

FROM BEST BUDDIES TO FAMILY

Story and photographs by Laurence L. Levin



Among those attending the 2009 Inauguration party at the Shriver home are Sidney McKelvy, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Maria Shriver, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, Cher and Oprah.

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Like many of my stories, this one began with a telephone call. An associate recommended me to take photos at an event. A series of questions followed. Are you available on this date? What is your fee? Oh, remember, we are a non-profit. Can you get the film donated? The event was a Best Buddies fundraiser to be hosted by Sargent Shriver and Eunice Kennedy Shriver (Maria Shriver's mother and sister to President John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy) at their home in Potomac, Maryland.

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This wasn't my first brush with the Shrivers. Sargent Shriver spoke at my high school when he was campaigning for vice-president, and I even have photographs of him from that visit. I knew of Eunice Shriver because I had been involved with the Special Olympics. Eunice is the founder of Special Olympics. Going to their home and meeting them face to face was an honor.

Best Buddies is an organization started by the Shrivers' son, Anthony. It is dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. My job would include taking pictures of Anthony with all of the guests as well as documenting the fundraiser.

A big tent with seating for more than 500 people was set up outside the large Shriver home. The night was a fast-paced adventure with familiar political, business and celebrity types throughout the venue. Ask me who I photographed, and I would be hard-pressed to remember, since I kept moving from one shot to the next. I do remember listening to the Temptations, however, during a few moments I took to relax.

Anthony Shriver is a passionate, gregarious and good-hearted man. He spent the evening greeting his guests, making small talk and cajoling support for his cause. After listening to the various testimonials during the presentation and reading the program, I understood the evening's importance.

My photography went smoothly. No mishaps. I was completely exhausted at the end. I turned over nearly 20 rolls of film and said

my goodnights. It was fun and an inspiring night, and I expected it to end with that.

Well, I must have done something right, because over the years the Shrivers kept calling me to photograph the Best Buddies Ball. Eventually, they added other events in Washington, DC. Then they added events in California, Florida, Indiana and Massachusetts. Over the past 16 years, a friendship developed, and I was called on to shoot family events as well.

Not often does one of America's prominent families allow an outsider in. Although I only got to spend time with them in their later years, both Eunice and Sarge left me with an enduring legacy. Her passion and commitment never ended. She was comfortable coaxing presidents and senators, as well as swimming in the pool with Special Olympic athletes. In a group of people, she would always find buddies and athletes; listening, encouraging and just spending time with each person. Eunice was a great believer in getting people to do more. She would never allow anyone to say "can't." You had to keep trying, and you had to include everyone.

I witnessed the importance of family with Sarge. He developed Alzheimer's and, though not as active as he once was, he was still included in all family events. Each of the Shriver siblings and grandchildren provided love and compassion. I realized his legacy in these later years as the tributes and dedications were made. Here is a man who was never elected to a public office, but who had more impact on the American people than some presidents. Shriver was responsible for the Peace Corps, War on Poverty, Head Start, Job Corps, VISTA, Foster Grandparents, Legal Services for the Poor and other programs. Additionally, his involvement in Special Olympics with his wife Eunice continues to provide opportunities for millions around the world.

Throughout the years, I had a front row seat. I spent time with the family and got to meet interesting and prominent people. These photographs are a selection of images made of Eunice and Sargent Shriver from those times. To see more photos, go to www.LLLevin.com.



Eunice Shriver is surrounded by Special Olympics athletes at her home in Potomac, Maryland during Camp Shriver 2004. Camp Shriver was the precursor to the Special Olympics. In 1960, when a mother of a child with intellectual disabilities explained to Eunice that there was no mainstream summer camp that would accept her child, Eunice decided to start a camp for special needs in Maryland.



Eunice Shriver poses with Olympic Gold Medalist Carl Lewis at the 2004 Best Buddies Hearst Castle Challenge. The fund-raising challenge involves a bike ride from Carmel, California to Hearst Castle along the Pacific Coast Highway. Eunice and Carl rode in a criterion event on the Hearst Castle grounds.



President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush hosted a dinner at the White House to celebrate "The Spirit of Special Olympics" in 2006 and commemorate The Olympics' successful five-year campaign to double the number of participating athletes worldwide. They surpassed the goal at 2.5 million participating athletes.



Receiving line at the dedication of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) in 2008 with brother Ted Kennedy and Sister Jean Kennedy Smith.

Sargent Shriver poses with 5 of his 14 grandchildren: Kathleen, Rosie, Sam, Caroline and Tim Shriver, Christmas 2009.

