

SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

Ep 1 - The Journey of Boomer Esiason

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[00:00:00] Lisa: **[00:00:00]** Seeking the extraordinary is sponsored by The Colony Group, a national wealth and business management company that seeks the extraordinary by pursuing an unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow.

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Michael: **[00:00:28]** Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary. Welcome to our shared quest, a quest, not for a thing, but for an ideal. A quest, not for a place, but into the inner unexplored regions of ourselves, a quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or are doing exactly that. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in seeking the extraordinary. I'm **[00:01:00]** Michael Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary. Today's guest is the founder of one of the most impactful nonprofit organizations in the world. He's changing the world as it turns, he's made a difference in the lives of thousands and in doing so has made a difference in the lives of millions of others. He also happens to be a national TV and radio celebrity. The 1988 NFL MVP, a Superbowl quarterback, a four-time NFL pro bowler. The first quarterback selected in the 1984 NFL draft, the Walter Payton man of the year in 1995 and the all-time leader among left-handed quarterbacks for touchdown passes, passing yards and completions. He's the husband of Cheryl. The father of Gunnar and Sydney. He is extraordinary, though he'd probably never admit it. Please welcome the extraordinary Boomer Esiason. **[00:02:00]** Boomer, great to have you.

Boomer: **[00:02:01]** It's great to see you. Well, thank you, Michael. It's great to be here with you and thank you for those nice kind words. I didn't realize how old I was until you started listing all of those things, but yeah, it's been quite a fruitful and topsy-turvy life, but nonetheless, I'm very fortunate to be able to do some of the things that I've been able to do and accomplish a lot of the things that when I was a kid, never thought in my wildest dreams that I would be able to accomplish.

Michael: **[00:02:25]** Well, thanks for that Boomer. And that's actually a great place for us to begin. I'd actually love to begin with when you were a kid and learn a little bit more about your upbringing. So could you tell us a little bit about your childhood and maybe focus on how it was so formative for you?

Boomer: **[00:02:44]** Yeah. Well, my father was a world war II veteran. And he settled on long Island in 1959 in a little town called East Islip. It was a farmland back when he moved there, he was on the GI bill when he came back from world war two. So he got into the insurance **[00:03:00]** industry. He and my mom settled there. They had two daughters. My two older sisters, I was born in 1961. My mother died in 1968 of cancer. So I grew up essentially without a mom. I had two older sisters that were eight and nine years older than I was. So I was seven years old. Then I saw my father basically have his whole life torn apart in two ways. One was the world war two experience, which any vet will tell you was a life altering and it all into its own.

One was the world war two experience, which any vet will tell you was a life altering and it all into its own. And then to have the love of his life, my mother, die of cancer and watch her go through the suffering of that back in the sixties, it left a profound mark on him. I'm sure. However, I will say that he turned his entire attention to making sure that I would be raised and raised properly and brought up the right way, the best way that he could.

We didn't have a lot of money. I remember even in my teen years asking him for his last \$5, so I can take my girlfriend to the movies on a Friday night. [00:04:00] So this was a man who was all about sacrifice. This was a man who put his life on the line for others in the line of war. He sacrificed for me and my two sisters and a man who I never saw ever. Again, with another woman in his life. That's how true love was founded for my mother and father. So I have on my desk, a picture of them in their wedding picture, and I'm often reminded of just of the sacrifices that he made for me. So I would say we were a lower middle class family. Grew up in a \$17,000 home in East Islip, but it was a great upbringing and a lot of the community, Michael, was a lot of world war two vets were moving out there. It was just a better place to live. It was getting away from New York City. It was true suburbia. It was farmland. It was literally, it was high school sports. And I saw a man that basically sacrificed his entire life for me.

Michael: [00:04:55] Well, he certainly sounds extraordinary. Boy, so losing your [00:05:00] mom at the age of seven, so that I assume, but of course can't, I can't relate to that. I assume that was just a life-changing event for you. Do you remember it?

Boomer: [00:05:09] I do a member a little bit. I remember visiting her at Mercy Hospital in Long Island, and I remember them not allowing me to go up to see her in her room back then.

