

## *The Power of Hope – The Bond that Connects Us All*

On May 8, 2010, I had the privilege of attending *Triumph Over Pain's Second Annual Run-Walk-Roll* in McKinney, Texas. This event benefited RSD/CRPS awareness and research.

When I first learned of the event in mid-January from Tricia Scott, founder and Executive Director of *Triumph Over Pain*, I immediately knew that I had to attend. Through my own battle with pain, I used to think about how I would feel if I knew there was a walk that promoted chronic pain research and awareness. I used to wonder how I would feel to know others cared about my well-being and were committed to helping the pain community find answers.

This was my dream – to have national walks that supported those living with chronic pain. Therefore, I had to be present at *Triumph Over Pain's Run-Walk-Roll*. I wanted to witness the victorious moments of other chronic pain survivors, and share in their accomplishment and achievement...it is true that we are all inspirations to each other.

Even now as I have had time to digest the significance of the event, I still find myself at a loss for words. My trip to Texas was short – *I was there less than twenty hours* – and yet, it was filled with much hope, meaning, and pride. Days after the race, I still felt excited, alive, and joyful. It was indeed a perfect day and a life changing experience for me.

Standing among the other runners, walkers, and rollers energized me. I could actually feel the love, the support and the hope of the other participants. There was a bond between us and I knew we were all in this together. In some way, each of our lives had been touched by pain. Realizing that by coming together, we became stronger and our voices became louder gave me a rush of adrenaline. Together, we were making a difference.

During the 5k run, I felt powerful, strong and unstoppable. With each step I took, I moved further from the “sick” label and closer to defining myself as “healed.” I felt honored to have such courageous and brave individuals surrounding me, and I knew that we were all running for hope and healing.

Approaching the finish line, I became overwhelmed with emotion. I began to think about my own healing journey. I had come so far in the past seven years. It was hard to imagine seven years earlier, I was bedridden and wheelchair bound. It was difficult to comprehend the drastic changes to my health. How was it possible that seven years ago I was praying to live and now I was thriving in life? Life can definitely change in an instant; therefore, we must always hold onto hope and believe in the unimaginable.

Although I was running for myself, I knew this race was larger than me. The closer I came to the finish line, the more I thought of my fellow chronic pain survivors and friends. In my opinion, each of us living with pain is a survivor. After all, every day we continue to move forward with dignity, grace, and courage. We keep looking for light in

the darkness. We are warriors, fighting to find answers so that we can live life by our rules.

It was a moving, emotional time for me as I crossed the finish line at 27:41, my personal best for a 5k. Immediately, I remembered those who were unable to attend the race. This was for them, just as much as it was for me. *This run was for everyone living with pain.*

Besides the thrill of participating in the run, I also met extraordinary people who openly shared their stories of pain, struggle, and triumph with me. Hearing the hopefulness and pride in their voices as they spoke of their personal journeys living with, dealing with, and overcoming pain resonated deep within me.

I talked a long time to one woman with fibromyalgia. As she was just a few years older than I was, I could relate a great deal to her story. For years, she had been trying to get a handle on her pain. She kept seeing doctors and trying new medications but nothing helped. Every day was a struggle as she felt the disease begin to control her. Tired of the disease taking everything she valued away from her, she began to make changes. Although she had been proactive in her recovery, she now saw she had to become empowered in her life again.

With the help of friends and family, she began to take positive steps toward overall healing. She started exercising and found she enjoyed running. This was her first sponsored run and the fastest she had ever finished a 5k. She was glowing as we talked, and I could not help but tear up. This was *her* moment. This was *her* day to say pain no longer defined or controlled her. She was having her “A-ha Moment,” which I gratefully was able to witness.

Then there was the gentleman who planned to walk the one-mile walk, only to feel moved to run. Despite the wind inflaming the hypersensitivity in his RSD arm, he jogged his way to the finish line! He used to run for pleasure and this was the first time he had done so since the pain began. I spoke to another couple who came from Wisconsin to participate. She had CRPS, and he wanted to lend his support to her recovery journey. To see his commitment to her and to see her admiration for him reaffirmed my belief that love conquers all. While he might not have been able to take away her pain, he showed her that he would do whatever he could in order to help her find answers.

Another man I spent time with told me it was his goal to finish the one-mile walk. Since living with pain, he had trouble walking far distances and he wanted to prove to himself that he could accomplish whatever he wanted to. Although it exacerbated his pain, he finished the walk! Just by looking at his facial expression, I knew this was a huge milestone for him. Being able to share in his celebration was powerful and special. He had triumphed ... and he knew it!

Finally, I met a young, courageous girl who brought me to tears. She was determined to complete the 5k, no matter what obstacles she faced. I know she started running, and

with time, began to walk. At some point along the race, her pain became more intense. Even with severe agony, she refused to quit. Her sister then carried her piggyback style the remaining distance. Inches from the finish line, her sister put her down so she could take the final steps by herself. It was an emotional scene, and I hope she knows what an inspiration she is and how much her story has moved me. She is a trooper.

I applaud *Triumph Over Pain* for putting together an incredibly inspiring event. Giving those of us a chance to feel victorious and triumphant is a gift I will cherish. I thank them for seeing our inner potential and allowing us the chance to grow.

To my fellow chronic pain survivors and friends, know that you are loved and not alone on this journey. Continue to hold onto hope, and keep encouraging and motivating one another. Remember that we all have tremendous inner-strength and a resilient spirit. We are strong, and we are empowered. Together, we will find those answers. Until then, we need to have hope and support one another.

Believing in Miracles,  
Nicole Hemmenway