

COMMITTED
DETERMINED
COMPASSIONATE
PERSISTENT
ACCEPTING
STRONG
COURAGEOUS
DELIGHTFUL
DRIVEN
UNSTOPPABLE
SPIRITED
PURPOSEFUL

RARE
PERSEVERING
ENTERTAINING
GENEROUS
PASSIONATE
BRILLIANT
FUN
DETERMINED
TOUGH
HUMBLE
INTENSE
UNFORGETTABLE

Myrna
AND
Stuart Porter

THE GOOD FIGHT

BY LISA STAMOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS BALSAMO

THE QUIET FIRE BEHIND THEM LIT UP THE ROOM as we sat down to talk. Myrna and Stuart Porter were comfortably seated in their family room as we set out to review the highlights of their lives. Myrna spoke first. “Well, I’m sure someone will say that we disagree with each other in public,” she said as she glanced at Stuart. Myrna’s concern quickly gave way to forecast a telling theme in their work and life together.

Myrna and Stuart aren’t afraid to let their passion loose. There was a happy tension that buzzed noticeably between them, one that continues to fuel their extraordinary individual goals and accomplishments as well as their marriage. This spirited and tenacious character is a hallmark of this dynamic duo’s path through life, put to good work as they engineered a measurable difference in our world. They’re not afraid to challenge the status quo, even with each other. That fighting spirit has preserved their lives as each has faced cancer with a clear battle plan to win.

One has to wonder about the source of Myrna and Stuart’s legendary determination. Both carry the pioneering spirit of their ancestors; they speak fondly of their heritage and what they learned at home. While the Porter name is Irish, Stuart recently learned that members of his family came from England. Stuart’s middle name, Williams, is that of a great-grandfather who emigrated to the United States from Wales in 1847.

Stuart grew up near Detroit and at age 7 moved with his family to Davenport, Iowa, where his father ran the Blackhawk Beer Company. His father became ill and the family moved back to Grosse Point, Mich., when he was 15; he lost both of his parents while in his 20s. Stuart attended the University of Michigan where he received a degree in engineering science and mathematics. After college, he moved to Chicago. There, Stuart received an MBA from the University of Chicago. He also completed his doctoral exams at the same university.

His first job was with U.S. Gypsum for a year. He joined the Electromotive Division of General Motors, where his work was involved with designing nuclear-powered combat vehicles. He had joined the Air Force National Guard while in college, and was called to active duty during the Berlin crisis. He was stationed in France and later traveled around Europe. Eventually he would return to Chicago and meet Myrna at a party in Old Town. “It was instant attraction,” Stuart said of her independent and fun-loving spirit.

Stuart’s career led him into the investment industry where he worked until retirement. “I got bored,” he said of his retirement at age 60, “and started a private equity firm, SPC Capital, where I invest in leveraged buyouts.” Friends spoke of Stuart as a dynamic entrepreneur with amazing risk-taking abilities.

Myrna Denham grew up in a tiny town near Saskatoon in the Saskatchewan Province of western Canada, close to the Alaskan border. She was the sixth oldest of 16 children. Myrna’s mother was Icelandic and her father was Scotch, Irish, and English, though both parents were born in Canada. “The Icelandic people are a matriarchal society, and the women have held positions in their society for generations,” explained Myrna. She added that while powerful, the

Icelandic women are feminine. She talked about how her family was isolated and that there was plenty of time to learn strong family values.

Myrna’s mother embraced a love of education and community. When her Icelandic ancestors came to Canada, of the few possessions brought along were books. In the early days, a horse-drawn sleigh ride took Myrna to school in winter, and a buggy was transportation on warm days. While picturesque, high school at home was limited to correspondence courses. Myrna left home at 14 to pursue a better high school in a larger town. She moved in with a family, worked as a nanny to earn her keep, and eventually relocated to Chicago to live with an aunt. Myrna is a registered nurse with a degree in psychology and a master’s degree in social work. Her talent and leadership have touched countless lives across the nation.

Myrna and Stuart moved to Barrington to offer their two sons a great place to grow up. Of their marriage, Myrna said, “I think the respect that we have

for each other and what we value in life – decency, honesty, giving back, and caring for others – binds us together and in a way, makes for a stronger marriage.” They spoke of the shared values they quickly found with neighbors and friends in Barrington. “Everyone here is extended family and we take pride in the accomplishments of each other’s children,” Myrna said. “We have an incredible support system here,” she added.

Myrna and Stuart have both faced cancer. Myrna had breast cancer and won her battle. Stuart is undergoing treatment

for prostate cancer, following many years of beating the odds of this recurring and aggressive threat. “A serious illness can be all-consuming for family members,” Myrna said. “I think what has helped us is to be consciously thoughtful about how to live our lives. Even in tough times, there are choices in life. We can choose to search for the joyful moments or days, or we can dwell on our unfortunate circumstances.”

Myrna and Stuart have built a legacy of helping others as co-founders of Wellness Place, a cancer support center in Palatine. They were instrumental in founding the Sea Blue Prostate Cancer Walk in Chicago, (formerly the Greater Chicago Run, Walk ‘n Roll), now a joint venture between Wellness Place and Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education and Support Network. At their second home out west, Myrna and Stu are active with the Odyssey Writes of Passage, a program for at-risk teens based in Palm Desert, Calif.

“We enjoy life, and our attitude means everything,” Stuart said. “Giving back to the community is the single most enjoyable thing you can do,” he added. “We don’t know what next week brings, and we live our life in a way knowing that we will leave the world having made a difference by challenging each other, giving love and support to family, and having faith in God.” Myrna explained that they treasure each moment. “We just keep living,” she said.

The Porters may disagree on things once in a while, yet these survivors do agree on what’s important — to a total commitment for each other, to making a better world, and to continuing the good fight each and every day.



HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT MYRNA AND STUART PORTER.

Ellie Jones Arnold

I have been blessed to have Stu and Myrna as dear friends for 35 years. I am astonished by what these two have accomplished during that time for the community. Their incredible family that they have created is a true testament to this dynamic duo. Myrna extends her open arms to so many. Stu embraces all with a smile and a twinkle in his eye. They are bright, beautiful, intelligent, generous, and loving. I feel fortunate to be considered a friend.

LeeAnn Atwood

I am the development and marketing director for Wellness Place. Myrna is one of our co-founders and highly active in the organization. Stu is on our board of directors. Myrna and Stu introduced me to other stakeholders within the organization at a dinner. I had the honor of sitting next to Myrna. I recall being intimidated initially — after all, there were seven of them and only one of me! A side discussion between Myrna and I ensued and at the end of it, she made an announcement that I will carry with me forever. She exclaimed that there were “... two kinds of people in the world: ducks and eagles. Ducks sit around and wait to be told what to do. Eagles fly without being told and get things done. I am happy to say that you, my dear, are an eagle!” To receive such a compliment from a proven eagle like Myrna was a highlight in my career.

The Rev. Curtis T. Baxter

The Porters have been members of The Presbyterian Church of Barrington for nearly 40 years. I am proud to have been their pastor for 10 of those years. My wife, Sherri, and I are close to Stu and Myrna as they graciously extended hands of compassion, kindness, support, and friendship to us across these many years.

The Porters are both courageous and gracious survivors of cancer. Their personal stories of spiritual growth and tenacious survival have deeply moved Sherri and me in our walk of faith. The doors of Myrna’s home and her heart are always open to anyone who needs her. Myrna understands that we live in a broken, hurting world. I know countless stories in which Myrna accepted people and offered them unconditional love. Stu is humble. He never flaunts who he is, what he has, or what he has done. I have watched him reach out to men and women by respecting them as his equal and frequently by defending them in their time of need. Stu understands that love must be put into action if it is to have value in our world. He also understands that when we live with humility, we extend the possibility of compassion, grace, humor, and joy into precious life of another human being struggling to get through the pilgrimage of life with dignity.

I have the deepest regard for Stu and Myrna Porter as people of faith, gracious humanitarians, generous philanthropists, and most importantly as beloved friends.

