

Dr. Julia Hallisy's acceptance speech after receiving the 2008 Celina Field caregiver award from The National Pain Foundation at their Triumph Dinner at City Hall in San Francisco.

I want to thank The National Pain Foundation for this award and for their dedication and their tireless work on behalf of those who suffer. I share this award with my husband, John and with our devoted support system of family and friends, many of whom are here tonight.

I learned how to be an effective caregiver the way that children learn best; by watching and imitating their parents. My late sister, Donna was born with a life-threatening heart condition and watching my mother care for her I learned that there are no obstacles too great to overcome when you are an advocate for a loved one. History was to repeat itself in a cruel way when my daughter was diagnosed in 1989 with cancer and my family was thrust into the same situations my parents had faced decades earlier.

Of all the challenges having a child with an illness brings, seeing our child in pain was the most difficult. Kate endured spinal taps, bone marrow biopsies, radiation, chemotherapy, the loss of her right eye, several reconstructive surgeries to her orbit, five weeks on a ventilator fighting a hospital-acquired infection and the most devastating of all - phantom limb pain after an amputation.

The phantom limb pain was a grueling testament to the mind/body connection in the pain process. It seemed that Kate's brain was in chaos and struggling to comprehend both the physical and emotional loss of a vital body part. We learned in no uncertain terms that pain is real, it is measurable and it always requires intervention. The answer to pain is information, research and medical intervention, but it is also determination, perseverance and hope.

Kate so clearly understood that the point is not that we suffer but that we strive to transcend pain - to reduce its stronghold on our lives and to not let it be what defines us. That those who face the challenge of pain are not forsaken, they are not alone, and their burden is shared with those around them. Organizations like The National Pain Foundation prove that we can support those in need not just with information and referrals but with reassurance and solace.

Living with the effects of pain compels so many to search for meaning and purpose in their lives and invariably leads them down a path to others in need. The beautiful irony is that the same experience of pain that makes us bold, angry and defiant also makes us humble, reflective and compassionate. Everyone who faces pain personally or as part of a support system shares in one of the common threads of the human condition and is a testament to the fact that tragedy and triumph so often go hand-in-hand.