



The Iron Woman Behind the Iron Horse

The Greater New York Chapter of The ALS Association has commemorated a pivotal caregiver from ALS history with a luncheon named in honor of Eleanor Gehrig, the wife of famed baseball hero Lou Gehrig.

Eleanor Twitchell and Lou Gehrig married in 1933, and Eleanor soon became the “First Lady of the Yankees,” traveling the country with the New York baseball team. Six years later, Lou’s performance on the field began to lag, and in 1939, and after 2,130 consecutive games, Gehrig took his name off the roster. Eleanor and Lou both knew something was wrong, and it was Eleanor who booked the appointment at the Mayo clinic to arrange for Lou see a specialist.

On June 19th, his 36th birthday, Lou was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a disease that would bear his name for decades to come. When Lou Gehrig gave his famous address at Yankee Stadium 80 years ago, just a few weeks after receiving his diagnosis of ALS, it also marked a new chapter in Eleanor’s life as she stepped up to the plate to serve as caregiver.

By his side day and night, Eleanor was committed to her husband, showing bravery in the face of the tyrannical disease they battled together. Though she lost Lou just 23 months later, Eleanor continued in the fight against ALS. Throughout her life, she tirelessly promoted ALS research, partnered with the Muscular Dystrophy Association, testified before Congress for research funding, and left a significant portion of her estate to the cause. Their legacy lives on through the Eleanor and Lou Gehrig ALS Center at Columbia University, which remains a leading facility for people living with ALS and for clinical trials to help find treatments for this disease.

The inaugural Eleanor Gehrig Luncheon: A Celebration of Caregivers, honored her dedication to caregiving and to the fight by recognizing four remarkable caregivers: Christine Pendergast, Patrick Quinn, Sr., Nirmal Shah and Caroline Winterton (pictured below). The event was so successful it will become an annual event at the Greater New York Chapter.