

Kelly Buckley

BY MICHAEL MOORE

Kelly Buckley wears a shirt that says "Mom's angels," with the names of her two daughters captured in pink hearts.

In her own heart is a message that she shares with other families who have lost or might lose children to cancer: "Never give up hope."

Buckley, now 47, lost both of her daughters, Melissa and Sarah, to cancer within a two-year span. The cancer wasn't hereditary, and both girls battled very different types of cancer.

Kelly's oldest daughter, Melissa, was 15 in February of 1998 when doctors first identified what they thought was an infection in her back.

When they made an incision to operate, they discovered her spine was covered with tumors, and diagnosed her with Burkitt's lymphoma.

Melissa turned 16 that March and died on May 19 of that same year.

"The chemo was too aggressive for her," Kelly said. "Every surgery that was done to help her ... it was working and then something else would happen."

Kelly's younger daughter, Sarah, was diagnosed in September of 1998 with pineal blastoma, a type of brain cancer. She was just 9 years old.

Kelly did everything she could to try to help Sarah. She researched the disease as much as she could online to find out what doctors were doing in other states to treat the disease.

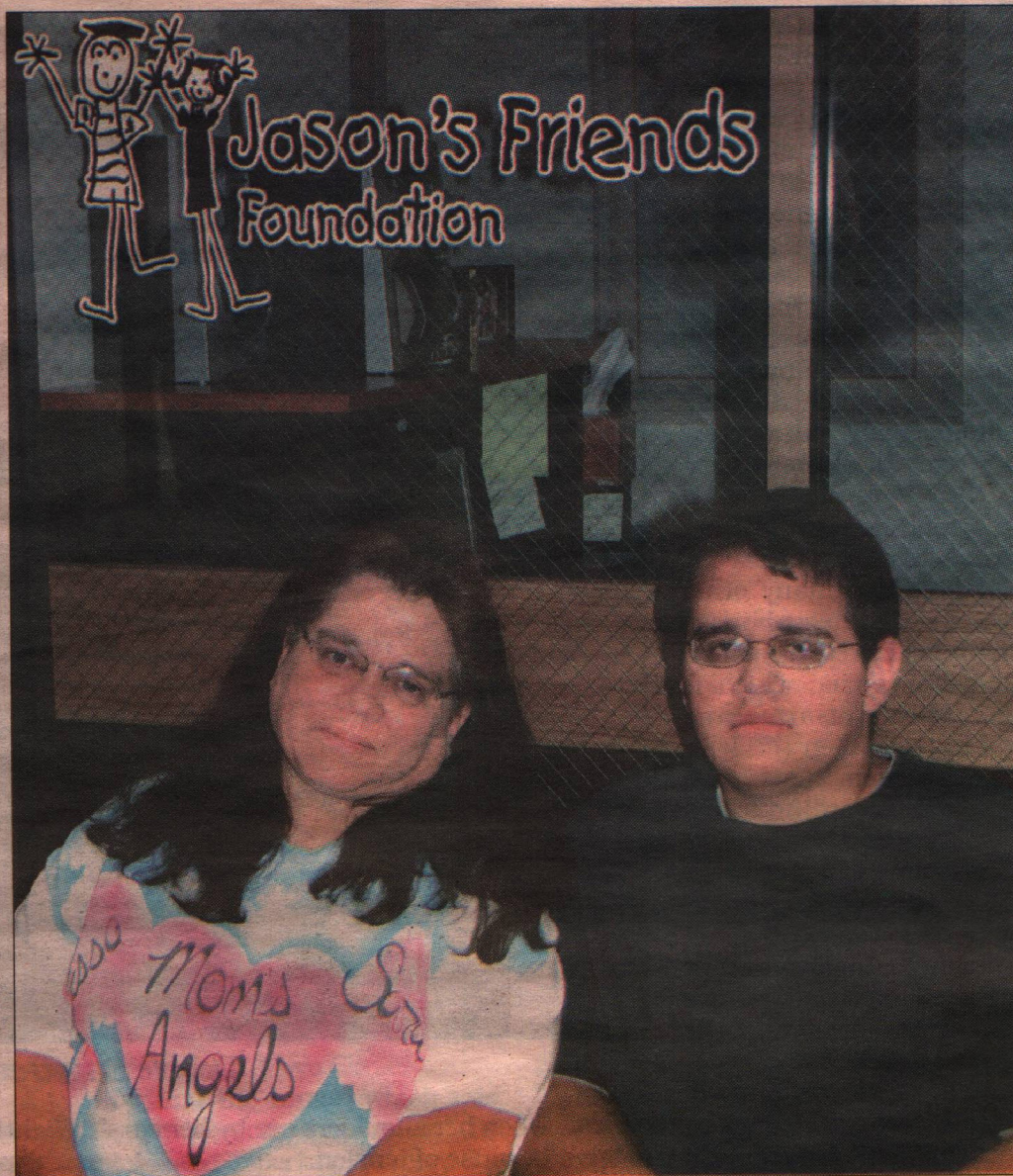
She would bring those options to Sarah's physicians in Casper, including Dr. Harlen Myers. The doctors were willing to try whatever they could to help Kelly's daughter.

"It kind of gave her a little bit of added time, which I think is maybe what I needed to get prepared for losing her," Kelly said.

Sarah died on Dec. 26, 2000, just six days after her 10th birthday.

Doctors wanted to prescribe antidepressants for Kelly after her daughters' deaths, but she refused.

"When I first lost my girls, they wanted to give me something," she said. "I didn't want to. When you wake up, you still have to deal with



Kelly Buckley and her son, Richard, support Jason's Friends.

the situation."

Kelly's son, Richard, now 18, helped her get through the death of her daughters. During Sarah's illness, he helped by giving his sister her medicine.

"He was my best friend, and he still is," Kelly said. "I still watch him like a hawk, even though he's 18."

Almost a decade after her oldest daughter's death, Kelly shares her stories with other families who have had a child diagnosed with cancer.

She tells them about Jason's Friends and the help the organization can provide.

When her daughters were sick, Kelly never had to worry about a bill, because Jason's Friends stepped in and paid them for her.

"They are more than willing to do anything for you, for anybody," she said. "When your child is diagnosed, they're there for you."

She speaks of the importance of faith and the role that it plays in her

life every day.

"I know that there's a heaven and that there's a God, and that we have that promise to have our loved ones back, whether they're children or adults," she said.

Kelly's own faith was strengthened by that of her daughters. In their last days, they knew it was their time, and both took solace in their fate and accepted that.

"Sarah was excited when she knew it was time," Kelly said. "She said, 'Mom, it's time for me to go.' She was excited to see her sister, and other kids that she knew who had passed away. First and foremost, she was excited to see Jesus."

Today, Kelly urges people to find hope through their doctors, organizations like Jason's Friends and their own faith.

"Never give up hope," she stressed again. "There is hope out there. I want people to know not to give up."