

In the spirit of the season, we honor those whose wise words, kind acts, and good humor have changed our lives. Here, a group of distinguished men and women talk about who has inspired them most. What better time of year to say thanks?

# GREAT Inspirations

## ALEXANDRA AND MATTHEW REEVE ON THEIR FATHER, ACTOR CHRISTOPHER REEVE

*Alexandra:* Dad had always been a very active person, strong and self-disciplined, and that continued after his horseback-riding accident in 1995 [which paralyzed him from the neck down; he died in 2004]. He made physical rehab his new goal. He said, "If the scientists are going to do their job, I'm going to be ready when they come to me." That gave

him a focus. He wanted to help the millions of other people in America who were living with paralysis, plus many more worldwide. He knew they didn't have the resources he did, the best help available, the best therapies, the best equipment. He wanted to change all that. He was always hopeful.

*Matthew:* With today's technology, the littlest extra movement can result in more independence. Dad was working on it. Moving his

Contributing writers: Lois Cahall, Margaret Heffernan, Alanna Nash

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEN REGAN/EMERY



Reeve never gave up hope, say his children Matthew and Alexandra, who are both board members of the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation.



**AUTHOR MARIE BRENNER  
ON FILM EXECUTIVE PAT  
COOPER**

It was the first day of my first real job in New York City, and there she was: my first real boss. Pat Cooper wore a dress-for-success suit and pearls as if she were the star of *The Women*. She had dark, curly hair that was tightly cropped, and she walked and moved with confidence. As director of creative affairs at Paramount Pictures in 1973, she was willing to give me a tryout as her assistant. I was thrilled.

"I have a dream job," I wrote my mother.

Under Pat, I learned about well-written scripts and great stories from the same movie titans who had made classics like *The Godfather*. Pat's mantra was this: quality. Quality was for her everything that our smart band of script readers believed in and those philistines in Hollywood did not.

After returning from a business lunch, she'd wave her hand and say to me, "None of this is real. Trying to change the world is what matters. Wake up. Look around you every

day. There are wars in Bangladesh and criminals in the White House. Why are you here when you could be out there, trying to tell people what's going on?"

And two years later, I was suddenly out there, out here, struggling to make my way as a reporter. Pat helped show me the way.

**CANCER ACTIVIST DEE  
DEE RICKS ON CYCLING  
CHAMPION LANCE  
ARMSTRONG**

Early last year, I was packing for spring break with my kids when I felt a lump in my breast. That was odd: Only months before, I'd had a routine exam and there were no abnormalities. I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and they said one breast would have to be removed quickly. I thought about watching my boys graduate from college and opted to have a double mastectomy. I remember that a Tim McGraw song was playing in the car on my way to the hospital. "Live Like You Were Dying."

I was a single working mother. My first thought was, What about

"AFTER RETURNING FROM LUNCH, PAT WOULD WAVE HER HAND AND SAY, 'NONE OF THIS IS REAL. TRYING TO CHANGE THE WORLD IS WHAT MATTERS.'"



Investigative journalist Brenner (right), whose latest book is *Apples & Oranges*, received valuable career advice from Cooper.



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Armstrong and Ricks in 2007.

my children? My second thought was, What man is going to want me without breasts? But whom could I relate to? I got tired of all the Hallmark survivor stories. Not for me. Finally I happened upon Lance Armstrong's book *It's Not About the Bike*, and there I found a superhuman. He was a child of a single mother, as I was.

After my mastectomy, I joined forces with Lance and others to help change our health care system. Through all the charitable work he does with his Lance Armstrong Foundation, Lance has inspired me to use my voice to promote cancer awareness, especially for the poor who are diagnosed too late. This is our connection. Cancer patients are dying not because we don't have a cure but because we don't have

enough preventive medical care. To have hope, we must have access to health care.

Lance is not just an athlete to me. He's a role model. He achieves everything he sets his mind to. In our generation, there are few whom I hold in high esteem. Lance makes me want to reach higher for myself and especially for others. And he is always out to win. That's what I love about him.

It's spooky because in 1999, when I was visiting Paris, he was cycling in the Tour de France. And I was one of the people who stood in the crowd and held up a sign that said "Go Armstrong. U.S.A. rules!" Who knew that just a few years later, his cancer mission and mine would unite us?

**LANCE ARMSTRONG ON  
HIS MOTHER, LINDA  
ARMSTRONG KELLY**

My mother is my hero. She once told me, "If you can't give 110 percent, you won't make it," and I've never forgotten that. She is my best friend, my motivator, and my most loyal ally. I wish everyone had at least one person who inspires him or her the way my mother inspires me.