Dr. Greg Brebach

I have known Myrna and Stuart for 30 years as an omnipresent houseguest and close friend of their eldest son, Stu. I cherish Myrna’s given title of “third son.” From ballgames and patio parties to Wellness Place board meetings, what has become apparent is their dedication to each other, their

community, and the fight against cancer. Their commitment to local charities is well-chronicled. What’s not as well-known is the daily support that Stuart provides to those recently diagnosed with prostate cancer — providing incite and guidance on the best treatments, medical centers, and doctors — all with the kindness and empathy of a path understood and traveled. Myrna is a tireless crusader for the fight against cancer. Her desire to make a difference has changed the landscape of community cancer support in Barrington, and is a foundation of support this community can be very proud of. I love them both for their individual talents and admire the way they challenge traditional conventions, yet have the self-awareness and capability to support their beliefs, their community, and each other. Keep on fighting!

Gen and Terry Brown

We belong to the same clubs in Barrington and also Indian Wells, Calif. Myrna and Stu inspire us to be better people. We feel blessed to have them for our friends. Even with their own health issues to deal with, they are always available to help others. They have touched so many lives. Stu is always willing to offer not just his marital advice but football expertise. He is the best example of someone who will never give up — a real fighter. Myrna’s sense of humor is equal to her husband. That is a perfect word for them — equals. We love them both.

Melinda Browning

Myrna and Stu Porter are my aunt and uncle, although you could say they’ve been more like parents to me. They have played an immense role in all of the momentous occasions of my life. Uncle Stu gave me away at my wedding (in place of my late father), and Myrna and Stu are godparents to my children. Their influence on me has been tremendous. I am continually in awe of Stu’s sharp wit, unparalleled intelligence, and wicked humor. His presence is commanding and I enjoy every moment I spend with him. Never have I gone away without learning something new.

My aunt and I can be like two peas in a pod, so similar are we. I admire how spirited and purposeful she can be when she finds something that ignites her passion. What I see as their greatest gift is the culture of generosity that they have created within our family. They have not only been unfailingly generous with both their sons and with me, they have also provided a wonderful example of philanthropy. I am inspired to be involved in my community and give back to others by watching Myrna and Stu.

Patrick Casey

I have known Stu and Myrna for 30 years and have been Stu’s business partner for the past 10 years. Special does not begin to describe the Porters. Stu is known as a fierce competitor and strives to succeed in all endeavors. He is also a legendary personality that successfully uses his unique brand of humor to make business and social situations vastly more enjoyable. (Myrna will not agree with this publicly, but privately, I am sure she does.) Stu finds humor in situations that require levity or its seriousness would overwhelm. It is because he can laugh at himself that everyone around him laughs with him. Stu has always been his funniest on the golf course. He is always ready



to share a new joke and always at the most inappropriate time. This is Stu at his most enjoyable. Those of us who know Stu and Myrna feel and treasure their presence in our lives.

Fran and John Ekizian

We are friends of the Porters from Indian Wells, Calif. We both enjoyed playing golf and found out that we had the same goals in life. Myrna had this vision of a place where people with cancer could go. She worked very hard and did whatever was necessary to accomplish this. When Wellness Place was created, we discovered Stu and Myrna were dedicated to its survival as a necessary charitable organization. We were amazed at the level of dedication that Stu and Myrna had to insure that Wellness Place would be a success. They would not only support Wellness Place financially, but would spend hours to put together a team of knowledgeable people on the staff. Stu and Myrna are special people on a mission to help others in their time of need.

Michael J. Falcone

Stu Porter and I first met almost 50 years ago when the Air Force reserves were recalled to active duty in response to the construction of the Berlin Wall. We were stationed in Chaumont, France, at an airbase that was flying daily missions over Berlin. We worked and slept in the same barracks. We were accountants for the commissary, but most of our time was spent calculating what the odds were for every possible poker hand. Stu is a gifted mathematician. He is one of the most memorable people that I have known. We went our separate ways after active duty and lived in different parts of the country. A few years ago we rekindled our friendship and have seen each other several times since. I feel as if we have never skipped a beat. Stu is one of the most engaging men I know. He has achieved a great deal of success but still has not changed. He has also shared that success with many people and many causes. He is caring and generous to a fault. Myrna is as dedicated and tenacious as he, and together they make a great team. Myrna has been especially supportive to Stu during his illness. Stu has been very courageous and upbeat, in spite of his physical problems. They are both examples of what can be accomplished in life with perseverance and optimism.

