

I'M READY, son - it's my time to go. You've given me more happiness than anything else in this world. I love you."

With those words, showbiz legend Merv Griffin said goodbye to his beloved son Tony shortly before the TV icon died of prostate cancer on Sunday, Aug. 12.

The 82-year-old showman slipped away at 1 a.m. as Tony and Merv's daughter-in-law Tricia huddled near his bed at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

"Merv was brave to the end, even as all measures to prolong his life failed," a close friend told *THE ENQUIRER*.

"He was suffering terribly - the cancer had spread to his bones, lungs and liver."

Late Saturday morning, Aug. 11, Tony made the painful decision to put a DNR notice - Do Not Resuscitate - on his father.

"IT WAS THE HARDEST THING Tony ever had to do. He loved his father with all his heart, but he knew nothing more could be done for him," said the friend.

"Merv, connected to feeding tubes and morphine drips, drifted

in and out of consciousness, and at 11 p.m. on Saturday night he spoke his last words.

"As Tony brought his face close to his father's, Merv whispered hoarsely: 'You were my life.'" He thanked Tony for bringing him great joy and expressed his undying love.

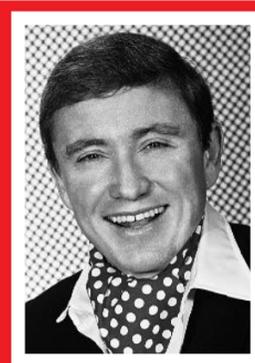
Merv shut his eyes, never regained consciousness - and America lost one of its most remarkable entertainers.

Nancy Reagan, accompanied by two Secret Service agents, made a final visit to her pal Merv's bedside on Friday afternoon, said the friend.

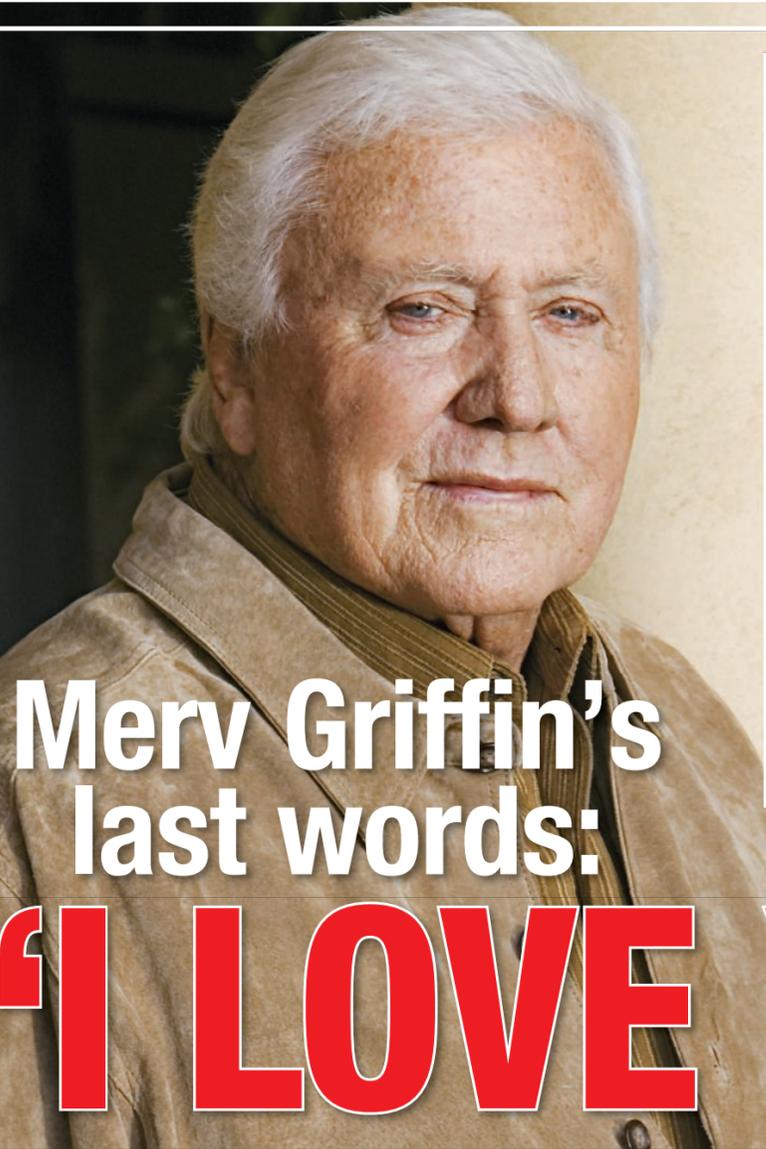
"Losing Merv has been devastating to her. She knew him for more than 50 years. He was her rock during