It was all the initial phases of treating cancer. And she was very sick and through the radiation and everything, I guess they just did not want to have children in and around that type of an area. So I remember her looking down. From her window and I was out in a courtyard looking up and waving to her. And I do have vivid memories of that. What I remember after that was after she did die, I remember my sister is bawling for about a week and I remember how hard it was for them. But for me as a seven-year-old, I was pretty resilient. I was not really into organized sports at that point, because back then it didn't really [00:06:00] start until you were nine.

So there were two years in there where my dad had to do something with me. And I think we spent a lot of time going to ball games. His company always would have tickets to either a Met game or a New York Ranger hockey game or a Knick game. And he would always try to take me to those games, and we would always have special time together. And he also started taking me fishing. On my birthday. So he would always take me out of school from first grade or second grade all the way until I was a senior in high school, on my birthday. And we would always go fishing. And I remember several writing those times with him and those memories basically, I used to raise my own kids with, so I tried to learn from the best human being I knew in my life. And hopefully I've lived a life that has reflected the life that he lived.

Michael: [00:06:50] That's extraordinary Boomer. And so it sounds like your dad was a real mentor for you.

Boomer: [00:06:56] He was. Look, I wasn't the greatest kid growing up. I was always getting [00:07:00] in some sort of trouble, nothing really bad, but I was always doing something wrong because I didn't have any supervision at the house. And back then we had neighbors and my buddy's moms would always kind of take me in for dinner or something else until my dad got home from work.

So there was a shared responsibility within our community to make sure that we all had -- we're on solid footing to the to the best we possibly could back then. And I have great memories of my childhood other than the fact that my mom passed away, but I got to know my aunts and uncles really well. They would always take me on vacation if they could.

I had one part of our family was somewhat successful. My godfather was on the USS Nevada at Pearl Harbor and he was the youngest Ensign in the Navy. And he was given the, I want to say the Navy Medal of Valor and he was my godfather, and he was well off and he was one of the first senior pilots to TWA.

So he and his wife, my aunt Vern, my father's sister would travel around [00:08:00] the world and they would always bring back something for me from somewhere where they came from. And so I had an interesting kind of peek at the outside world from them. And then of course my mother's sister, my aunt Dee, used to take me on vacations, but we'd always have to drive because she hated to fly.

So we didn't go very far. We'd go to Vermont, we'd go to Maine, we'd go to Massachusetts. And we'd spend a couple of weeks away from where I grew up for a summer. And these people all had a profound impact on me, and they were loving. They were caring. They took interest in my life. And it's one of the reasons I think all these years later at the age of 59, I realized all what they were doing to give me the platform that I was able to take and use for my own life.

And then of course for my kids' lives. Yeah.

Michael: [00:08:50] It's great that you have awareness around all of that. Were you a good student?

Boomer: [00:08:55] I was a good student. As long as I was playing. It really is really weird. I was a B student in high [00:09:00] school. I remember, I think my SATs were 1150. I was not a highly recruited football player by any stretch of the imagination.

Everybody sees me now and they think, Oh, he must've been a great high school football player. I was a good high school football player back in the seventies, you didn't throw a lot, but it's not like today. You can't take today's world and attach it to 1978. When I was a senior in high school, I averaged eight passes a game and we played nine football games.

So I, I think I threw 80 passes in competition in a season. Think about that. And some kids were throwing 80 passes in a game now. So I basically got a college scholarship to the University of Maryland. Because of a basketball game that I played in when a Maryland football coach who was recruiting an opponent that I was playing against, saw my athleticism on the basketball court and said, man, I didn't know you were that kind of athlete.

Why don't you come to the university of Maryland -- and Maryland had one scholarship left. I took it. I didn't even realize what I was signing. My [00:10:00] dad was not with me on the visit. And I landed back at LaGuardia Airport on Eastern Airlines -- the first airline that the first flight that I had ever taken.

And he said, how'd it go? I said, I think I signed something. I'm not really sure what it was a piece of paper they put in front of me. Cause my dad did not go with me. And we got home, and my high school football coach called my dad and said, your son just got a scholarship to the University of Maryland.

So my grades were good enough to get that. Then the school there, everything was fine until I got to Maryland. And I was the 11th string quarterback on the team when I got there. So I went from being the star in high school to 11th string on a team that had 110 players on it.

Wow. So I had to work my way through that and I failed out of school a couple of times at the University of Maryland.