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Stu embraces all with a smile and a twinkle in his eye.
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— ELLIE JONES ARNOLD

Russ Gould

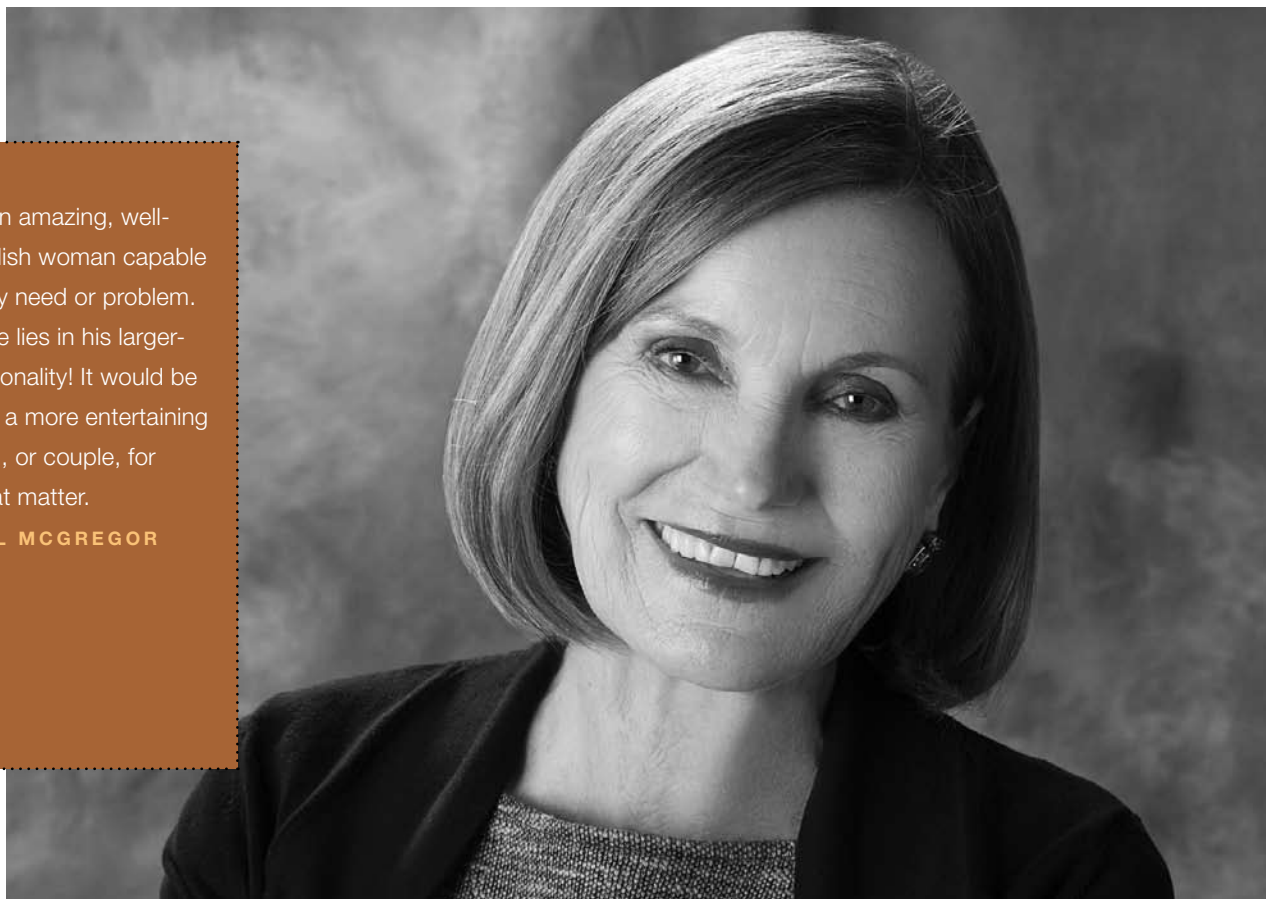
I have come to know Myrna and Stu as my close friends through eight years of pioneering work with prostate cancer support, education, and advocacy projects. Myrna and Stu were part of my new and developing UsTOO and Wellness Place programs. It was Myrna's idea "to do something for the guys," and suggested a prostate cancer walk. She worked tirelessly with passion and commitment to make things happen. The results are known — the major walks in Chicago have raised \$1.5 million for prostate cancer. The funds generated have had far-reaching effects, including the development of the Prostate Cancer Resource Center, which is unique to Wellness Place. Myrna and Stu's passion and encouragement to make this the best program in the country have inspired me to continue to provide life-changing help to men and their families with prostate cancer. With Stu's help, we have developed the new Advanced Prostate Cancer Support group, which is known and consulted by men across the country.

