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'A Debt of Gratitude'

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Vicki Edwards Giambrone calls her commitment to UD a debt of gratitude. Diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in her first semester, Giambrone didn't want to drop out. "I'd been there a couple of months and had fallen in love with the community and with the experience," said Giambrone, a communication major and the first in her Jamestown, Ohio, family to go to college. "Then, going home for Thanksgiving break and thinking I may never get to go back — that was almost as devastating as the diagnosis."

As she lay in the hospital, her adviser, communication professor Florence Wolff — whom a fellow Flyer from high school warned her to steer clear of — showed up with a plan. Wolff gathered Giambrone's work and made arrangements for her to take her finals; classmates came to study with her; and when Giambrone came back to campus, Wolff and dean of students Margaret Holland arranged the accommodations Giambrone needed — a parking space and a room with a bath.

Despite a relapse, Giambrone did something even healthy students seldom achieve: She graduated early. "I told Dr. Wolff, 'I can't thank you enough,'" Giambrone said. "She told me, 'This is UD. This is what we do.'"

Giambrone immediately began what she called "paying it back and maybe paying it forward, too."

For 10 years, Giambrone, now vice president of marketing and external affairs for Children's Medical Center and a well-known advocate for children, shared her story in an invited lecture for a sociology class on death and dying. In 1991, she became one of the National Alumni Association's most devoted members; she helped develop the first Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop and the national Leadership with Virtue awards program and symposium. She served eight years on the National Alumni Association board of directors, four of them as president. In the association's seat on the UD board of trustees, she had a role in UD's purchase of 50 acres from NCR Corp. She's now an honorary member of the board of trustees, a member of the board's athletics committee and an advisory board member for the renovation and expansion of the Immaculate Conception Chapel.

"My life is forever changed because of UD, and for that, I am eternally grateful," said Giambrone, who also earned a master's in public administration from UD in 2001. "I found my faith at UD — I converted to Catholicism there; I found my family — I met my husband there; and I found my future — the education that made it possible for me to do whatever I wanted. I'm so grateful I can't even express it."

But as one who gives of herself without reservation to causes she believes in, Giambrone should know at least two things: In 1978, she was a cause to believe in.

And there was never a debt.

— Maureen Schlangen