Michael: [00:10:47] Did you. I was not aware of that.

Boomer: [00:10:50] Twice.actually.

Michael: [00:10:52] So I assume that as you entered university of Maryland, you weren't thinking you were going to have a pro football career. So [00:11:00] what did you study?

Boomer: [00:11:01] So I was a communications major initially. RTBF they call it radio, television, and film back then. But again, when I talk about failing out and it's funny to me now, but when I think back to it, it's probably, it was very concerning to my father, to the people that were in my life that spent all that time giving me their time and setting forth the platform that I could succeed. And I almost blew it at least twice. And a lot of it was tied to whether or not I was playing. And so when I got to the University of Maryland in the summer of 1979, like I said, I was like 11th string. On the depth chart and you have to earn your stripes and football nothing's ever given to you.

And most of course, you're the highest recruited guy. Well, I was the lowest recruited guy, almost a walk-on and nature. A and I did fail out of school my first semester there because they weren't playing me, and I wasn't playing on the varsity. I was playing on some JV squad that they had. And so, I had to go to summer school in 1980.

[00:12:00] So I went to summer school in 1980, redid all the grades, got everything right. Came back in 1980 and then was redshirted my sophomore year. And I failed that again and that fall. And I had to go back to summer school in 81. I believe it was and get myself back in school, again, fight for the job. And finally, I got the job in 1981 as a starting quarterback after two years due in large part to two guys who got hurt in front of me.

And once I got that job I never looked back. I was never going to lose that job again, because it meant so much to me and my grades obviously slowly shot up along with my success on the field. Yeah.

Michael: [00:12:42] And was it natural athletic ability? Was it just confidence? Was it drive? What was it that, that converted you from an 11th string quarterback to the starter?

Boomer: [00:12:54] All of it. Honestly, all of it, and I do remember thinking about my [00:13:00] father. In the battle of the bulge, thinking about my uncle on the USS Nevada and here I am playing football in college and it did mean something to me. It really did mean something to me because I don't believe. That I would have been able to stay in school.

If I didn't stay in school the military most likely was going to be the next place I was going to turn to. And I remember my father even asking me saying, do you want to go into the Marines? Do you want to go do something that's going to toughen you up or whatever? And I don't know if he was threatening me or he was motivating me or what he was doing, but whatever he was making me want to stay in school, get my grades right. And then fight all the way to the top. And then once I got there, I was not going to let it go there. It was just too much sacrifice along the way. And I can tell you story after story, and I don't want to bore your listeners, but of how many different levels of adversity that one has to deal with to get to the point where you can be a starting quarterback at a major college university.

So, or major college, I should say. [00:14:00] So I held onto that job for three years and then was drafted into the NFL. But even that was a disappointing day in my life. You would think being drafted in the NFL would be the height of your dreams and what you look forward to. But instead of being drafted in the first round where I thought I was going to be drafted, I fell all the way to the second round.

Michael: [00:14:29] I did read you were pretty upset about that. So I appreciate you being honest about it. Yeah. I would love to have you talk a little bit about that draft night.

Boomer: [00:14:38] That draft day was really a very hard day for me to swallow. There are a lot of things that led up to the 1984 NFL draft. I was the, I was either the one or the two quarterback, depending on what you liked. Steve Young was the other quarterback that came out. So there were two left-handers, believe it or not.

At the top of that draft, Steve decided to go to the [00:15:00] USFL. And he got a huge deal from the LA Express. And so I was the next quarterback up and I remember having a press conference. My agent David Falk at the time was not very happy about me having this press conference. And I said at this press conference, Michael, I am not going to the USFL.

I did not grow up a New Jersey General fan or a Memphis Showboat fan. I grew up a Baltimore Colt fan because of the great Bert Jones. And now what also happened in this draft is that the Colts left Baltimore in the middle of March and moved to Indianapolis before the 1984 season. And before this draft had the Baltimore Colts stayed in Baltimore, Ernie Coursey, who was the general manager, told me I was going to be their first pick their first pick in the draft.

But because they left to go to Indianapolis, I said, I would never play for the Colts. So you have two things like colliding here, you have the USFL spending [00:16:00] all this money on players like me and you had the team that I wanted to play for the Baltimore Colts move in the middle of the night out to Indianapolis and be holding another press conference saying I will never play for the Indianapolis Colts.