Pat and Dan Huber

Myrna and Stu are a unique, generous, caring, and enjoyable couple. We met the Porters when we were transferred to Fox Point in 1973 where we lived for five years. Stu and I coached our sons together in little league football, baseball, hockey, and basketball in those initial years. This early association around the children's athletics and education grew and we became even closer friends, playing golf, tennis, skiing, socializing, and spending family vacations together. The family vacations we have experienced with them have been the most fun and memorable of our lives. When Myrna and friends developed the wellness center concept and initiated the early phases, we encouraged the initiative. The concept made sense to us, for we lost our eldest child, Mary, at the age of 9 to cancer. We experienced firsthand what

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— CAROL MCGREGOR



challenges families face in battling cancer or other potentially life-threatening diseases. We respect Myrna and Stu for their initiative and untiring dedication to this great cause and thank them for their contributions.

Quin Lanning

Fifteen years ago, I met Myrna through church and since then we have become dear friends. A year after she was diagnosed with breast cancer, I became a cancer survivor. Through this walk, she was my support and mentor. Myrna got me involved with Wellness Place. With her leadership and example, I found it meaningful to give to others what I was experiencing. Stu and Myrna are an incredible and dynamic duo. Stu told me recently that their marriage is based on challenge, love, and support. Stu and Myrna are very personable and gracious to others; your ideas are important to them. Stu's sense of humor and wit are contagious. Family is important to them. Stu and Myrna, congratulations on your tremendous contributions to our area.

Barbara and Jim Ledinsky

During 1970, Stu and Jim met through business and the four of us had dinner shortly thereafter. We stay in touch with them from home in Naples, Fla. It was clear to us that these were special people and we have been good friends for almost 40 years. Although Myrna and Stu may disagree at times, they have identical views on the importance of honesty, family, helping others, and community outreach. They are fascinating, fabulous individuals and amazing friends. While Myrna was undergoing chemotherapy, she told us about her vision of Wellness Place. With Stu's support and help, she began to make that a reality. When Stu was diagnosed with prostate cancer, they started the

Chicago Us Too Prostate Walk. Right in the middle of a great deal of adversity, they rose above their issues and took on the challenge of helping others.

Anne and Bob Lee

We met Stu and Myrna 30 years ago when our children became friends. Years later, Myrna founded Wellness Place and encouraged our daughter to become involved. While serving as president of the auxiliary, Laura fostered our interest in becoming volunteers. We soon recognized the tireless devotion, endless energy, and consistent commitment Myrna contributed to perpetuating the goals of the cancer resource center. Adversity opened a window of opportunity to "live life as a thank you," find gratitude moments in the dailiness of life, and give back with great generosity of leadership, spirit, and gifts. Together, Myrna and Stu make things happen. Myrna and Stu are quintessential standard bearers of being committed to a goal, becoming involved, sharing their time and talent, and inspiring others. We honor the Porters' partnership during their personal journey of facing challenges with resilience, research, and perseverance. Yes, the "Porter Perseverance" is a tribute to the courage, strength, and tenacity it takes to keep on keeping on. Myrna and Stu have walked through storms and held their heads high.

