

**The Traveling Bell**  
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*"Oh, the Places You'll Go." Dr. Suess*

Behind every object is a story: here is the story of The Sunny Hillside School Bell. It was not an electric bell in the hallway or classroom to announce class; it was not a large bell mounted in a belfry atop the school that bonged by pulling a rope. It sat on the teacher's desk in a Nebraska country school.

The Bell was handheld, about eight inches tall, with a black wood handle, a brass body, and an iron clapper inside. The clapper hit the inner wall and produced a loud clang.

The small bronze Sunny Hillside Bell is a significant part of history, holding memories of generations of students who attended an old-fashioned country school. A photo of The Bell prompts visions of all the hands that held and rang it and all the students it has summoned.

I first encountered The Bell as a six-year-old starting school at Sunny Hillside. It was my first day of school; I watched the teacher grasp The Bell, stand on the stoop, and shake the Bell. Clang. Clang. Clang. I saw a student catch the last ball in a game of Ante, Ante Over. A group of older students ended their game of Pom-Pom Pull Away, and others pumped the handle and sipped their last cold drink of water from the cup hanging on the outdoor pump. Recess was over.

Memories are foggy, but I remember one chilly October day in 1946 when my teacher in country school handed me The Bell. "You may ring it for recess today." With excitement tingling clear to my toes, I clutched The Bell and rang it with all the umph a six-year-old could muster. Students sprinting, scampering, or strolling appeared from around the schoolyard, entered the classroom, and returned to their schoolbooks.

*"Oh, the power of The Bell."*

That Bell called my father, siblings, and lifelong friends in from recess. It summoned generations of families at that country school from 1883 until it closed its doors in 1948.

The Bell lingered on the unused teacher's desk in the vacant classroom. In 1959, my father purchased the Bell for my sister Joyce, and The Bell's adventures began.

The Bell left Sunny Hillside and headed west to a Marine Base in Twenty-Nine Palms, CA, with Joyce and her husband. Then, the Bell journeyed to Des Moines, IA—the new home of Joyce, Ed, and their family. It was mounted on a black Asia-style platform with a bronze plaque denoting its age and origin, and sat on a shelf between the family's kitchen and living room. The children admired The Bell—a token of their mother's childhood school days.

In 2007, Joyce's granddaughter, Molly, started her teaching career as a math teacher in the South Bronx of New York with the Teach for America Program. It was time for the next generation to embrace The Bell. To continue the tradition, Molly's grandmother entrusted her with The Bell.

A fourth generation of descendants now admired The Bell and its history.

It sat in Molly's classroom—a symbol of the past, a vision of the present, and a hint of the future.

*"Making memories around the world. —North America, Africa, Europe, Asia..."*

Three years later, accompanied by The Bell, Molly arrived to teach in Kuwait City at the tip of the Persian Gulf. A classroom of international students greeted The Bell with its humble past.

Then, on to Luanda, the capital of Angola, located on the west coast of South Africa. The Bell fascinated students in a new country. It sat on Molly's desk as her students calculated math problems.

Molly and her husband traveled to Portugal and the United States to vacation with family. With the birth of their baby boy, a fifth generation of Smiths embraced The Sunny Hillside Bell.

Next, Molly, her family, and The Bell arrived in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. The city is situated on the Chao Phraya River and is renowned for its magnificent palaces, skyscrapers, and vibrant markets that attract tourists from around the world. More students greeted the Bell as they walked into Molly's math classes.

*What is on the horizon: the next adventure—South America?*

The Sunny Hillside Bell is far from its origin, the one-room country school southeast of Cambridge, NE. It has heard children's voices echoing from classroom walls around the world.

*A link to the past and a bridge to the present.*