So it sounds like I'm pretty demanding guy. And I probably was not that coachable. So I would probably be scared of me as a personality as well. And I probably did more harm to myself. And one of the reasons I probably fell than anything else, but it was a series of unfortunate situations that took place that forced me to drop.

So I was angry that day and two of my teammates at the University of Maryland were drafted in the first round and they were nice enough to wait for me to be drafted. So we all three could have a press conference together at the University of Maryland that day, which was a big day for all of us, nonetheless, but still for me, a very disappointing day.

Michael: [00:16:52] Well, but again though, you have awareness around that, and I appreciate your honesty about that.

Boomer: [00:16:59] I think any [00:17:00] time, what happens in your life, where it's a perceived failure, maybe by others is fuel for fire. For those of us who are Uber competitive. And I think if I could ever really describe my own personality, it would be is that I am about as competitive as they come.

And I may not be the greatest athlete. I don't have Michael Jordan or LeBron James or John Elway's physical gifts. I have gifts. There's no question about that. I recognize that, but I always felt like in order to play at that level, or to be on that with those types of players in your league, you have to have a drive and a competitive desire that is going to keep pushing you and allowing you to fight through the negatives, like falling on draft day.

Michael: [00:17:48] Well, I'm going to ask you in a moment about your Super Bowl appearance. But before I do that, I have to ask. So you succeeded the great Ken Anderson, who, when I was growing up, I loved Ken Anderson. He was [00:18:00] one of my favorite players. Was he a friend as a mentor? Was he, did, was he a teacher for you?

Boomer: [00:18:07] Well, both. He was a mentor. First mainly became a friend, and then he became my offensive coordinator my last year in the NFL in 1997. And I had one of my best runs ever under him as an offensive coordinator.

And to this day, he still is a friend. I got there. He was in year 14 of a 16-year career. And my first year I played, I started four games because he and the initial backup Turk Shoner both got it hurt.

So I had to be pressed into service my rookie year, and I was lost. I think we were probably three and one in those games, but it was more because of the other guys around me, as opposed to me doing anything special the second year. It was an interesting year because I was battling for the starting quarterback job.

And Sam Wyche, head coach, did give it to Kenny. And then I remember standing on the sideline playing against the St. Louis [00:19:00] Cardinals that year. And I think it was our, either our first or second game. And I overheard Kenny say to, to Sam Wyche, our head coach, I'm done. I just don't want to play anymore. I don't want to be, I don't, I just don't want to be out on the field anymore.

And this was, I think it was as either his 15th or 16th year. And I thought Sam was going to put me in and he didn't. He put Turk in to play, the body of that game. And then I came in the fourth quarter and I think we scored three touchdowns, meaningless touchdowns. Cause we, I think we lost the game, like 41 to 28 or something, but we scored three touchdowns in the 4th quarter and our owner the great Paul Brown, who used to be the head coach of the Cleveland Browns, and the Cleveland Browns are named after him. He moved after Art Modell fired him -- told Sam on the plane ride back from St. Louis that Boomer is going to start the next game against the San Diego chargers and Dan Fouts. And I started that next game much like I did at the University of Maryland when I finally got my chance, and we lost the game 44 to [00:20:00] 42.

But I realized that was the game that I knew that I arrived and that I could play at that level. And I could play at a very high level against some of the greatest players. So that's when it really clicked for me in 1985.

Michael: [00:20:13] And that's a great transition to get to your Super Bowl appearance. So there's really no, but about your career, you had a spectacular career by any measure, you got to the Super Bowl. And yup. Almost one. It was so close, and I'd love to hear more about how you reflect on that, what you learned from that experience. How do you think about that? All these years later?

Boomer: [00:20:38] I've experienced Michael, a lot of really high highs and some of the lowest of lows and to appreciate the Super Bowl appearance in 1988, you have to go back a year in 1987, the Cincinnati Bengals signed me to a contract extension that made me the highest paid player in the league in August of 1987.

[00:21:00] Now they were paying me 1.2 million dollars a year, which turned out to be about seven... well you'd know, better than I do because of your financial background. I think it was \$75,000 a game. Yeah. And that was a lot of money. And I remember Chris Collinsworth my teammate saying that you're the first millionaire in the history of the NFL.

