

Giving Is Good for the Soul



The Life and Legacy of Charles and Shirley Weiss

by Grace Camblos

Commissioned by The Graduate School, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Charles and Shirley Weiss have created a lasting legacy—as teachers, researchers, world travelers, and philanthropists. These life experiences informed one of the most important decisions of their lives together—to create a fellowship program that would give graduate students the opportunity to learn differently and to improve the quality of life in their communities.

To honor the 20th anniversary of the Weiss Urban Livability Program, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate School commissioned a biography to share the story of the Weisses' remarkable journey together. *Giving Is Good for the Soul: The Life and Legacy of Charles and Shirley Weiss* covers their intellectual interests, professional and personal achievements and—most important of all—their appetite for sharing everything they learned and received for the good of others. They lived their lives with the belief that giving was as good for the giver as it was for the recipient. Their life story bears witness to this truth.

Grace Camblos is a writer and photographer based in Carrboro, North Carolina. She has worked as a science writer, reporter, news photographer, and oral historian. After receiving her bachelor of arts degree in English, magna cum laude, from the College of William and Mary, she earned a master of arts degree in journalism and mass communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While pursuing her graduate degree, she served as senior editor for *The Fountain*, the UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate School's annual magazine. *Giving Is Good for the Soul: The Life and Legacy of Charles and Shirley Weiss* is her first commissioned book.



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Photography Acknowledgements

Except where noted, all photographs are courtesy of Charles and Shirley Weiss or Will Owens Photography.

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Shirley and Charles Weiss are very special people. If you do not already know this, reading this biography will surely convince you. The story of their lives and legacy is one that needs to be shared—just as they shared so generously with everyone they met throughout their lives—their families, friends, colleagues, students, and even strangers. The depth of their commitment to sharing is exemplified by the Weiss Urban Livability Program, which they created so that graduate students would benefit and make the world a better place.

This biography is the result of many years of reflection and story-telling. In the remembering and sharing, Charles and Shirley Weiss relived those many days they shared together. It was fun—for the listeners, recorders, and writers as much as for them. During this time, when the project was well along but not yet complete, Shirley Weiss died August 31, 2010, after her long and arduous fight with osteoporosis. Charles and Shirley had been married for more than 68 years. The remembering and sharing perhaps then became even more precious for Charles—and for all of us.

The process of generating this book began years ago. After meeting Shirley and Charles Weiss in the fall of 2008, the 2008-09 Weiss Urban Livability Fellows were so inspired by these emeriti professors' lives and stories that they felt motivated to ensure future generations of Fellows would similarly benefit. The idea of preserving the Weisses' stories through an oral history was born. At the Fellows' request, The Graduate School employed History graduate student Kristen Deiss to conduct a series of interviews with the Weisses and some of their colleagues during the spring of 2009. The Fellows also began the huge task of organizing the Weisses' extensive personal photo collection.

“This project was motivated by our sincere desire to record the inspiring story of the Weisses and the evolution of the fellowship program,” the Fellows wrote that spring. “In addition, we felt that the extensive collection of photographs documenting the Weisses' personal and professional travels should be shared.”

While the project turned out to be too large for completion in only a semester, it served as a beginning point for this biography. Charles and Shirley began reviewing their life together, reflecting on the many helpful mentors they had known and the fortunate paths they had taken together.

The Graduate School then contracted with a professional writer, Grace Camblos, with the goal of producing this biography as a valuable contribution to our University's history

and a learning resource for future Weiss Fellows. Grace Camblos utilized the interview transcripts produced by Kristen Deiss, as well as interview transcripts from Laura Puaca, another former History student who had interviewed Shirley years earlier as part of a thesis project. Camblos also conducted interviews with Shirley, Charles and others. She then skillfully penned all of the stories, details, and data into this marvelously well-told story of their lives. Camblos has done justice to the considerable challenge of capturing their adventurous spirits, their generous personalities, and their deep love for one another, while also making it a genuine page-turner. Her work with Charles in identifying just the right pictures to accompany the stories makes it all come to life.

In addition to Camblos, Deiss, Puaca, and the Weiss Fellows, The Graduate School wishes to thank all of the many people who shared their remembrances. Additional vital contributors include Meghan Lubker, of Blue Frog Design, for creating this beautiful finished product; Deb Saine, for her keen editing skills; and Rachell Underhill, Chris Cline, and Faye Lewis for help with photo preparation. Of course, the support of our Graduate School Deans Steven Matson and Linda Dykstra was essential in making this happen.

Finally, our deep appreciation goes to Shirley and Charles Weiss for their generous spirit in sharing their stories and lives with us, and for creating the Weiss Urban Livability Program. In perpetuity, the Weiss Program will continue to support graduate students in pursuit of their academic goals and give them a unique experience that may help shape their own careers and lives.

In appreciation,

Sandra Hoeflich, Ph.D.

Associate Dean, The Graduate School

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill