

Madeline Brill Nelson Chair in Ethics Education

As a young girl, Madeline would often accompany her father, a beloved and pioneering physician on his weekend rounds in southwest Portland. Observing carefully his compassion and unwavering attention for each of his patients, she learned early on that caring and commitment were the cornerstones of his work. She recognized how critical a role he played in the lives of so many. She resolved to continue this legacy of selfless service to the community through unstinting dedication to the highest standards of medical professionalism and teaching.

Madeline often reflected on stories about her father's boyhood years in Poland where he had been profoundly inspired by the skill and passion of the itinerant doctor who traveled from village to village. He envisioned a new life for himself as a doctor in the United States. Through his stories and her own cherished memories of him, Madeline took up this mantle of caring and went on to envision what transformation was possible in the way health care could be both taught and delivered.

"He was a wonderful, caring husband and father, but his life was really medicine – providing the best care he could for his patients," Madeline remembered of her father, who continued his medical practice until three months before he died at the age of 88. She wistfully recalled how often he was absent from the home as he tended the needs of his patients, and then smiled at the thought of how much he was loved in return by the numerous patients and families he nurtured with such dedication and service.

It was through the lens of these tender memories that Madeline first envisioned what the Center for Ethics in Health Care could be. "When I heard about Susan Tolle's ideas for the Center, I was reminded straight away about how Dad lived his life. In supporting the Center, I'm helping to promote the kind of medical care my dad provided. His spirit is right there, along with Susan," Madeline says softly.

Almost three decades have now passed since the Center was established, and Madeline demonstrated in innumerable ways the depth of her caring and the expansiveness of her vision. With quiet pride, limitless generosity and her innate ability to understand the new challenges within the healthcare community, she continued her distinguished family legacy as a way to honor her father's work and his extraordinary humanity.

"It's impossible to express adequately what Madeline gave to the Center over these many years," says Susan Tolle. "She set the highest standard imaginable for integrity and commitment. And it is with such gratitude and appreciation that we honor her and her father's legacy through the work that we do – so much of which is possible only because of her dedication to the Center."