I said, yeah, it's pretty cool. Why did they do this? I was a good player for sure. There was no question about it. And I earned my money at 85 and 86 and leading in 87, we had a really good team and I think they want to do extend me because they knew that we were going to have a good year. But they also knew one other aspect that I was the player rep for the NFL players association for the Cincinnati Bengals.

And I think they were trying to kind of buy me and try to buy my silence. And if anything, it actually gave me more confidence in who I was as a player, because they were paying me it made me the highest paid player. So after the second game of that year, we went on strike [00:22:00] and I was a leader of that strike.

And I actually sat down in front of a bus that was carrying the replacement players into the facility that we used to practice at. And I always felt like a picture is worth a thousand words. And boy that not only did it wasn't worth it, a thousand words, it was worth 1.2 million words.

Cause I was the highest paid player, and I was on strike and I was fighting for my teammates.

And for all of those players, that for all those years basically got screwed. At least I thought they did. And now that I look back on it, I was right. I did the right thing and I bore my soul and I put my career on the line and we went four and 11 that year. And I was booed off the field, the last five or six games of the season, especially like the last three games in Cincinnati.

I was public enemy number one, going into the 1988 season. So you could imagine if social media where are around back then? There is no way in the world that I would have been brought back as the Bengals quarterback. But Mike Brown, who [00:23:00] was the owner's son, Paul Brown son. And who was the general manager loved me as a player, loved me as a leader. Didn't like me as the NFLPA leader, but like me as his quarterback. So he brought me back. And now we start on our way to the Super Bowl. And we started that season seven and 0, and the most unlikely of seven and 0's, as a matter of fact, if I remember correctly, most prognosticators had us at like four and 12 going into the season, thinking that we were going to be one of the worst teams.

Cause we're just coming off of a bad year, but we had a great team. So. I ended up winning the MVP that year. So I go from being booed off the field and basically just totally ridiculed in Cincinnati till one year later becoming the MVP of the NFL. So the lowest of lows to the highest of highs and we get to the Super Bowl and we're underdogs to the great Joe Montana and the 49ers.

And we, I felt we were a better team, but he got the ball with three minutes and 38 seconds to [00:24:00] go. He had to march 98 yards drove his team for a touchdown, every childhood quarterback's dream to do this in a Super Bowl. And that was, it's a, it's a. It's an unfortunate memory that we lost the game. But when I think of the journey that happened from the year before, when I signed that new contract in August of 87 to where we were, I think it was January of 88 or 89, actually it was a wild ride for sure. And one that I will never, ever forget, even though we lost the game. Yeah.

Michael: [00:24:30] Well, I could listen to those stories all day, but I you've got so much more to talk about, and I'd like to get into your broadcasting career just briefly before we get into the Boomer Esiason Foundation. And you're pretty prolific. I watch you every Sunday. I see you on the NFL today and at your on Boomer and Gio you're pretty prolific in social media as well. So my question for you is, do you do a lot of prep for these shows or is it just. Is it, does it just come naturally? How much [00:25:00] work goes into being out there on such a regular basis?

Boomer: [00:25:06] It's constant. It's always constant. And you always have to stay up on the latest news, both politically sports-wise, whatever it may be, especially when you're doing a four-hour radio program, five days a week, that simulcast on CBS sports network. So you can't show up and not know what the hell you're talking about.

And you've got to have good opinions and you gotta make sure that those opinions, at least my side of it is based. In fact, because I have credibility, I have reputation. I have everything that goes in behind it. I'm not just an entertainer. Most of the guys that I work with on the radio are entertainers.

There'll be contrarians, just to be contrary it's just to make it interesting for the listener. So I can always play off of those guys would just, which is a lot of fun for me. But again, when you talk about a broadcast career that spans from 1997 to 2020 or 1998 to 2020, when I graduated the University of Maryland, I would hope to get into TV and radio.

As a matter of fact, I did a. An [00:26:00] internship at WJZ-TV in Baltimore. And there was a little-known local reporter covering all the local human interest stories. Her name was Oprah Winfrey. So we were there together in 19, in 1981 and 82. I think the summers of those years then obviously she wants to do her thing.

