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My Memories with Dearly Loved Nancy Reagan: “Just Say Yes” - For Ronnie and America

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Nancy Reagan was beautiful and smart. Reflecting on senses when in her presence: seeing her, Nancy was elegant-conservative; speaking with her, Nancy was keenly attentive; listening to her, Nancy was gently persuasive. Nancy's scent was like roses. Touching her, Nancy was warmly reserved. But Nancy had an amazing “sixth sense” the rare gift of perception and vision. She seemed to sense the good, the true intent of a person or conversely was keenly aware to be careful that someone was not who they portrayed. Nancy was a devoted and thoughtful friend with a plethora of talent, but she knew exactly what she wanted most to be. Nancy gracefully and confidently said, *“My job is to be Mrs. Ronald Reagan.”*



The First Lady in Red

Nancy expressed, *“I think a woman gets more if she acts feminine.”* As the eldest of ten, the first eight being younger sisters, I concur wholeheartedly with Nancy's wise perspective. Nancy Reagan walked into a room and everyone looked in

awe. She carried herself with an aura of elegance, beauty and command of the world stage she was propelled into as the “Leading Lady” gliding into the arms of her one and only “Leading Man.” My husband and I were invited to an evening with President and Mrs. Reagan in New York in 1990, about a year after they left office. Nancy and her Ronnie looked at each other smiling so romantically, all hearts present were touched. This memory inspires the poignant lyrics from “The Lady in Red”, which became popular in 1986 during their reign in The White House. One can imagine the “Gentleman of her dreams,” Nancy’s adored Ronnie serenading her, like it was their very first date,

*“I’ve never seen you looking so gorgeous as you did tonight
I’ve never seen you shine so bright, you were amazing
I’ve never seen so many people want to be there by your side
And when you turned to me and smiled, it took my breath away
And I have never had such a feeling
Such a feeling of complete and utter love, as I do tonight.”*

Nancy and I shared the love of the heart color red, in our wardrobes and GOP party symbol. But Nancy was literally America’s First Lady in Red. She inspired the tasteful “Nancy Reagan Look” comparable to the fashionable Grace Kelly and Jackie Kennedy Onassis. Her shoes and handbags matched her suits which fit beautifully on her slim figure. Mrs. Ronald Reagan outwardly was an extremely reserved and dignified woman, but the times we were together opened a glimpse into who this very private person was inside. Nancy had a charming and calming spirit. She was considerate and cogent in an almost “Obi Wan Kenobi” way. Her radiating childlike smile with a sophisticated demeanor presented a uniquely balanced composure. Nancy was soft-spoken with an infectious laugh.

She always looked stunning. Her hair was perfectly coiffed and her lovely hands greeted yours with unpretentious manicured nails. Nancy’s subtle makeup highlighted her milky bright skin with exquisite cheekbones and deep set “doe” eyes. Actually, her smile and eyes were her most engaging features as they made you feel she saw into your heart and soul. And no one else had her attention except you. While Nancy was the apple of Ronnie’s eye and he was her world, she was also a woman’s good and caring friend.

Good Neighbor and Good Friend

Nancy had a humble warm way of making you feel that she genuinely respected you and had time for you. Few women I have known have her combined qualities of quiet charisma, kind of shy and elegantly demure, but with iron strong character. Nancy had a sense of humor, being born in the “Chinese Year of the Metal Rooster” maybe contributed to her traits. Nancy was a loyal friend to many (Los) Angelenos with a special affection for Betsy Bloomingdale, her dear longtime girlfriend, and Jerry Perenchio, her closest neighbor and a wonderful man who lovingly made sure Nancy was well. There are many special friends who were neighbors of Nancy, proud “Reaganites” including Ambassador and Mrs. Glen Holden, late Ambassador Bill Wilson, Bob and Kelly Day to name a few. It was at their home one intimate evening that Nancy shared a preview of “I Love You Ronnie: The Letters of Ronald Reagan to Nancy Reagan.” Those graced to be present received a personalized version as a gift of their love. For years we have all been good neighbors in the diverse, closely knit Bel-Air enclave of Los Angeles. Friends and neighbors are of all political party persuasions and all faiths and ethnicities. Most of us grew up in caring American neighborhoods where you help each other, interestingly, that’s Bel-Air. Nancy had her favorite table at the original Bel-Air Hotel Dining Room. It was a corner booth looking out to the courtyard. She loved to meet for breakfast there and the staff all loved her.

