

Jon Dunn
2003 ADA Award Ceremony

I'd like to thank Ron Bratt for the opportunity to speak tonight. I'd also like to thank Marilyn Burke, for inviting me to share my thoughts and for her friendship throughout the years. It's truly unfortunate that Marilyn can't be here tonight, because no one can speak as well about Julia or the importance and meaning of this award than she can.

I first met Julia six years ago -- at debate camp. Poetry brought us together. We were sitting next to each other in a big auditorium at the first lecture and we were both terribly bored. We started exchanging notes, which developed into short poems, mine very bad and hers -- really quite good. Success invaded every part of Julia's life. In addition to being an accomplished poet, Julia was an athlete, a voracious reader, a talented artist, and a gifted debater. In short, she was a complete person.

Julia was also very popular. She was that type of popular that comes from being smart, beautiful, funny and athletic. But all of Julia's friends weren't necessarily part of the popular crowd. In fact, you'd often see her talking with one of those "tournament loners." You know the type, those debaters who aren't that good and sort of shuffle around the halls by themselves at tournaments trying to go unnoticed. Funny thing is these people came alive with Julia. She made them feel appreciated as friends, and in turn, they revealed their best traits as better people. She was that type of person.

Julia was passionate about purple. When she found out that I also liked the color, she tried to send me a full ream of purple flow paper in the mail -- 8 different times. Each time she made a small mistake on my zip code, and each time the ream of paper was returned to her house in California. By the ninth time, I got my purple paper, rather banged up around the edges, but I did finally get it, with the zip code clearly scribbled out and written over the top nine times. Julia never seemed to bother with the small details -- in her quest to live a complete life.

Debate is a tough activity. It's intense. It's an activity where many of us cheer when an early morning round is cancelled, and it's easy to get caught up in the pressure of competition—and forget about debate. Like most of you, I have watched hundreds of rounds where the debaters don't seem to care much about what is going on. No one laughs. No one jokes. No one talks to the other team like friends. No one seems to be enjoying, debating. One thing was always very clear about debate rounds with Julia: she loved every minute of it. Everyone looked forward to debating Julia because you knew it would be the most entertaining two hours of the weekend. She applied the same intense passion that she had for life to every single debate. If you have never had the chance to hear her "unique" speaking style, once described to me as a chipmunk on speed, I highly encourage you to log on to the Foundation's website and listen in. Trust me, it's like no other speaker you've ever heard. You can hear her passion for debate simply by listening to her speak.

A few years ago I was going through one of those sad periods that affect people in life. It had been going on for a long time. One day in March, Julia's mom sent me a package in the mail with a video titled "Julia Burke: a Young Woman of Substance," which is a short story of her

life. I popped the video in and became cured. The video reminded me of what a complete person is like, and what being passionate for life and happiness is all about. Julia had that sort of impact on people.

One final story. Early on in Julia's debate career we met at the Emory tournament in Atlanta. Over the course of the weekend it became obvious that something was really bothering her. I asked her what was wrong and she said that her coach, Ryan Mills, had recently confided in her that he thought she would be the best debater he had ever seen. Relieved, I asked her what was so bad about that. She became very serious and replied "I only hope that I can live up to it."

The Julia Burke Award honors the debater who exhibits excellence in and passion for debate, a commitment to helping others, love and respect for the debate community and dedication to maintaining friendships despite the pressures of competition. This was Julia. The Julia Burke award honors that type of person.