

Patsy Dowling

March 8, 1942 - June 2, 2002

"We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours."

Dag Hammarskjold (1905 - 1961)

Patsy Dowling certainly did not choose to give birth to a daughter with disabilities. However, once the frame of her destiny was established, she dedicated the remainder of her life to making disabilities become possibilities. This passion was not limited to her daughter, Kristina, but also to countless other children and adults who were in need of a caring soul to assist them with their special needs. Patsy often said that her life's goal was that when she died it could be said of her that in her lifetime she "had made a difference". This was a guiding principle that was apparent in every activity of her life. She often entered her occupation as a "Professional Volunteer".

Patsy's association with Bay Area Rehabilitation Center began when her daughter Kristina started receiving occupational, speech, and physical therapy services at the age of three. During the four years Kristina received services at the Center, Patsy developed many life-long relationships with other parents of children with special needs. Together these parents worked diligently to improve community services for all individuals with disabilities. Patsy created within her own family this loving concern. She was proud of her children as they broadened this circle of service and concern for others. One of her daughters volunteered at the Center as a teenager, served an internship at the Center during college, and worked at the Center for eight years after graduation. Patsy's son also volunteered at the Center for three years as a teenager. He now teaches special education in California.

Patsy's special passions were for individuals with disabilities. Visiting spinal cord injury patients at TIRR in the medical center, bringing them lunch, taking them home for weekend activities, or having a parent stay in her home and providing transportation to the medical center were things that created joy in her life. When a child with disabilities entered her own life, she took things she learned and her own creative abilities to stimulate child development to become a teacher for the MHMRA Infant/Parent Training Center. In order to touch a broadening circle of children with special needs she became a long-time volunteer within the schools. Her active advocacy for children with special needs was channeled to help make inclusion within our schools work to the advantage of both children with and without disabilities.

Patsy's involvement with children in Special Olympics was a natural extension of her activities. Whether it was providing transportation to children (known as her bus route) that could not otherwise get to practice and events, or to be sure they had appropriate clothing for their trips, she was dedicated to helping them in this important development activity. Patsy's devotion to individuals with disabilities has been honored on two separate occasions. In 1997 she was honored as the Outstanding Volunteer of Baytown by the Rotary Club of Baytown. Also in 1997, Patsy's family was named as the Special Olympics Area 4 Family of the Year. Area 4 is comprised of Harris, Liberty and Waller counties.

When her own illness compromised her immune system to where she could no longer work with children, she turned to what had been a glowing ember of desire to get involved in hospice. She found her niche in making calls to bereaved family members to help provide support following the death of a loved one. In the last year of her life she made over 700 of these phone calls, including many after her own illness left her unable to leave home. In 1985, Patsy learned that she had breast cancer. Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy placed the cancer in remission. In 1990, Patsy had a reoccurrence of the disease; however, a repeat of the previous treatment once again caused the cancer to go into remission. Sadly, in 1998 she learned that the disease had metastasized to her brain, and for five years she bravely fought the disease. Unfortunately, Patsy was unable to once again overcome the cancer.

Patsy's motto was:

"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was,  
or the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove... but the world  
may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

Because of Patsy's tireless efforts on behalf of individuals with disabilities, her long-time commitment to Bay Area Rehabilitation Center, including serving as a member of the Center's Ambassadors Circle, the management of Bay Area Rehabilitation Center is naming the Wheelchair Accessible Nature Trail and Playground in her honor and memory. Named "Patsy's Destiny", the recreational area will ensure that her desire of making a difference will be carried into the future