Carol McGregor

Myrna and Stuart ... Now, that is a pair to be reckoned with! We have been friends for more than 30 years while raising our children and welcoming grandchildren. Is there anything more heartwarming than old friends who have been with each other through much of what life has to offer? Myrna is an amazing, well-educated, stylish woman capable of solving any need or

problem. Stuart's forte lies in his larger-than-life personality! It would be difficult to find a more entertaining individual, or couple, for that matter. Just as impressive is Stuart's genius with mathematics, he has a passion and determination to conquer anything that crosses his path, be it a complicated financial problem, prostate cancer, golf, or cards, but it does not extend to a fear of heights. Their own generosity and fundraising expertise should be used as a road map to success for any organization. Together, they are the dynamic duo whom we all dearly love.

Al Moorhouse

My wife, Bonnie, and I have been friends of Myrna and Stu for 25 years. We've enjoyed a friendship that has been interesting and delightful. Myrna is continually pursuing ideas that can help people in need. Whether it is in Barrington or at their winter home, Myrna has continually pursued these goals always supported by Stu, their two children, Stuart and Randall, and their respective families.

Stu, on the other hand, is very complex. He is one that would look for an old golf ball for 30 minutes, and on the other hand he radiates unbelievable generosity. He is one of the toughest humans we have been associated with. His courage handling prostate cancer over the last eight years is remarkable. His unbelievable strength and even demeanor always amaze Bonnie and I. His willingness to live is unparalleled because of the torments of his treatments. Stu always has a smile on his face and a warm welcome to all whom he crosses paths with. Myrna and Stu have been successful in their lives and they have shared that success with others less fortunate. We are limited by words for this article, but Bonnie's and my love for them is unlimited and we are proud that they call us their friends.

Marie and Dick Neil

Stu was one of our closest friends at the University of Michigan where we shared many memorable times at fraternity parties and football games. Stu was always the life of the party and a master of limericks and college songs — he never forgot a word or a line — demonstrated again 50 years later at our class of '59 Michigan reunion. Stu joined the Air National Guard with Dick Neil in Toledo even though he was still deferred as a college student. The stories of their martini and poker parties in the laundry room of their Air Force barracks are legendary! Stu was called up for a stint in Germany where he made the most of his card playing acumen. He returned to Chicago to pursue a successful career in investments and the beginning of his courtship of Myrna, whom we found to be beautiful, smart, and a true match for Stu. We admired her determination to make it on her own in Chicago after leaving a huge family while in her teens. She completed a master's degree after she was married and her dedication to social work provided significant impetus for the charitable work she initiated on behalf of women with breast cancer. Stu's courageous and aggressive battle with cancer has included the pursuit of risky trials and treatment, which seemed outrageous but have given him extra years to enjoy his family, friends, and his philanthropic partnership with Myrna.

Gary Personette

I have known Stu Porter for years through our connection in the financial world, and I first met Myrna when I became a board member of Wellness Place. Myrna and Stu are an inspiration to our community. Their gold standard for service and giving back motivates and encourages all who work with them to do more. I found Myrna to be creative and tenacious in her commitment to Wellness Place. Stu has been a continued example to all, to live life to the fullest and to fight the odds with knowledge and determination.



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— AL MOORHOUSE

They bring success, and fun to every cause that they promote and foster. It is an honor to be associated with them.

Chrissy Porter

I am a granddaughter of Myrna and Stuart Porter, living in Phoenix. My grandma Myrna, known as Nana, is a courageous and remarkable woman. She grew up on a poor farm in the Canadian plains with no electricity or running water. My nana left her home at the age of 14 for a better high school. Later she went to America to live with relatives and worked as a nanny for a family in Illinois. My nana eventually paid her way through college and nursing school. She has never let her circumstances limit her potential.

My grandpa, known as “Papa Hat,” is one of the most dedicated people I know. He is accepting and shows me that you should not judge a book by its cover. He also shows perseverance through his battle with cancer. My Papa Hat never gives up and he succeeds in everything he does. I love him dearly. He is special in his own way and is a gift to our family.

Randall Porter

I am the youngest of Myrna and Stuart’s two sons. My mother grew up very poor on a farm in Saskatchewan, and left at an early age. She put herself through high school, college, nursing school, and graduate school, earning her master’s degree while raising two very challenging boys. Although she studied a lot when I was growing up, she never made it seem like she had no time for us. Her persistence, determination, and hard work allowed her to succeed in many ways. In this regard, she has served as a tremendous role model to me. My father grew up with a life of privilege, but lost his father at a young age. With no inheritance from the family business, he had to start over. He, too, has modeled a trait of servitude throughout his life, but first and foremost, he served his family and did so with encouragement and love. He gave me the gift of unconditional love. I hope my children feel the same way.

