

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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Cherished Friend Edition



Dear Friends:

Nick Buoniconti had quite the impressive curriculum vitae: Hall of Fame football player, captain of the 1972 Miami Dolphins team that is still the only squad in history to go undefeated for an entire season, groundbreaking TV sportscaster, hugely successful attorney and business executive, and, of course, staunch and selfless advocate for individuals with paralysis.

But for those who knew him personally like I - and some of you - did, he was a dear and cherished friend and our compatriot in helping America's disabled veterans. Indeed, through the research and treatment breakthroughs achieved by Miami Project to Cure Paralysis - Buoniconti Fund in the Lois Pope LIFE Center at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, many of the heroic men and women who experienced horrific and permanent disabilities while fighting for our country have realized remarkable progress in their recovery and even in their mobility.

I first met Nick decades ago through our mutual friend, the pioneering neurosurgeon Dr. Barth Green. When my mother suffered a stroke and was afflicted with macular degeneration, I asked friends and colleagues who was the best doctor to help her, they all told me to go see Barth. They were right and he and I became fast friends.

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
www.life-edu.org or call 561.582.8083.

(Dear Friends continued)

Then when Nick's son Marc was paralyzed making a routine tackle in a college football game 34 years ago, Barth and Nick committed themselves to spending the rest of their lives to finding a cure for him and others similarly afflicted. They founded the Miami Project - Buoniconti Fund and opened a laboratory in a building on the university's campus. But the building was so inadequate that when planes flew overhead they would not only disrupt the scientists but also the experiments that were being conducted. In short, they desperately needed a new home for their work. I wanted to do something to help.

Fast back and then forward a few years in both directions. I had met the wonderful actor and humanitarian Christopher Reeve when I was an actress and singer and he was a budding star. We became friends and he would occasionally perform in productions at the theater that my late husband Gene and I created in Manalapan. Chris also attended one of the first Lady in Red galas - I still vividly recall him taking my hand and leading me to and on the dance floor. It was a magic moment.

But the magic soon turned into a nightmare for Chris when he was thrown from a horse and paralyzed during an equestrian ride. That horrific accident crystalized my desire to help Nick, Barth and the Miami Project - Buoniconti Fund, and I soon made the lead gift of \$10 million to fund the organization's new home. I was deeply honored when Barth and Nick, as well as my dear friends Suzie and Dr. Eugene Sayfie, asked if they could put my name on the magnificent facility in recognition of my contribution. And, I'm even more honored that, under their direction and leadership, it has become the leading center for research and treatment for paralysis and other neurological diseases in the entire world!

In the years since, Nick and I would see each other at various events, most notably the Annual Great Sports Legends Dinner in New York that benefitted the Miami Project - Buoniconti Fund. Even in a crowd of some 1500 people, he would always take time to seek me out, introduce me to some of the Hall of Famers who were being honored, and thank me for my assistance.

But it was me who should have been thanking him. Without his laser-focus, his devotion, his energy, his passion, and his perseverance in striving to find a cure for Marc and his fellow paraplegics and quadriplegics, the treatments and therapies that are now benefitting disabled veterans would never have been achieved.

I remember when Nick was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. With Marc by his side, Nick told the crowd that he would give it all up - all the success and renown - if he could one day see Marc get out of his wheelchair and walk again.

I know in my heart that day will come - not just for Marc but for our disabled veterans and others who are also confined to wheelchairs. And Nick will smile down from Heaven, knowing that he helped make it happen. That will be his greatest legacy...and it will be that memory of him that will always serve as an inspiration and blessing to me.

Rest in peace, my dear friend.

Love,

Lois

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