

Pass It On®...

Unseen Beauty.

April Lufriu is an actor, TV host and spokesperson — and a triple crown winner as Mrs. Florida, Mrs. America and Mrs. World. But what makes her beautiful is what she is doing for children who are losing their sight to a rare degenerative eye disease.

April Lufriu holds herself with confidence as she walks across the stage. She knows every step is scrutinized, every angle of her body judged and every word she speaks evaluated for clarity, tone, originality and emotional weight. “I had to learn how to walk right,” she laughs. “And I had to eat right.”

That’s about all she’ll say about her preparation for the competition. Even though it is a grueling process of getting in physical shape, studying, practicing diction and understanding the finer points of how the right fashion decisions complement not only your physical appearance, but also accentuate your personality. Yes, Lufriu put the work in. But what she really cares about is bringing awareness to a rare degenerative disease that steals the eyesight of people when they reach middle age.

Retinitis pigmentosa begins as a halo effect, a shadow donut around the outer periphery of a person’s vision. Annoying at first, the donut grows over the years, becoming a pinhole, and then, totally dark. There is no cure.

“My one and only goal in life is to help find a cure for this disease that affects my family.” Lufriu shows signs herself; her sister is nearly blind, and both of her children have been diagnosed with it. “That diagnosis propelled me to do more,” Lufriu says. “I joined the local chapter and boosted fundraising from \$50,000 a year to over \$200,000 a year. Being Mrs. World gave me the platform I needed to bring awareness and support to not only the organizations doing the research, but also to the patients and parents suffering.”

The scientific research on retinitis pigmentosa is underfunded. It’s not a very glamorous cause, and it affects a much smaller percentage of the population than, say, cancer, but it is deeply personal to Lufriu, who has seen firsthand the way vision loss impacts lives.

“I want to raise enough awareness for the disease that we get the funding we need and find a cure in the next 10 years,” Lufriu says with conviction. Then her voice grows tender as she talks about her sister. “She is severely blind. She accepts it, and there is no way to reverse it. It’s heartbreaking when it reaches that point. I don’t want my kids to go down that same road. I don’t want anyone to go down that road.”

The poverty rate is very high for people who have lost their sight. Employment is difficult to secure, and many of them are overwhelmed with medical bills. And many of them are overwhelmed with medical bills. April’s next step, after finding a cure for Retinitis Pigmentosa, is the creation of a nonprofit that offers relief from the crushing burden of medical bills these people face. “I want to create an organization that takes care of these people, provides them with grants. I want them to see that beyond acceptance there is hope.”

Seeing Hope...[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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