

LIFE notes

LIFE prides itself on helping those in need and for being the champion for those who cannot speak but who enrich our lives and everyday make us a little more... human.

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The Real Winner Edition



Dear Friends:

Most people remember H. Ross Perot as the billionaire data processing entrepreneur who mounted two unsuccessful presidential campaigns in the 1990s. Even though he lost - coming in third behind Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush - his 1992 presidential bid was one of the most successful third-party candidacies in U.S. history.

In my eyes, though - and the hearts and minds of America's disabled veterans -- Ross Perot should always come in first. For without his historic beneficence, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial probably would not exist.

I had conceived of the memorial as the country's first permanent public tribute to what was then the three million living disabled veterans and to those who had died. Then I worked with the now late Jesse Brown, who was then Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Art Wilson, the adjutant general of the Disabled American Veterans organization; and members of Congress on the necessary legislation to make the memorial a reality. However, by law, public funds could not be used to build the memorial - we had to raise more than \$80 million from private donors before we could put the first shovel in the ground.

Upcoming events

October 5, 2019

2019 Hero Dog Awards Gala
Beverly Hills California

November 12, 2019

Made for Each Other Premiere
The Breakers Palm Beach
By Invitation Only
6:30 pm

January 3, 2020

LIFE's 26th Annual Lady in Red Gala
The Breakers Palm Beach
By Invitation Only
6:00 pm

To learn more or to donate, visit
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(Dear Friends continued)

We reached out to so many people, so many companies, so many foundations. Some people said we didn't need another memorial in Washington D.C. Others said that disabled veterans needed more tangible recognition - they needed access to comprehensive quality health care, jobs, educational benefits. Long after the fighting on the battlefield ended for them, they continued to fight other battles, to re-integrate into their home and professional lives, their communities and society at-large, all defined by their new reality. They carry the permanent scars of war, physical and mental, and will do so for the rest of their lives.

Ross Perot was one in the latter group. A group of us travelled to Plano, Texas to meet with him on several occasions with a singular goal: to convince him to make a very significant contribution to the memorial. On each of these occasions, I would present my case but it was as if he didn't want to hear what I was saying. "Little woman," as he would call me, "stop wasting my time. In fact, stop wasting your money. Disabled veterans need hospitals, not memorials. Why don't you give your money for a hospital for them."

I half expected him to whip out some of the graphs and charts he was noted for during his Presidential campaigns, except these would highlight what makes the best ROI, return on investment, a memorial or a hospital. Then he would tell me that I reminded him of his wife, Margot, "always looking around corners, always looking for angles."

My angle was quite simple. A sizable donation from him would jump start our campaign and open the doors to other major donors. As he was a veteran of the U.S. Navy and a stalwart supporter of Vietnam War veterans, as well as being one of the most successful businessmen in America, I knew he had the right prestige. So, first I would remind him that that I did give some of my own money to hospitals, including the University of Miami to support paralysis research.

But, more importantly, I would explain that there was more than one way to help veterans heal. To be sure, veterans need the best health care. But healing comes in many forms. When you are marginalized, when your sacrifices are far too often forgotten, you also need a refuge, a place of reflection, and a place that reminds and educates others that your sacrifices were not in vain.

After hearing "little woman" from him a number of times, I began to suspect my own efforts were being made in vain. So one can imagine my surprise when at the end of visit number three, he turned to me and asked, "How many disabled American veterans are there living today?" I told him three million (now it is more than 4.2 million). He sat back in his chair, gave me a thoughtful stare, and then said, "Fine. I'll give you one dollar for every living disabled American veteran."

That three million dollars was a shot in the arm for us. It quickly opened doors to other large donations and paved the way for our campaign's success. On October 5, 2014, on a magnificent sunny day, we dedicated the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. Ross was not able to join us that day but in my remarks I made sure to thank him. For if not for him, the eternal flame in our memorial would never have even been ignited and our dream extinguished.

Yes, H. Ross Perot was a business magnate and a Presidential candidate. Yes, he served with distinction in the Navy and was equally distinguished as a philanthropist. But he was more than that to me, and to America's disabled veterans. H. Ross Perot was a true American patriot, a true American hero.

Love,

Lois

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