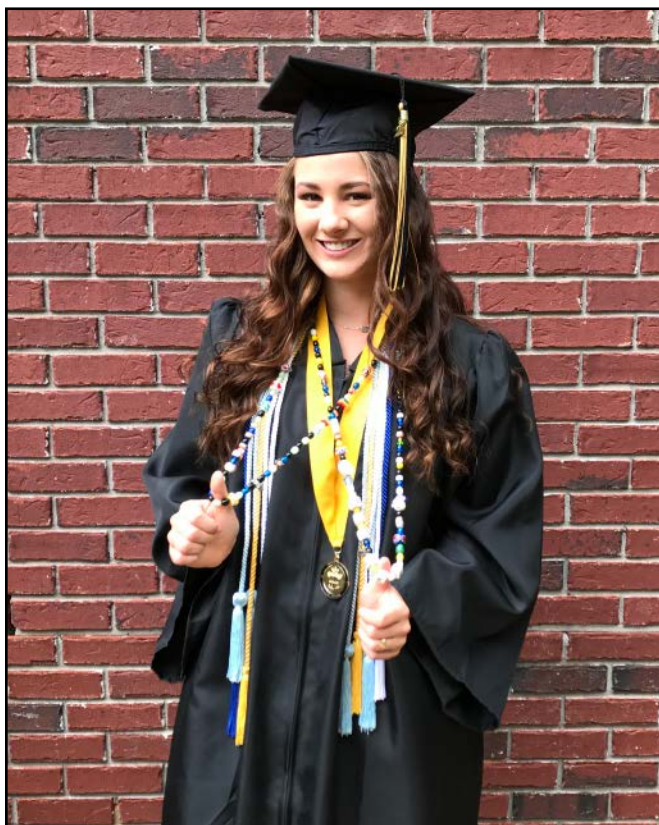
Today, Beads of Courage enters its eighteenth year since the first program was piloted at Phoenix Children's Hospital in 2003. Giving beads at the bedside is now a standard of practice to help children cope in more than 300 children's hospitals in eight countries. The glass beads donated by artists remain the art in our arts-in-medicine mission.



Beads of Courage member Grace, with siblings Bennett and Maggie, who participate in the BOC Sibling Program.



Top photo: Beads of Courage member Allyson in 2010.
Bottom photo: Allyson in 2017 at her high school graduation.



Leah Brinson is one of the patients on the CBS Sunday Morning video talking about the anchor bead she received as a Beads of Courage member in 2010. She still has her beads and is now a nurse at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, where the interview for the video was filmed. (That video is at: <https://youtu.be/WMCcJxO9mnY>)



Beads of Courage member Mason and family



Beads of Courage member Arthur

I personally believe that the healing energy and intention from every artist who donates beads brings a boost of human love and compassion to the children we support. Every time a bead is given, human caring is affirmed, and a child is reminded that they are not alone in their fight for life.



An artist-made Act of Courage bead

Bead Artists! Your Beads Go for Good Deeds!

As a nonprofit organization providing arts-in-medicine programs to 60,000 children annually, Beads of Courage relies on a dedicated community of lampwork glass bead artists to support our mission.

Each year, we need as many as 100,000 artist-made glass beads to give to children participating in the Beads of Courage Program. Like colorful medals awarded in battle, each bead you donate will be given to a child to honor an act of courage in their battle against cancer or another serious illness.

Visit www.BeadsofCourage.org and click on DONATE to learn how you can help.



*Beads of Courage would like to thank
Soda Lime Times for their support!*

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T I M E S

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