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Potter Stewart*

George Bush†

We were friends for many years, Potter and I, Andy and Barbara—The Bushes and the Stewarts. We were neighbors on Palisades Lane, and there were a lot of Sunday afternoon lunches between us and a lot of laughter.

When I was appointed to the U.N., China, and the C.I.A., Potter swore me in—and he swore me in twice as Vice President. I was always flattered that it was Potter holding the Bible and leading me through the oath.

We were not, as Richard Nixon now and then insisted, roommates at Yale. Potter belongs to the famous Class of '37, a class that was an outstanding part of a generation that did a lot of this century's heavy lifting.

The Stewarts were New England moved to Ohio—anti-slavery and pro-Union. Potter's great grandfather was a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi. He would have been proud of Potter's forceful, though erratic, approach to driving his car on our street.

His grandfather volunteered for the Union Army. His father was an eminent trial lawyer who took it on himself to act as public defender for the poor, and Potter's mother campaigned for United States membership in the League of Nations.

And so, you see, a long river of history and idealism flowed through Potter's veins. He inherited a very personal sense of patriotism and moral purpose.

But Potter wasn't stuffy, not by a long shot. He was keenly funny—he was elected class wit at Hotchkiss with 43 votes (the next closest wit got 4).

All his life, Potter loved sports and politics. He was never nominated for most valuable player in sports. He could have gone all the way in politics. He felt the Cincinnati Reds were invincible and he loved speculating on elective politics—always discreetly of course—on the politics, not the Reds.

Potter spent World War II on a Navy tanker that sailed in mostly silent waters. But it carried 100 octane gasoline. Potter described his feelings: "Mostly boredom, mixed with occasional terror."

* This eulogy, reprinted in substantially complete form, was delivered by Vice President Bush at the funeral service for Justice Stewart in Washington.

† Vice President of the United States.

Potter spent the lonely hours of midnight watch thinking about his future.

And he decided on public service. Then he went home and called a pretty girl and met her under the "clock at the Biltmore," and soon Andy was his wife, and his life was beginning again.

It was a life well lived. Potter knew professional success early; more important, he was a personal success.

The Stewart family is an example of the success of love. Their children and their grandchildren brought Potter and Andy joy and the knowledge that the river of personal history would continue.

And when he left the court, when he walked away from the bench he'd graced with rigorous intellectual honesty for 23 years, Potter said a very sane thing. He said he wanted to spend more time with his family. Hardly a shocking desire, but one that was surprising nonetheless because it was so . . . well balanced. Let me explain.

In Washington, in our time, public men and public women, most of whom get more than their share of attention and honors and most of whom are important and celebrated, often find it difficult to keep their eye on the most important things, the enduring things, the things that really count.

One can find oneself being a public hero and a private failure, giving less and less attention to the family and the children and the life that goes on in the home. Potter put his family first.

One who has long watched the highest court of our nation said, simply: "He was one of the great ones."

And that is one opinion from which there will be no dissent, ever.