

Tragic loss opens patient's heart

When Patricia Kearns lost her eye to a bottle rocket 18 years ago, she made an important decision—a decision that would change her life. “I was upset. I was angry,” she recalls. “But you have to decide, are they going to get my eye or everything else too.” Mrs. Kearns only gave into the loss of her eye and embarked on a journey that she calls the start of her ‘lifetime love affair’ with Bascom Palmer Eye Institute.

Mrs. Kearns was just 38 when, at the end of a Memorial Day party at home, she finally sat down for a moment to enjoy the string quartet hired to entertain for the evening. That’s when a bottle rocket, launched by children across the canal, made a direct path to her eye.

At Bascom Palmer, David T. Tse, M.D., professor of ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgery, began the delicate attempt to save Mrs. Kearns’ eye and reconstruct her severely damaged eyelids. Five hours later, she awoke to find that despite the successful eyelid repair, her eye could not be saved—something she had suspected all along.

As devastating as was the news, Tse assured Mrs. Kearns that she could carry on a normal life. “You can do anything you want,” he told her. He was right. Within days, Mrs. Kearns was relearning simple tasks like going up and down stairs and pouring a glass of milk. Within months, she was fitted for a prosthetic eye, and by year’s end, she was driving once again.

“Her vibrant personality shines through and she chose to get on with her life,” says Tse. “Her strong character leaves her essentially without peers with regard to humility, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance.”

During one of her visits to Bascom Palmer, Mrs. Kearns overheard a woman telling Dr. Tse that she could not afford to pay for a prosthetic eye for her son. Mrs. Kearns saw an opportunity to help and offered to pay for the \$700 prosthesis. It was just the beginning of a long history of support for the institution. Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Kearns and her husband made a major donation to Bascom Palmer, funding the oculoplastics clinic and creating an endowment to help children whose parents could not afford prosthetic eyes.

“When God closes a door, He always opens a window,” Mrs. Kearns says. “I feel this incident really opened my heart.”

Over the years, Mrs. Kearns and her husband have continued their support of the department, providing significant funds to advance research and education at the institute and to help preserve the sight and repair the eyes of countless children.

“Patricia suffered a tragic personal loss,” says Tse. “This galvanic event opened her heart to kids losing an eye and she is deeply committed to helping them recover. Her charity, kindness and generosity are exemplary.”

“It’s important for people to know I consider all this part of my recovery,” says Mrs. Kearns. “Bascom Palmer has helped me more than I have helped them.”



Dr. Tse with patients, Patricia Kearns and Kenyetta (Keekee) English, both shining examples of grace and courage in the face of adversity.

“Patricia Kearns’ strong character leaves her essentially without peers with regard to humility, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance.” —David T. Tse, M.D.

“I was bleeding and in shock,” she recalls. Doctors at her local emergency room in Fort Lauderdale stabilized Mrs. Kearns for the ambulance ride to Bascom Palmer. Her husband Tom, a trustee and long time supporter of the University of Miami, knew the institute and its founder, Edward Norton, well.