



Kate Adamson: A VOICE FOR

THE VOICELESS

By Anita Crane

Ten years ago, Kate Adamson was the active wife of a successful attorney and the loving mother of two girls aged four years and 18 months. Despite debilitating migraines, she worked out and looked healthy. In June 1995, Kate's migraines intensified. One morning, she collapsed at age 33.

Kate's first days in the hospital were more terrifying than her worst nightmare. Because she was so young and fit, ER doctors didn't know what to look for and the hospital had no MRI facilities. Fully aware and thinking lucidly with "a perfect sense of pain," Kate couldn't open her eyes or speak as doctors desperately tried to diagnose whether she was paralyzed from a brain tumor or stroke. Kate thought, "Please somebody help! I'm frightened. What's happening to me? Why can't I say what I think?"



July 1995



Meeting Terri's parents, Mary and Bob Schindler.



Giving her April 19 Congressional testimony.

Taking on the pain

Kate was transferred to a better hospital where a neurologist and other specialists took over. During catheter insertion for an angiogram, her husband Steven fainted and was removed from the room. After the test, Kate was told she had suffered a brain stem stroke. The next day, Steven found himself in an elevator with the doctor that had performed Kate's angiogram. Unaware of Steven's identity, the radiologist openly told a nurse that Kate was the worst case he'd seen in a long time and if she was lucky, she would die. Steven kept this to himself and when other doctors told him Kate had less than a one-in-a-million chance to survive, he decided to believe in her and God.

After mental prayer and a tremendous physical struggle, Kate opened her eyes. Then

Steven asked her to answer questions by blinking. "This is a true love story," Kate beamed. "Within a few days Steven put a sign above my bed and it said, 'This is a human being here. She understands what you say. Please treat her as a person.'" And so began the recovery of Kate Adamson.

The trials and victories of her rehabilitation are detailed in the autobiography *Kate's Journey: Triumph Over Adversity*.

"Like Terri Schiavo," stressed Kate, "I had to wear a diaper and it was humiliating. I was in the hospital's intensive care unit for 70 days and I couldn't speak at all for three months. I couldn't speak full sentences until I was home in mid-October."

For months Kate was unable to eat or drink, so doctors surgically inserted various tubes without anesthesia. "When they inserted the feeding tube into my



Outside Terri Schiavo's hospice.

stomach, thinking I could not feel, I felt everything. I felt every cut, every second. But I was totally locked into my body, unable to move a muscle," she said.

Eventually, immobility stalled Kate's digestive system and the feeding tube was removed. "When my feeding tube was turned off for eight days," she said, "the pains of starvation were excruciating. I was on the inside screaming out: 'I do not want to die. Don't starve me. I want to live, feed me something!'"

Spiritual growth

In silence, Kate sometimes questioned why God allowed her to undergo such agony. Other times, she praised Him for restoring the powers that most people take for granted. Now Kate is a hemiplegic, since the left side of her body is paralyzed. Whenever Kate becomes downhearted because she can't sport high heels from Nordstrom's, she wears her disability in honor of those worse off than herself.

"Before the stroke," Kate recalled, "I was involved in my church, but in a lot of ways I was very selfish and shallow. Now I

have a deeper meaning. Many of us hope for easy lives and comfortable pleasures, but the price for such a life is a weak spirit that counts for little in the greater scheme of life. I did not choose to be extraordinary. I was an ordinary woman called to understand the power of prayer, faith and courage.

"From day to day, I never know how I will feel," Kate continued. "Sometimes I still suffer depression. But disability can bring out the best in someone. I promised God that if He would help me, I would do His will. I came to accept my disability and I hope it helps me to help others. I believe it happened so I could be a voice for the voiceless."

Since recovery, Kate founded her own stroke survivor group, became a national spokesperson for the American Stroke Association and a motivational speaker.

"I just know what it's like and I remember it," Kate voiced. "I think doctors offer patients the worst possible scenario. So I take that with me when I visit other people in the same situation. I look in their eyes and say, 'Don't give up. Never lose hope, you can do it, just don't give up!'"

Fighting for Terri

As soon as she learned that Terri Schiavo was threatened with euthanasia, nothing could hold Kate back. She went to Florida on behalf of all disabled persons worldwide. She met with Terri's parents and Gov. Jeb Bush. Kate protested outside the hospice and spoke out for Terri's right to life on national TV, sometimes using carrots to show that only vegetables are capable of a persistent vegetative state.

On March 14, Kate told the

Florida House Judiciary Committee that healthcare workers wanted her to die and when she didn't, they said her quality of life wouldn't be justifiable: "They told my husband it would be better for him—to let me go. It would be better for the children—to let me go. They said it would be better—for me... Except [there was] one pesky detail—my heart kept beating—stubborn—like me... What we do to the helpless marks our souls forever. What we allow to happen to the disabled labels us forever. You have heard me; could you as a panel kill me?" Consequently the committee, then the House, voted to save Terri, but efforts failed in the Florida Senate.

"Disabled people are being warehoused," Kate revealed. "When Terri was suddenly disabled, she was in her twenties and I believe she could have recovered with therapy. Terri was alive, but she got no stimulation, no therapy, no chance for recovery.

"Forty million people don't have insurance in this country, so if they become disabled, they will not be treated. Even though we had insurance when I suffered a stroke, my husband had to fight. If it

weren't for him, I'd be dead.

"I still require therapy frequently. Without it, my muscles would atrophy. But my insurance company only covers 12 therapy sessions a year. So I have to look for ways to get therapy and treatment on my own. The government has to do something, especially for those with no one to fight for them."

In her substantial April 19 testimony before the U.S. House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Kate said: "I think the Schiavo case is [an] awful blot on this country that will stain us for years and years to come... Never again allow judges the sole discretion to make these kinds of decisions. The courts are no more up to playing God than the legislature or executive is."

Expect to hear from Kate again because, as she said, "There is no difference between euthanasia and abortion—it's always the people who can't protect themselves. We will not forget Terri. This is just the beginning."

Anita Crane is associate editor of *Celebrate Life*. See more about Kate's work and her entire Congressional testimony at KatesJourney.com.

Kate and her daughters, five years after the stroke.

