

AMERICA'S HEROES

Thanks And Remembrance



President Ronald Reagan receives a model of his ship.

by Nancy Reagan

(NAPSA)—People often ask me what I most remember from our time in the White House. I think the most memorable moments may be those nights when Ronnie went down Pennsylvania Avenue to the U.S. Capitol to deliver the State of the Union—a night I would be seated in the gallery in the House of Representatives, next to an American Hero such as Lennie Skutnik, the passerby who risked his life saving others when a plane crashed in the icy waters of the Potomac River.

Ronald Reagan relished those moments because he related to people, to ordinary Americans doing extraordinary things.

To him, those every-day heroes embodied the very idea of America. It was something in his blood, something he'd known from his boyhood days in Dixon, Illinois, a time when children dreamt of growing up to be sports heroes or movie stars or—who knows—maybe even President. No wonder Ronnie could always relate to the driving power of the American dream.

It is a belief he carries with him in the great adventure of life. From his days as a sportscaster at WOC in Davenport, Iowa, to the day we met on a blind date, through all our years in Hollywood and the decades of public service, first in California and then in the White House, he has been guided by an abiding American optimism that, as Ronnie loves to say, "America's best day always lies ahead."



The U.S. Navy's newest aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan.

I think that optimism is what people love about Ronnie. I know it's what I love about him.

Of course, our journey has not been free of adversity. No journey ever is. An assassination attempt, the battles with cancer and Ronnie's long struggle now with Alzheimer's. Even as those of us who love him set out to help him through each challenge, somehow, it is always Ronnie who lifts us up, who gives us strength to carry through.

The gift of Ronnie's strength is something I summoned up when I traveled to the site of a truly special ceremony, an extraordinary honor conferred on no other living president: the naming of our Navy's newest aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan christened March 4, 2001, our 49th Wedding Anniversary.

Though Ronnie was not able to be there, I was.

To me, his absence was like an empty seat in the House Gallery. We missed that wry smile, that gracious nod of the head, those heart-felt words and all of this could only happen at one moment in history and in one blessed place—the United States of America.

For this great honor, I thank the American people on behalf of myself and my husband—my American Hero: Ronald Reagan. For more information on Ronald Reagan and the christening, please see www.reaganfoundation.org.