her husband Ronnie's prolonged illness and death." The former first lady said his death "is heartbreaking, not just for those of us who loved Merv personally, but for everyone around the world who has known Merv through his music, his television shows and his business."

The multitalented performer first caught the public eye as a big band singer and then went on to become one of America's



A young Merv at the beginning of his TV career



Merv Griffin's last words:

'I LOVE YOU, SON'

Legendary entertainer was **ready** for the end

most successful talk-show hosts. He struck gold as the creator of "Jeopardy!" and "Wheel of Fortune."

THE ALWAYS UPBEAT ENTERTAINER also proved to be a first-rate businessman. He bought and sold 17 radio stations, six casino resorts and 22 hotels, including the famed Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills.

An invitation-only funeral Mass was scheduled for Aug. 17 at the Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Beverly Hills.

At the time of his death, Merv was putting the final touches on a new game show, "Merv Griffin's

! Merv never ran out of energy or novel ideas...He was full of life and positive vibrations until the end !

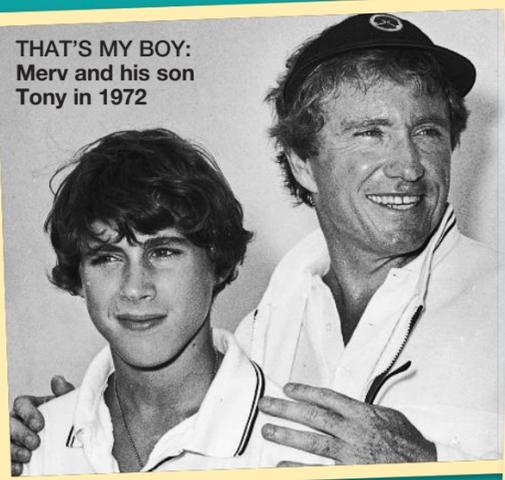
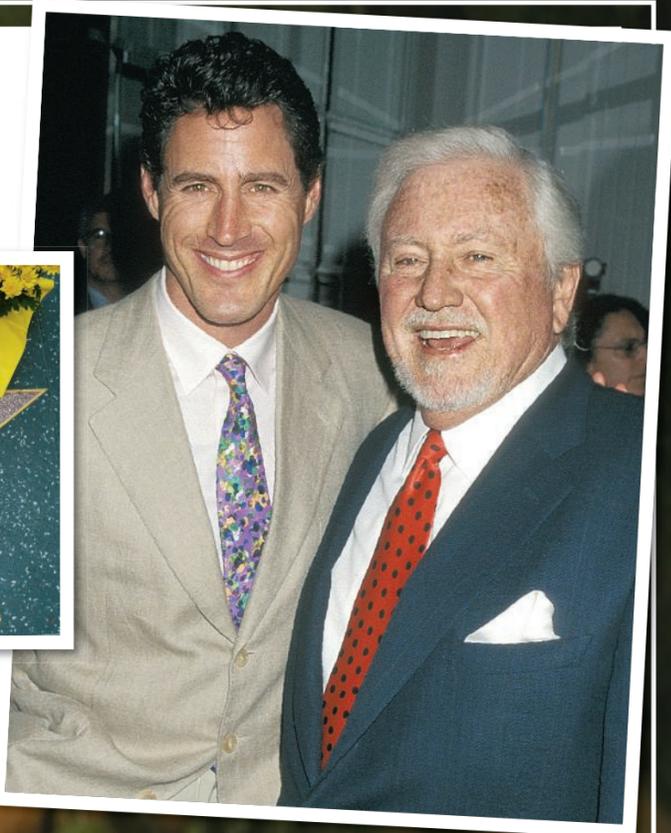
Crosswords," based on one of his lifelong passions.

