

## Charles Harting Percy

Class of 1937



Charles Harting Percy was born on September 29, 1919, in Pensacola, Florida, while his mother, a professional violinist from Chicago, was touring Southern states. He was fondly known as “Chuck” to family and friends, with the exception of his mother, Elisabeth, who insisted on calling him “Charles.”

His parents returned to Chicago, where his father worked as a bank clerk until he lost his job during the Great Depression. Although his family had very little money, they focused on the best available educational opportunities. They saved enough money to pay rent for a house in Wilmette, which allowed Percy to enter New Trier High School. He parked cars, was a movie theater usher, and worked at the Rotary Club throughout high school to help support his family.

Percy excelled in his academic work and continued his studies at the University of Chicago. He worked summer jobs at Bell & Howell Company, a Chicago-based camera manufacturer, and they hired him as a full-time employee upon his graduation in 1941. World War II broke out, and Percy joined the Navy in 1943. He returned to Bell & Howell Company, rising quickly through the ranks, and was named president in 1949.

After 25 years at Bell & Howell, and with President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s encouragement, he ran for governor of Illinois in 1964 and narrowly lost to Otto Kerner Jr. In 1966, he challenged and defeated Democratic incumbent U.S. Senator Paul H. Douglas and went on to represent Illinois in the Senate for three terms. During his Senate tenure, Percy proposed legislation to create a private foundation to finance low-cost housing and foster home ownership for low-income families like his own.

While Percy loved the world of politics, nothing brought him more pride than his family. Percy and his first wife, Jeanne Dickerson, had three children: twin daughters Valerie and Sharon and son Roger. Valerie and Sharon had the good fortune to be New Trier students. Sadly, Jeanne passed away in 1947 when the children were under the age of three. Several years later, Percy married Loraine Guyer, and they had two more children, Gail and Mark.

Charles Harting Percy was a man of honor, integrity, and principle. His formative years at New Trier instilled in him the sense of duty to his fellow man and prepared him for a lifetime of hard work in business and public service.

