

DAVE HYDE
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QUARTERBACKING THE FIGHT



SHAY AND BOB GRIESE
Advocates



There is a moment each year, a moment without cameras or notebooks, when Bob Griese walks inside Moffitt Cancer Center and feels like a fan getting an inside look at the team he follows. That's how he refers to the doctors and researchers at Moffitt.

"My team," Griese calls them in the way football fans once did about his Miami Dolphins of the 1970s, the way he did as a youth about the New York Yankees, the way every sports fan does from his or her first cheer.

Everyone has a team. This is Griese's team now. As chairman of Moffitt's national Board of Advisors, he makes an annual tour to see the clinical trials, talk with the involved doctors and translate the year's progress against cancer in a manner he understands: as that of a football quarterback moving the ball downfield against the toughest opponent of them all.

"For a long time, we were backed against our goal line against cancer," he said. "Then we started to move the ball down the field some, slowly but surely. Now you can see it, the progress this team has made. You can feel the momentum from the work they're doing. The end zone's getting closer."

It was on one of these recent trips to Moffitt, as he studied the research and listened especially to breakthroughs in chemotherapy treatment, Griese realized something that marked progress more than any chart or medical analysis could. He realized his late wife, Judi, would have a great chance of surviving today. It struck him that an otherwise healthy 44-year-old woman – a nurse, no less – who discovered a small lump on her breast one morning would have a far greater chance of living more than the five years Judi did – watching her three sons grow and continuing a good life with her husband.

"OK, let's fight this," Judi said to her husband after each trip to the oncologist, each trip to chemotherapy, each time she was told the cancer spread until there was no way to stop it. That was 25 years ago, and the end of Judi's fight was the beginning of her husband's fight. It began privately, at home, with the shepherding of his three boys through the death of their mother. Griese knew what it was like to lose a parent. He was 10 years old and felt lost when his father died of a heart attack. He tells a story: As family and friends gathered at the family home to mourn his father, his mother suddenly realized Bob was missing. Everyone searched the house. People ran through the neighborhood, calling for him. Police arrived to help. Then someone heard a thumping sound upstairs. Alone, in a closet, Bob sat thumping his heels against a cedar chest and hiding from his changed world. He was traumatized by his father's death, and so gave great thought when Judi died to helping his sons, especially the youngest, Brian, who was 12 and the only one still living at home.

"We laughed and cried and were honest with each other about our feelings," Griese said. "I might hide my true thoughts and emotions in public. I never did inside the family."



FAMILY TRADITION

At the time his NFL career bloomed in Denver, Brian Griese showed all of a pro athlete's possibilities. And responsibilities. He didn't just think of succeeding in football. He thought of how to help the 12-year-old kid he once was.

That was the vision for Judi's House, a large, red-bricked haven where children, teens and young adults get help in dealing with the loss of a parent in the same way Brian lost his mother, Judi, to cancer in 1988.

Brian had his dad to help him through the grief. They talked. They cried. Day by day, they felt their way through the process, which the professional counselors at Judi's House navigate more easily.

Since it was founded in 2002, Judi's House has helped more than 6,000 children through their bereavement. Brian has stayed true to his cause despite an 11-year NFL career that took him from Denver to Miami, Tampa Bay and Chicago. Denver always remained his home in good part because of Judi's House.

Brian didn't just help children deal with issues similar to the ones he had of loneliness and anger over the loss of a parent; he memorialized his mother and heartened his father. "I'm more proud of what he's done off the field than anything he's done on the field," his father, Bob, said.

Brian also serves on Moffitt Cancer Center's Board of Advisors. To learn more about Judi's House, visit JudisHouse.org.

Over the years, Griese became a grandfather, re-married to Shay and continued the fight against cancer on a more public stage. He joined Moffitt. He lent his voice to fundraisers. He has become so known in this world that he often picks up his phone to hear a fragile voice asking for help. Sometimes it's a friend. Often, it's a stranger telling of a family member or co-worker who has been diagnosed with cancer and doesn't know where to turn. Griese recognizes those concerns, those questions and that scared voice as him all those years ago.

"I know exactly what it's like to go through that, to wonder about the unknown and worry about losing a loved one," Griese said. "I help them as best I can. But after a little bit I know exactly what they need."

Which is?

"For me to hand the phone to Shay," he says. Shay has a list of names and phone numbers at Moffitt, draws a picture of what they can expect in the days ahead and comforts them with knowledge and direction as much as any words. This is what a couple of decades involved with cancer has done, what they're hoping to lend a small hand to stopping.

"I don't know anybody that hasn't been touched by cancer in their circle of family or friends, somewhere," Griese said.

Just off his undefeated 1972 Dolphins team, Griese can go down a list of lost friends: linebacker Bob Matheson died of Hodgkin's Disease, which is cancer of the lymph nodes; Dorothy Shula, the wife of coach Don Shula, died of breast cancer; and tight end Jim Mandich died of bile duct cancer.

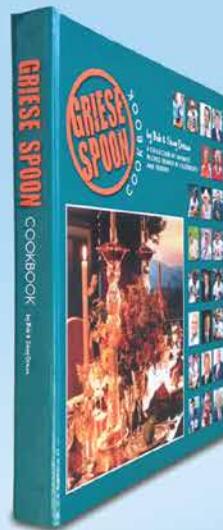
Judi is part of that tragic list. It explains why Griese joined Moffitt. It's why he roots for his team of doctors and researchers. He never expected this to be the road he took, but then life has been a surprise to him the whole way. He was only recruited by two colleges out of high school. He didn't think pro football was an option, back in the dark ages without wall-to-wall draft coverage, until he walked into the Purdue football office one day and was told, "The Miami Dolphins drafted you."

Two Super Bowl wins and a Hall of Fame football career later, his fight is with cancer. He's a foot soldier in it. The real quarterbacks are the doctors and researchers. The goal, he says, "is to see cancer eradicated in my lifetime. I'd love to see them all out of a job."

To that end, each year when he tours the Moffitt facility, Griese asks the same question from the same place of hope. "How come you guys aren't out of business yet?" he says. That will mean their work was successful, that cancer is gone. Griese knows his team isn't there yet. But he feels it is marching down the field, getting closer to making it happen. 🗣️

COOKING WITH SHAY

Shay Griese does some of her best work from the passenger seat of an airplane. It was flying from Miami to Dallas that she once struck up a conversation, then a card game with a quiet traveler who later became her husband, Bob. And when she considered how to raise money for Moffitt Cancer Center in the midst of a national economic downturn, she relied on broader airplane research.



Over years of talking with maybe a hundred seated neighbors, Shay came to realize men spent lavishly on two things: pets and food. She couldn't come up with a fundraising idea involving pets. But food? She didn't just love to cook. Her football-famous husband could find men to provide recipes for a celebrity cookbook.

"Bob began calling some friends, and in two or three weeks we had enough good recipes to fill a book," she said.

Griese Spoon Cookbook became the outgrowth. Bob's long-time partner announcing college football on ABC-TV, Keith Jackson, wrote the foreword and gave a salmon recipe. Among the 168 pages of recipes are Dan Marino's Bolognese sauce, Don Shula's steak soup, Bryant Gumble's Creole stuffed mirlitons, Roger Staubach's chicken pot pie and country singer Kenny Chesney's key lime pie.

"I tested every item," Shay said. "The only wonder is how I didn't gain 30 pounds doing so."

Profits went to Moffitt and are still coming. The book is in its third printing in a year.

Shay is a member of Moffitt's Foundation Board of Directors. The book is available at the Cancer Center gift shop, wimmerco.com, amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.