But for me, you talking about the highest of highs. I left the NFL football field and went right into the Monday Night booth and I replaced Frank Gifford. So I went from right from the football field to the biggest TV job that you could get in football. And two years later, I was fired along with everybody behind the scenes.

And you talk about embarrassing. You talk about the lowest of lows. It's like going from the strike one year to the Super Bowl, but then losing it. It's like going to the end of the NFL's biggest TV job two years later, losing it, and then having to rebrand yourself and reeducate yourself and get yourself involved in other things, which is what I did.

So where I sit now is in one of [00:27:00] 10 great seats on the NFL today. I got a number one morning show in New York. I do a lot of other different speaking engagements. And then of course I have my personal life, which includes our foundation. So it's pretty busy, but you also have to make sure that you are locked and loaded and ready to go every single day.

Michael: [00:27:18] Again, before getting to your foundation. I'm just curious. So as you stay prepared as you do research, do you have a team that's helping you or are you doing all this research yourself for the radio show?

Boomer: [00:27:31] I that's all me that's 100%. I do have a producer that would give us suggestions of things that we may want to talk about and things of that nature.

But usually, the show is improv. It's pretty free flowing down here in New York. There's a lot of different things to talk about. There's always something on the back page that is of interest to all of our listeners here in New York. And like I said, it's not just football, it could be human interest stories.

It could be political stories. It could be guy talk and all that kind of stuff that you try to mix [00:28:00] in with the foundation of it being sports. So you do have to stay up on everything as far as Sunday show on the big network. The NFL today, we do have a group of researchers to make sure that we know every trend that is taking place in the NFL.

It's all NFL specific. You got to be up on all the statistics. You gotta be up on all the injuries. You gotta be all up on all the drama. You got to know who's getting fired, who's getting hired, who's hurt. Who's not hurt. What is this coach saying about that team? What is this player is saying about that player?

There is so much to digest and that's one of the reasons why we have such a big research department at CBS.

Michael: [00:28:39] Thank you for that. I could talk to you all day long about football because I am a huge NFL fan and I'd love to do that, but I'm also a fan of people that are engaged in deep philanthropy and altruism.

And now I do want to shift to the Boomer Esiason Foundation. [00:29:00] So you and your wife founded the Boomer Esiason Foundation. I got a little bit of conflicting information as I was doing my research. And I saw on your website, it says that you raised about \$115 million for CF research and services.

I've since also come into possession of information that says that it's actually over \$150 million, but it's a lot of money. You've raised a lot of money. Yeah. And this all of course began with the diagnosis of your son Gunnar. I believe at the age of two with cystic fibrosis and I would be honored and love it if you would be willing to tell us about that experience and tell us how it led to your decision to take action.

Boomer: [00:29:49] Yeah, the highs and lows again, find themselves in my personal life as well. When Gunnar was born in 1991, I was in the midst of a terrible season. He was sick and we didn't really know [00:30:00] why. 1992, I had my worst season as a pro Gunnar was still sick. We had no idea why I was still in Cincinnati. I finally got traded out of Cincinnati, got to the New York jets in 1993.

And that's when we got the diagnosis that Gunnar had a genetic deformity known as cystic fibrosis, which basically is a. Total body disease, but it really affects the lungs with bacterial infections.

And you've got to, it's a very labor-intensive disease, so the kids can live somewhat of a normal life. And it trying to change my life in 1990 and 1993. So I decided to use the platform at the NFL. Put a face on this disease and Gunnar and I graced the cover of Sports Illustrated in 1993 and it was called a quarterback's crusade and my crusade was all about one simple thing was to take all the things that I've learned from my father that we talked about earlier today and apply them to. Giving Gunnar the greatest childhood he could ever have and create as many memories with them as I possibly could all while still fighting cystic fibrosis.

And [00:31:00] because his mom, Cheryl was so dedicated to making sure he had everything he needed and took. Such great care of them. It allowed me to go out and raise money. So we've raised almost \$200 million. So I have to update the website. I'm sorry about that.

Michael: [00:31:15] Actually your bio is where it says 115 million.

Boomer: [00:31:19] I'll update that though. So anyway, it's been a, I guess, a labor of love if you will trying to do this. And I got involved because of a guy by the name of Frank Deford who lost his daughter, Alex, to CF at a very young age who was age of eight and he wrote a book about it and he did a movie on it and I got embraced and embroiled in cystic fibrosis.

