

FLORIDA ICON

Gay Culverhouse

Founder of Players' Outreach, an organization that assists former NFL players who have brain injuries; president of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers from 1991-1995; northeast Florida; age 63

by [Art Levy](#)

» **If I put my mind to something**, I'm going to do it. My children learned that very early on. If it was bedtime, you were going to bed.

» **I've got three blood diseases**, all of them extremely rare. My doctors have never seen this before. It's from I think being exposed to the air at 9/11 because I was on the sidewalk near the towers.

» **When I found out I had myelofibrosis**, I got my will in order, told the kids, bought a cemetery plot. I got my headstone all done. Then I didn't think anything more about it. That was seven years ago. My life expectancy at the time was five years.

» **The average, normal, run-of-the-mill person** never interested me and doesn't interest me today. I just choose to be around people who have faced challenges, overcome them and if they haven't overcome them, I'll be glad to help them become independent. I have a doctorate in special education from Columbia. That's my field, so when I started to hear about retired players who were in trouble, I said, 'OK, I'll find them and help them.' It's just a natural progression of what I've always done.

» **For four years in a row**, up until this year, I was the top amateur rider in the country in the Paso Fino horse world.

» **I've broken my back**. I've broken my ribs. I've broken my tailbone. I'm a disaster because I ride really hard and I take risks that no one else does and I ride horses that no one else will ride. I will push the horse to the absolute extreme. Most people are very tentative, but I'm not tentative. I'm either going to have a major crash or I'm going to win.

» **When I spoke to Congress last year** — I testified to the Congressional Judiciary Committee on Brain Injuries — they asked me, 'What are you going to do next?' And I told them that I was going to find Jerry Eckwood. I remembered Jerry when he was with the Buccaneers. I remembered Jerry walking to the wrong huddle, and I remembered him walking to the wrong bench. That stuck in my mind, so when the concussion stuff started coming out, I thought about Jerry. We tracked him from Arkansas to Tennessee. He has dementia. Now, he's in a phenomenal living facility, with his own mini-kitchen. He says the most exciting thing about it is he has a closet. He's well taken care of. He's clothed. He's fed. He lives near a mall he can walk to, and he's happy because it has a Cheesecake Factory. We gave him a life.

» **I have so much going on in my life**, the last thing I have time for is to think about being sick. Being sick is a fact of my life, just sort of like I wear size-8 shoes. You buy the shoe that fits and keep going.



Gay Culverhouse [Photo: Jon Fletcher]

» **I have a preponderance of platelets**, which either leads to clotting or bleeding, and you never can tell which. I also have something called cold agglutinin disease, which means if I get cold, if I drink something that's cold or if I physically get cold, I kill red blood cells. So I'm anemic, and I kill red cells when I get cold. It's a bad combination.

» **The majority of Americans** have jobs that are just hard work and stressful, and they need a break. That's sports.

» **In the winter, I go south.** Last winter, it was cold in Florida, so I took a place in Key West, and it was the coldest winter ever in Key West. So I went even farther south into South America. I have also spent time in Africa because it's nice and toasty. In order to live, I should be in a place that's 98.6, but that's like impossible, so I just get as warm as I can. Most people don't like to come into my home because it's really hot.

» **I'm a super grandmother.** I go visit the grandchildren, but I don't hover above them because I don't want them to think I'm weird. I want to leave them a legacy so they can say, 'Man, my grandmother did this and my grandmother did that. She never stopped.' Yeah, they may say that or they may say, 'God, she was really funny and couldn't do Legos worth a shit.'

» **You look at the Jaguars** and you know they are going to end up moving. People do not have the disposable income to support the team. My fear is the state of Florida is going to lose an NFL team and that does not bode well for the economy. It's a black eye. It's the mark of a loser.

» **When my grandson was 7**, he started playing football and, of course, he made the all-star team his first year. He plays both ways on the line. He's a little tank. He has lived in the south, and he's moving to the north and so his mother not only has him in football, she's also enrolled him in ice hockey. So I say, 'Great, not only won't he have a brain, he won't have any teeth either.'

» **Years ago, my daughter and I** were targeted in a kidnapping plot. That incident still has an impact on me and on my children. I keep a very low profile. I have many addresses in many places. I am always on the move, and my phone doesn't reflect the number where I live. I assure you I have a trained attack dog. I carry a concealed weapon and I would kill. I'd kill you just as soon as you moved. You walk in my house unexpectedly, you're going to get plugged.

» **You know, I've never given** a thought to what my dad (Hugh Culverhouse, former owner of the Buccaneers) would think about what I'm doing now. I guess he'd probably be thinking that I'm just doing what I always did, that I'm out there trying to save the world.