

Truly moved beyond words –

I had the privilege of attending the First Annual USC Quench the Fire Run in Long Beach, CA on December 2nd. After communicating with Karlain over the internet and phone for many months, my primary reason for attending the event was to see Karlain, an RSD patient for 10 years, and her son, Randy. It's amazing to me that I could have so much in common with a woman 26 years my senior. Below is a picture of Randy and Karlain as they pose with an autographed copy of their book *Start Strong, Finish Strong* by Dr. Kenneth Cooper and Dr. Tyler Cooper. I credit Dr. Cooper and his organization for my success in slowly lessening the pain associated with RSD. The books were an appreciation gift for their hard work and dedication to supporting awareness and raising funds for RSD research.



Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD) is something I've always considered to be a lonely disorder. When you mention RSD, most people will look at you with confusion and say, "What's that?" Within seconds, you lose their attention and they leave not knowing any more than they did when they first asked the question. In mid to late 2004, I entered remission from the disorder. Remission doesn't mean pain free, but with a pain disorder like RSD, constant tolerable pain is currently as close to cured as possible. Earlier this year when the normal barometric pressure in Dallas dropped and stayed low for an extended period of time, my RSD came out of remission. I was once again reminded of the ugly truth surrounding this disorder - Constant Intolerable Pain.

In early spring, I reached out to meet others with RSD. Receiving a friend request from Randy, an LAPD officer, turned out to be an amazing blessing. He believed the best thing for his Mom would be to communicate with others that share the disorder. I am so grateful to Randy for his friend request and for his request that I befriend his mom, Karlain. She is truly a remarkable lady! I am so thankful to Randy for making my friendship with Karlain possible.



I believe Karlain and I will continue to support one another through pain, remission, happiness and sadness. Earlier this year, I was convinced my RSD would go into remission. I feared I would lose her friendship once we no longer had the constant intolerable pain to discuss. I see now my fear wasn't rational. I'm so blessed to have friends who are RSD patients who still accept me even if my physical appearance doesn't currently show RSD.

While my primary purpose for attending the Quench the Fire Run was to meet Karlain and Randy in person, I truly feel a force bigger than me had a much larger plan in motion. I was apprehensive about meeting others with RSD because I felt they wouldn't accept me. Would I be rejected because I didn't experience the same painful episodes – the relentless pain – every minute of every day? Once again, my fear of rejection wasn't rational and I was accepted with open arms.



The bigger plan set in motion mentioned above has everything to do with Tracey. Tracey is the only other person I have met who has RSD isolated in one location of the body. We just happen to share the same location – the left knee. Tracey spends most of her time using a walker or wheelchair. To say that she touched my heart would be an understatement. I hope I was able to inspire her half as much as she inspired me. I have truly made a friend for life! Here is a picture of Tracey and me before the 5K began.

Tracey is experiencing the same fears and disappointments I previously experienced. She is unable to have anything touch her knee like pants, blankets, or sheets. Even a slight breeze causes her excruciating pain. I recall the same situation. Hearing Tracey say, "I can't remember the last time I was able to wear pants," while tears formed and rolled down her cheeks caused me to remember when I had voiced the same concern. In that moment, I felt a very close connection to a complete stranger. I truly understood the raw emotion and hope behind every word.

In addition to having the honor of meeting Tracey, I also had the pleasure of meeting Barbara, Tracey's mother. After a few moments in conversation, I saw that Tracey and I had something else in common – a supportive loving mom. To witness the love and support Barbara unconditionally provides Tracey is very moving. My mom played a vital role in supporting me during my struggle to understand and accept that I had RSD. I'm glad Tracey has the same type of loving support.

The 5K course was set in the beautifully landscaped El Dorado Park in Long Beach. To my knowledge, everyone who participated in the event was able to finish the 5K. We had those who ran and those who walked the 5K course. We had many who participated in the event with the aid of a wheelchair or crutches. The first picture is one of our participants who walked the entire 5K on crutches. The next picture is of Gabi, an 18 year old girl recently diagnosed with full body RSD. It was so wonderful to see her family supporting her by walking beside her. She has a long road ahead of her and a supportive family makes a world of difference.



About 300 yards from the finish line, I was able to spot Tracy and Barbara about 500 yards away. She was using the wheelchair as a walker and her Mom was all smiles beside her. I walked out to join them for the last few hundred yards. Due to the winding path, Tracy had no idea the finish line was just a few hundred yards ahead. When I reached them, Tracy said this was the most she had ever walked at one time in over 8 years. She said she didn't walk the entire way, but she walked a lot of it. I had no doubt! As we rounded the corner, I pointed to the finish line. The tears of joy, the pride, the total astonishment at realizing what she was about to accomplish was evident when the finish line was in plain view...her eyes told the entire story. I ran up ahead to get in position to take the following picture. Here is Tracy pushing her own wheelchair across the finish line. What she had considered impossible beforehand was now actually happening.



To put the day into words is extraordinarily hard. For a person who always has something to say, I find myself speechless. The courage, the strength, and the will to conquer a seemingly impossible dream...that's what I witnessed firsthand. I saw those who would ordinarily be withdrawn and depressed absolutely glowing. I feel so blessed to have witnessed such a glorious day!

In the notes above, I primarily concentrated on my emotions regarding Tracey and the feeling of watching her finish the 5K in extreme physical pain – and still finish on her feet! However, the day was filled with another inspirational character too!

Dennis Kinch is an inspiration to many affected with chronic pain across the country. May 5, 2005 was the day he began his quest. This quest had him walking a total of 3,000 miles from Boston to Washington, DC and then from Chicago to Los Angeles, CA. His purpose was to let everyone he came into contact know there is a way to change our pain cycle – we just have to make a decision and persevere. He is walking proof!

Dennis heard about the RSD Awareness walk in Long Beach and felt led to participate. From Manhattan Beach, he walked all night (12 hours) to arrive at El Dorado Park around 5:00 am. A few hours later, he participated in the First Annual USC Quench the Fire 5K Walk. To see this gentleman harnessed to a large wheelbarrow he pulls behind him was an amazing picture. Dennis lives with a debilitating pain disorder and he is a walking testimony that movement works! Dennis's story is one of courage, hope, and perseverance. I was able to walk beside him for a portion of the walk and he is truly an inspiration to all who experience chronic pain. To the right is a picture of Dennis and me during the event.



And last, but definitely not least...I am honored to call Randy my friend. The entire concept for this walk came from Randy and his love for his mother. He worked diligently to get sponsorship so the 5K would be realized. His primary purpose was to spread awareness about a disease that many people don't realize exists. It is amazing to see what transpired after this young man had a single thought – to help bring awareness and raise funds for Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy research. Even after USC signed on as host and took over all decisions regarding the race, Randy stayed on and was a driving force behind the success of the event. He managed to bring in 300 plus participants and locate additional sponsors to donate items for the event. Randy was able to persuade me to fly in from Dallas. He was able to motivate Dennis to attend. Randy was even able to persuade a doctor to fly in from Romania to support the cause. Now that is some serious power of persuasion!



If you ever have the opportunity to meet Randy, you will find him to be genuinely humble and always positive. For many RSD patients, Randy has assumed a title I don't believe he would be too comfortable hearing – hero. He is a passionate soul with a never-ending supply of energy. His favorite closing on messages is "Dream Big." I know an entire community indebted to his ambition, drive, and dedication...and we are all Dreaming Big – A cure for RSD!

I invite everyone to attend the 2nd Annual Quench the Fire 5K in 2008.
Dream Big with us! Adidas said it best...

Impossible is Nothing