Motivating Mentor

Nancy passionately spoke about three concerns in her heart, first Ronnie, then America and youth, many destroyed by drugs and alcohol. She was a mentor in my life, motivating me to get involved in politics and in our community of Los Angeles. Because of Nancy’s encouragement, I began police ride-a-longs to better understand the plight of people living on the streets in South Los Angeles where I grew up. On one such late night ride with the Sheriff’s department, I came to know a young woman Tammy who had been abused by her stepfather as a child prompting her to run away which led to her living on the streets. Tammy became addicted to crack-cocaine, mothering many children from different men who paid for her habit. Sweet homeless Tammy was the image of the suffering person living in the shadows that Nancy cared about helping. Nancy inspired people to “Just say yes” and help Tammy and others struggling with addiction to “Just say no” with loving support.

In 1997, out of the blue, I was contacted by Merv Griffin and invited to join him for lunch with a “special guest” at his Beverly Hilton Hotel. We walked into the private room and surprisingly Mrs. Reagan was waiting for us there. After a cordial exchange, she made a compelling argument as to why I should run for Lieutenant Governor along with Dan Lungren for Governor. Nancy expressed concern for the future of the Republican Party, especially in California. When I now reflect on how people, ordinary folks or well-known people are messengers along life paths and consider why and what for, it is humbling how God works in mysterious ways. Sometimes we are oblivious to His plan, stuck on our own.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says it all, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”*

Through The Noel Foundation, amazing people have come together for a better world. Drive with diplomacy and networking leads to worthwhile projects. Caring people of varied backgrounds and faith tradition partner for positive change through shared charitable endeavors. In the late nineties, we gathered to honor Nancy Reagan at The Beverly Wilshire Hotel. The foundation partnered with leaders from Japan also committed to spreading “warm-heartedness.” Kenzo Kassai, Founder and CEO of Aprica baby stroller company, led the delegation from Japan. Special caring lady friends including Olivia Newton-John, Arianna Huffington, Kerry Kennedy, Marcia Hobbs, and former First Lady of Hawaii Jean Ariyoshi joined this motivating event to show Mrs. Reagan how loved she was by an array of talented women and men transcending politics and inspiring shared purpose.

News that President Obama will not attend the funeral service to pay final respects to Mrs. Reagan is sad. It pains to see the divide that exists in America. When he was elected, Nancy paid him a great compliment, *“I thought Obama ran the best campaign I have ever known - disciplined, well organized, very, very good. I was very impressed”* she said. By missing this “Farewell to Nancy” gathering, President Obama misses an opportunity to be a unifier. “It can be done” when hardened hearts are opened allowing the light of Christ to penetrate them, so necessary for “The American Spirit.”

The Reagan Legacy- “It Can Be Done”

On President Reagan’s desk of the Oval Office was the small leather sign “It Can Be Done” which can be found at The Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. One is on my desk and given as gifts to people inspired by these four simple but poignant words. Mrs. Reagan was deeply committed to leave a lasting legacy of love and peace for all good people of the world of all political parties to experience when at The Reagan Library. She loved the people who helped make this vision a reality and those who worked to take care of it, preserving and promoting The Reagan Legacy. Nancy’s face lit up when she spoke of her children and grandchildren. She also held a special place in her heart for Fred Ryan and his beautiful family and for her loyal and caring assistant Joanne Drake. It was a blessing over the years to be with Mrs. Reagan in this historical site that was chosen to be the resting place for her beloved Ronnie and now herself, side by side eternally.

Eternal Union

Nancy Reagan in many ways was a mystery. Being with her you knew she was strong, but at the same time, you felt she was vulnerable needing some protection or loving support, especially with Ronnie not well and then gone. She will be sadly missed. But there is comfort for her family, friends and the American people whom she loved and served as an inspirational First Lady. Nancy is now with her “Knight in Shining Armor” and they are reunited for eternity and together experiencing the Beatific Vision of the true Shining City on the Hill. In The Gospel of John, Jesus promises:
“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
(John 14:1-4)”

On Sunday March 6, 2016 Nancy’s sweet Ronnie welcomed his beloved into his arms purring,

*“The lady in red, the lady in red
The lady in red, my lady in red
I love you!”*

May the souls of the faithful departed Ronald and Nancy, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
Brothers and Sisters, Alleluia. Amen.