Well, before Gunnar's diagnosis, even before Gunnar was born. So that was 1989. I first became aware of CF. And then lo and behold, here comes the lower of the lows Gunnar gets diagnosed with CF at the age of two. So we decided, and I decided to put this foundation together, make a difference in the [00:32:00] world.

And we have Gunnar is now 29 years old. There has been a major breakthrough in the last two years with a drug called Tricapta that has come from Vertex, which is located in Boston, where you're sitting right now. And that has been years and years of research and billions of dollars to get us to this point where Gunnar now at the age of 29, is that the Tuck school of business at Dartmouth.

And he's kind of restarting his life because of this drug and the impact that it's had on his body and what I'm seeing. Are all the fruits of the labor that all of us, as parents of cystic fibrosis children have done over the last 50 years, because if we didn't have the foundation of the previous families that have lost loved ones to cystic fibrosis, we would have never been able to accomplish what we have accomplished.

So while I'm so happy for Gunnar and so fulfilled as a dad, I also still have the reminders of all those families that went before us and lost, loved ones to CF. Well, before the age of 20, well, before the age of [00:33:00] 10, like Alex, the Ford did. So I'm certainly not in this fight by myself, but I think that I've enhanced it hopefully and put a name on it.

And we've made a big difference.

Michael: [00:33:10] You certainly have. This is really the model for success among many disease-based organizations. I know that from personal experience and I'd actually, I, what you did with Vertex is again a model because those who are in the know about the disease space is that what we understand is that the government needs to provide funding. You get support from the nonprofit sector, which is what you did, but you do need industry to participate. And your partnership with Vertex is a model that's looked at by, I, I do you have awareness around that? That's a model that's been looked at by many disease organizations now.

Boomer: [00:33:55] Yeah. And even the national cystic fibrosis foundation under the direction of [00:34:00] Dr. Bell came up with a venture philanthropy model. Does this model, Joe O'Donnell one of the businessmen there locally in Boston was the spearhead to raise all this money. So then we could actually incentivize companies with money that we can support them with and receive a royalty off of the success of any of these drugs that may come to fruition.

And Vertex is one of them. The companies that has benefited from that. And we have benefited as parents and families of cystic fibrosis. And that's where we put more, almost all of our money went into drug development. This is why I feel like I'm an expert when I'm talking about COVID-19 and vaccines and the FDA and the billions of dollars that are being put into trying to bring a backseat from the test tube to the patient.

I know how long it takes. It took us to almost 30 years to get to where we are in cystic fibrosis. Now that only affects about 30,000 people locally, but when you think of a global pandemic and you think about the amounts of money that have been [00:35:00] put into this and the amount of science and bio-science that have been put into this, it's no wonder.

That it's happening within about 11 months from when we first saw COVID-19 hit the shores of our country. It is remarkable what is happening in the bio-science arena in regard to this pandemic? So I've lived it, I've seen it, but I'm not shocked that it's come this quickly.

Michael: [00:35:24] Yeah, well, you have a spectacular NFL legacy, but your legacy for the world that you're leaving with the Boomer Esiason Foundation is extraordinary. And I was thinking about how you added your celebrity to it, and that undoubtedly that's helped you raise dollars, raise awareness, pursue your advocacy programs. But I was, it was thinking about the Michael J. Fox foundation, the Elton John AIDS foundation, the Christopher and Dana Reeve foundation for paralysis and [00:36:00] spinal injury. And even the Doug Flutie foundation I am of course, from New England. So the Doug Flutie foundation for autism and you are right there with all of those organizations, you truly have changed the world.

Boomer: [00:36:12] Well, it's something that I think we all have been touched by in our own personal lives. And it's one of the reasons why we try to do what we do. We make no apologies for exploiting the platforms that we have. I know Doug personally; I know exactly what he's gone through. I know Michael J. Fox. I know what he's gone through.

I think a of Bill and Melinda Gates and how much money they have. Just actually poured into so many different charitable endeavors and it's, and I can't even begin to tell you, Michael, how thankful I am to be a part of a small little success story, but to see the people that have supported us over the years, it gives me great warmth when I think about the human altruistic nature of how we try to help each other. When one asked and I've lived it for 27 years and I've seen it up close and personal, and it's nothing [00:37:00] short of amazing and a miracle.