Stuart (Stu) D. Porter

I am their eldest son, living outside of Boston. I consider my dad my best friend and mom my hero. My dad always taught me how important relationships are in life. His most unique quality is that he can make anyone comfortable with him; it does not matter their lot. I remember having the opportunity to organize a weekend to see University of Michigan play Notre Dame with my pals. My dad was going through his second round of chemotherapy and my mother said he would never be able to make a weekend of golf, revelry, and football. He would have none of her warnings and played 27 holes on Friday, closed down the bars in Chicago that night, and led the tailgating the next morning in South Bend! As a child, he coached a lot of our teams. I also have memories of riding the train every day with my dad to my summer job.

As a child, I remember attending my mom’s graduations at nursing school, undergraduate, and her graduate degree. I marvel at how determined she was to accomplish all that and still run our family. There is nothing she cannot accomplish. Her real passion is helping other people.

Stuart Gleason Porter

My grandpa, “Papa Hat,” and my grandma, “Nana,” have been my role models as far as I can remember. They are people who have recognized the lives they have been blessed with, and realized the importance of giving back. Both have faced adversity fighting cancer, and both show mutual support

throughout all their battles. Fans of traveling the world, my grandparents have enjoyed seeking out countries full of history and stories. Due to an abundance of memorable experiences, Papa Hat has become a grand storyteller. My grandma has lived a life anyone would be proud of.

My favorite trips will always be visiting Palm Springs, Calif., where my cousins, grandparents, and my own family meet. There is no place I’d rather enjoy dinner than my grandparents’ backyard where we share stories and our thoughts. My grandparents remind us what it means to be a Porter: hardworking, persistent, caring, and enjoying the little things in life that others do not take for granted. If I could help half the people my grandmother has, I would consider myself an accomplished man. I love my nana and papa and the memories and the lessons learned.


Pam Reiss

I am the executive director at Wellness Place. I met the Porters when I first got involved with the Wellness Place as a volunteer in 2003. The two of them exemplify the meaning of community, leadership, and philanthropy, setting the bar high for those around them. They are sticklers for details, demanding and tenacious to the point of maddening at times, and yet it’s because of that they have challenged me to do things I never thought I could do. I’ve never met two people with more heart, passion, and loyalty, qualities they inspire others with and have instilled deeply within their sons, Randall and Stuart. I feel truly blessed to know them.

Sandy Seplow

Stu and I met and served together in the United States Air Force during the Berlin Crisis. We became fast friends, sharing common interests such as our careers, enthusiasm to see the world, and being bachelors. Not long after our tour of duty was complete and we returned to our respective homes, I had the pleasure of meeting Myrna during a visit to Chicago. Today we both have winter homes in the Palm Springs, Calif., area, and it has been marvelous to rekindle our close friendship. I am extremely fortunate to have such good friends and I salute their accomplishments.

Jacob Shefa

I have had the blessing to know Myrna through her spirited, indefatigable assistance with my program for at-risk teens, *Odyssey Writes of Passage*, in Palm Desert, Calif. Myrna, teaches by example. She is confident and humble. It is through Myrna that I have met Stu. From our first meeting, I was impressed with Stu’s directness and his humanity. I will always remember our discussion about mentoring and about how important it is to be examples for our children. Stu inspired me to become a better mentor and father. Having met one of their sons, Stuart Jr., I can say that the Porter’s legacy of inspiration and dedication is alive and well. They are extraordinary human beings. 

Publisher’s Note: *Quintessential People™* is a heartfelt collaboration between our publication and portrait artist Thomas Balsamo. Our goal is to share with you exceptional images and words that ring true about some of the finest, most inspiring people in the community. For more information about *Quintessential People™*, contact QB at www.QBarrington.com or Thomas Balsamo (Portraits by Thomas) at 847-381-7710 or www.portraitsbythomas.com.