

**“We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours.” - Dag Hammarskjold**

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”.



Dorothy Patricia “Patsy” Dowling  
March 8, 1942 – June 2, 2002

Patsy’s association with Bay Area Rehabilitation Center began when Kristina started receiving occupational, physical and speech 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 after graduation. Patsy’s son also volunteered at the Center for three years as a teenager. He now works in the special education department for the Houston Independent School District.

When Kristina came into her life, Patsy took things she learned and her own creative abilities to stimulate child development and became a teacher for the Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMRA) Infant Parent Training Center. When she quit working as an IPTC Teacher, she began a long career as a volunteer. Her 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 special needs.

Patsy’s involvement with children in Special Olympics was a natural extension of her activities. Whether it was providing transportation for 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 event. Patsy worked tirelessly with “her” children to help them reach their difficult goals. She became both a cheerleader and chauffeur to many of Baytown’s children so that they could attend Special Olympics and other functions.

Patsy's devotion to individuals with disabilities was honored on two separate occasions. In 1977, she was honored as the Outstanding Volunteer of Baytown by the Rotary Club of Baytown. Also in 1977, 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.

Patsy's special passion was working to assist individuals and their families to live their best lives. Visiting spinal cord injury patients at the Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research (TIRR), bringing them lunch, taking them home for the weekend, or having guardians who resided out of the state stay in her home and providing transportation to the medical center were things that created joy in her life.

While serving as an advocate and dedicated volunteer on behalf of individuals with disabilities, Patsy was suffering from breast cancer. Twice, she was able to win her battle with the disease but, sadly, she was unable to beat it a third time when it metastasized to her brain. Facing her own demise, and becoming too ill to continue volunteering with children who had special needs, Patsy found a new way to continue her passion for volunteering and began devoting her time to hospice. In her last year she made over 700 phone calls to counsel families who had recently lost a loved one. Patsy touched many lives and will forever be missed.

At the time of her death, Bay Area Rehabilitation Center was in the process of developing a wheelchair accessible playground to be located on land donated to the Center in 1988. Because of Patsy's tireless efforts on behalf of individuals with disabilities, as well as her long-time commitment to Bay Area Rehabilitation Center, Bay Area Rehabilitation Center chose to name the project Patsy's Destiny Wheelchair Accessible Park (Patsy's Destiny) in her honor and memory. In a testament to the love and respect those who knew Patsy had for her, over 100 volunteers gathered together on May 6, 2004, to construct a wheelchair accessible playground superstructure ensuring that her desire of making a difference will be carried into the future.

While cancer became the one thing that could stop Patsy from living her life to the fullest, it could not stop her dream of providing a better life for individuals with disabilities. At her funeral a slide presentation of pictures taken throughout her life was shown with the music, "Remember Me This Way" playing in the background. Through Patsy's Destiny, Patsy will be remembered, and her personal motto will carry on far into the future. "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."