So if our listeners want to support you, this would be Esiason.org. That's the best place to go. You can make a donation there. You can find out about us. There we are a four-star charity navigator foundation. We take great pride in that. I hold down expenses significantly. And I, like I said, I try to use every Avenue that I possibly can to raise money. And it's been successful thus far.

Michael: [00:37:24] And you and Cheryl are still the co-chairs.

Boomer: [00:37:27] Yes, we are, our names are still on the front door, but I got to tell you the thing that I'm most proud about out of all of this is watching or grow into the young man that he has become and the amount of advocacy work that he does on behalf of all CF families and how he is embraced his role in all of this.

He's never once come to me and said, dad, I feel sorry for myself. I can't do this. It's been the opposite. He is all in, has always been all in. And that's the thing I'm most proud of.

Michael: [00:37:57] So I have in front of me the [00:38:00] Boomer Esiason Foundation mission statement, and I'm actually gonna read it or at least the beginning part of it.

And then it's going to lead to a question. So the Boomer Esiason Foundation is a dynamic partnership of leaders in the medical and business communities. Joining with the committed care volunteers to heighten awareness, education, and quality of life. For those affected by cystic fibrosis while providing financial support to research aimed at finding a cure.

And I read that mission statement. Because it now leads me to, I think my final question. Well, maybe my second to last question for you, which do you consider yourself to be personally mission bound? Have you ever thought about whether you yourself have a mission statement?

Boomer: [00:38:45] My mission statement is probably, I guess I've never been asked this question like this.

My mission statement is simply I will not fail. I will not, I will have bumps along the road. There'll be adversity for sure. There'll be those highs. There'll [00:39:00] be those lows. But in the midst of all of that, I'll never lose sight of what my ultimate goal is. No matter what I'm doing. And as far as our foundation is concerned is always being pragmatic.

It's also being realistic and it's also listening to the voices of the people that we're trying to help. So I guess that, I guess my mission statement would be never stopped driving towards success and never allowing anything to get in a way of that. Excellent.

Michael: [00:39:29] Outstanding. So what's the future for Boomer Esiason?

Boomer: [00:39:33] Hopefully retirement. Yeah. I would go so hard for 25 years and I still love what I do. I'd like to continue probably until I'm about 65. So I'm 59 years old. I turned 59 years old, not easy in a pandemic for any of us, but I will tell you that for me, the pandemic has made me realize. Just exactly what life is all about.

I think most people can reflect back on some things in their [00:40:00] lives that they'd like to do better, or they'd like to be better at. So for me, it's been a, it's been a little bit of a pause cause there's no traveling or any of that stuff going on, but I could see myself retiring in about five years, calling it quits and the hitting the golf ball a lot, heck of a lot more than I'm doing now.

Michael: [00:40:17] And playing hockey too.

Boomer: [00:40:19] I do play hockey. That's my competitive side. So I picked that up when I was 37 and it, yes, I am in a men's league hockey arena world, I should say. And it gives me that feeling that I'm back in the locker room with the guys, like I was back in the eighties and nineties.

Michael: [00:40:36] Yeah. Well, thank you, Boomer. Thank you for your time.

Any parting words for our audience, including anything that you want to promote or advocate for?

Boomer: [00:40:45] No, I think you've done a great job, Michael. I appreciate you having me on and that's not easy to be successful. All I can tell you is you gotta be driven. You gotta be, you gotta be committed. And most, most importantly, I think when people are involved with you, [00:41:00] you've gotta be above board and you've gotta be honest and you gotta have character.

And hopefully that's what is reflected through our foundation.

Michael: [00:41:07] Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, that is the extraordinary Boomer Esiason and you can follow Boomer Esiason and on Twitter @7boomer esiason and thank you to our sponsor The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with 15 offices across the country that itself seeks the extraordinary as it pursues its unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about The Colony Group and how it manages beyond money visit www.thecolonygroup.com. You can also follow The Colony Group on LinkedIn and on Twitter @colonygroup.

For Seeking the Extraordinary I'm Michael Nathanson. Follow me on LinkedIn and Twitter @Nathanson_MJ and learn more about my ongoing search for the [00:42:00] extraordinary.

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