"Merv never ran out of energy or novel ideas for new TV shows and ventures," marveled his friend. "He was full of life and positive vibrations until the end."

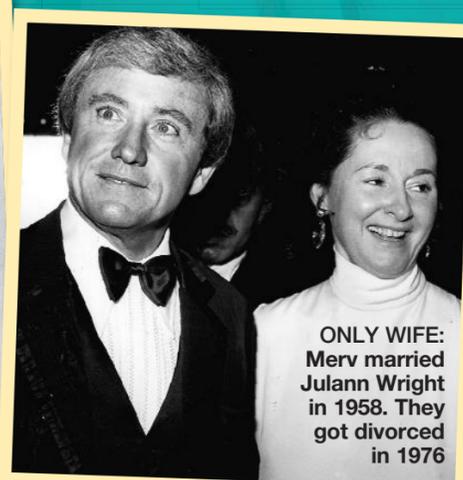
by ROBIN MIZRAHI



IN TRIBUTE: Merv died with son Tony at his side. Fans started leaving flowers at Merv's star on the Walk of Fame shortly after



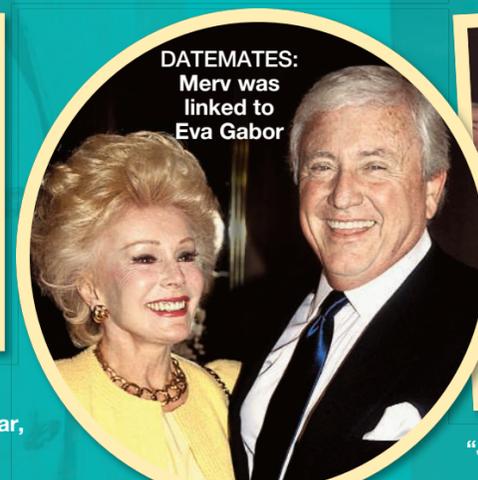
THAT'S MY BOY: Merv and his son Tony in 1972



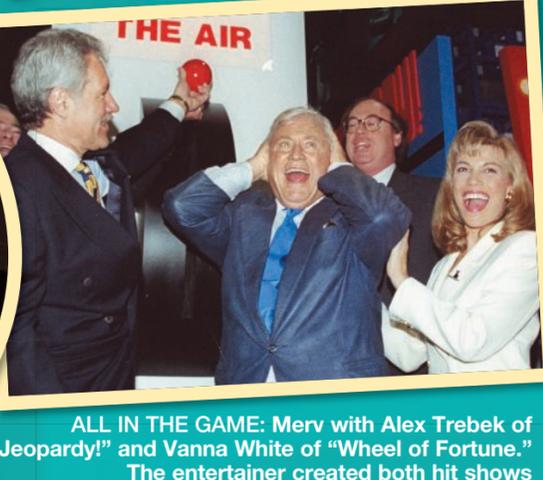
ONLY WIFE: Merv married Julann Wright in 1958. They got divorced in 1976



DARK SIDE: Disco dance king Denny Terrio (above) sued Merv for sexual harassment in 1976. Earlier the same year, Brent Plott claimed he was Merv's lover and sued the entertainer for palimony



DATEMATES: Merv was linked to Eva Gabor



ALL IN THE GAME: Merv with Alex Trebek of "Jeopardy!" and Vanna White of "Wheel of Fortune." The entertainer created both hit shows



Merv was a longtime friend of Nancy Reagan