

Each year an Athena Camps scholarship is awarded In Memory of
Melissa Rose Heagerty, M.D

THE JOURNEY IS THE REWARD

ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB

"Mel" grew up to personify what a young lady can do in this fantastic 21st Century world. She began life in a home with only one parent, a nineteen-year-old single mom who decided early in her pregnancy that she would go full-term, but could not adequately care for her newborn. Following Mel's birth, her mom immediately placed the baby up for adoption; six weeks later she joined the Heagerty family of San Jose and became Melissa Rose Heagerty.

Capable, curious, investigative, positive, purposeful, animated and strong-willed, Mel adapted to life by grabbing it with both hands. Despite physical challenges, she never let them discourage her. Always friendly, light-hearted but self-possessed, she excelled at school from the beginning, teaching herself before kindergarten to read by intently studying commercials on TV with printed captions.

Mel used her natural poise at every opportunity. In the 1st grade, she led her class' Christmas play performance before a packed house of 300. When power to the microphone suddenly quit and wasn't restored for what seemed like an eternity in front of a stilled audience, Mel, who was at the 'Mic' to introduce the number, instinctively and with a knowing smile, calmly stared at the audience, patiently waiting until the Show Could Go On. It did, and the adorable group of 7-year-olds was showered with a thunderous applause following their performance.

Mel learned to play the piano, and by her fifth-year of instruction was regularly performing at recitals and even statewide competitions. She played baseball, preferring to be the catcher because she felt she could better influence the outcome of the game from that position. In high school, her talent for science and mathematics led her to decide to pursue a medical career. A very inspiring freshman honors biology class teacher, three weeks into the first semester, began his lecture lying on a bed of nails. Asked if she would like to become a nurse, she said she would become a doctor.

Community service began in Catholic grammar school. An attitude emerged in Melissa that she could change the world for the better. At Archbishop Mitty high school, she spent an Easter week in Tijuana, Mexico, and with Girls Inc. of the East Bay, two weeks in the summer with Habitat for Humanity construction in an

impoverished part of rural West Virginia. That spirit to change things for the better continued into her medical residencies in Alameda County and, later, in San Bernardino County. Mel was elected treasurer at every school she attended, from grade school through medical school.

In the eighth grade Mel was stricken with a seizure for the first time. It was the start of her teenage years. Mel quickly put on weight, which fluctuated consistently above proper levels. In 2011, her career in family medicine blossomed. She adopted a very healthy balance between eating and exercise. In slightly more than 12 months, she lost 100 lbs. Although recurrent epilepsy was troublesome--and would ultimately become fatal--it was not an insurmountable obstacle. Seizures were just another impediment she would need to overcome during the remainder of her life.

Mel was on the threshold of an exciting, diverse career in medicine, balanced by a life-long commitment to the arts. She loved her extended and extensive family, including meaningful ongoing relationships with the separate families of both her birth parents whom she searched for and located in her 20s. She loved her friends. Everyone who got to know Mel loved her. She was incurably happy, always with a positive word for everyone. She never belittled anyone. Never.

Mel was a 21st Century Renaissance woman. That, simply, is her legacy, and, following her tragic and premature death, she will live on as a role model for women of even the humblest of origins, inspiring them to reveal and share their God-given talents unselfishly and in an unrelenting manner for the betterment of society.

Mel is missed; the life she lived exuberantly shouts to girls: "Go for it all!"