



INDUCTEE BIOGRAPHY: CHRISTOPHER REEVE

Superman Hall of Heroes inductee Christopher Reeve held many professions throughout his career, including actor, director and activist. Reeve not only played Superman on the big screen, he also showed the same 'Man of Steel' character away from the cameras. Since being paralyzed in an equestrian competition in 1995, Reeve not only put a human face on spinal cord injury, he motivated neuroscientists around the world to conquer the most complex diseases and conditions of the brain and central nervous system. Whether in a cape or in a chair, Reeve was a hero who exhibited unwavering courage and a tireless work ethic to deliver on his mission.

Christopher Reeve made his first appearance on stage at the Williamstown Theatre Festival at the age of 15. After graduating from Cornell University in 1974, he pursued his dream of acting, studying at Juilliard under the legendary John Houseman. Reeve made his Broadway debut opposite Katharine Hepburn in *A Matter of Gravity* in 1976 and then went on to distinguish himself in a variety of stage, screen and television roles. Film credits include: *Superman* in 1978 and its subsequent sequels, *Deathtrap*, *Somewhere in Time*, *The Bostonians*, *Street Smart*, *Speechless*, *Noises Off*, *Above Suspicion* and the Oscar-nominated *The Remains of the Day*. Stage credits include: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Fifth of July*, *My Life*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Love Letters*, and *The Aspern Papers*. Reeve was also a bestselling author and an award winning director.

In 1999, Reeve became the Chairman of the Board of the Christopher Reeve Foundation. The Reeve Foundation, a global, nonprofit organization which supports research to develop effective treatments and cures for paralysis caused by spinal cord injury and other central nervous system disorders. Soon after, the organization rebranded to include his wife, Dana Reeve, and reflect her work in establishing quality of life initiatives. From that point on, the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation had a dual mission, to advance the care and discover cures for paralysis.

As Vice Chairman of the National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.), Reeve worked on quality of life issues for the disabled. In partnership with Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont, he helped pass the 1999 Work Incentives Improvement Act, which allowed people with disabilities to return to work and still receive disability benefits. Reeve served on the Board of Directors of World T.E.A.M. Sports, TechHealth, and Leaders in Furthering Education (LIFE).

In addition to his work on behalf of the Reeve Foundation, Reeve's advocacy efforts included:

- Lobbying on behalf of the National Institutes of Health to double the NIH budget in five years.
- Testifying before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies in favor of federally funded stem cell research
- Providing instrumental and crucial support for the passage of the New York State Spinal Cord Injury Research Bill (7287C), landmark legislation that makes available up to \$8.5 million annually in funds collected from violations of the state's motor vehicle laws to be appropriated

among the leading research facilities in New York. Reeve was also involved in lobbying efforts for similar bills in New Jersey, Kentucky, Virginia and California

- Working tirelessly to obtain increased funding from both the public and private sectors to cure Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, MS, ALS, stroke, as well as to repair the damaged spinal cord
- Helping to establish the Reeve-Irvine Research Center at the UCI College of Medicine. The center supports the study of trauma to the spinal cord and diseases affecting it, with an emphasis on the development of therapies to promote the recovery and repair of neurological function

Reeve's community and political involvement pre-dates his spinal cord injury. Over the course of many years, he served as a national spokesman on behalf of the arts, campaign finance reform and the environment. A founder and Co-President of The Creative Coalition, he helped to create recycling in New York City and to persuade state legislature to set aside one billion dollars to protect the city's water supply. Since 1976, he was actively involved with Save the Children, Amnesty International, Natural Resources Defense Council, The Environmental Air Force and America's Watch. In 1987, he demonstrated in Santiago, Chile on behalf of 77 actors threatened with execution by the Pinochet regime. For this action, Reeve was given a special Obie Award in 1988 and the annual award from the Walter Briehl Human Rights Foundation.

A documentary film about Reeve's advocacy and road to recovery entitled *Christopher Reeve: Courageous Steps* aired on ABC television in the United States. The documentary was directed by Reeve's eldest son Matthew and has been distributed around the world.

In August 2004, Reeve completed his final directing project, *The Brooke Ellison Story*. This fact-based A&E cable television movie, which aired October 25, 2004, is based on the book, *Miracles Happen: One Mother, One Daughter, One Journey*. Brooke Ellison became a quadriplegic at age 11 but with determination and the support of her family, Ellison rose above her disability and went on to graduate from Harvard University.

Reeve once shared that he dreamed of a world of empty wheelchairs and after nearly a decade since his passing, the Reeve Foundation honors the late-actor and advocate by working tirelessly to make that dream a reality.

"So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable." --Christopher Reeve

Christopher Reeve died October 10, 2004 of heart failure. He was 52 years old. Reeve is survived by his mother Barbara Johnson, his brother Benjamin Reeve, and his three children – Matthew, Alexandra and Will.