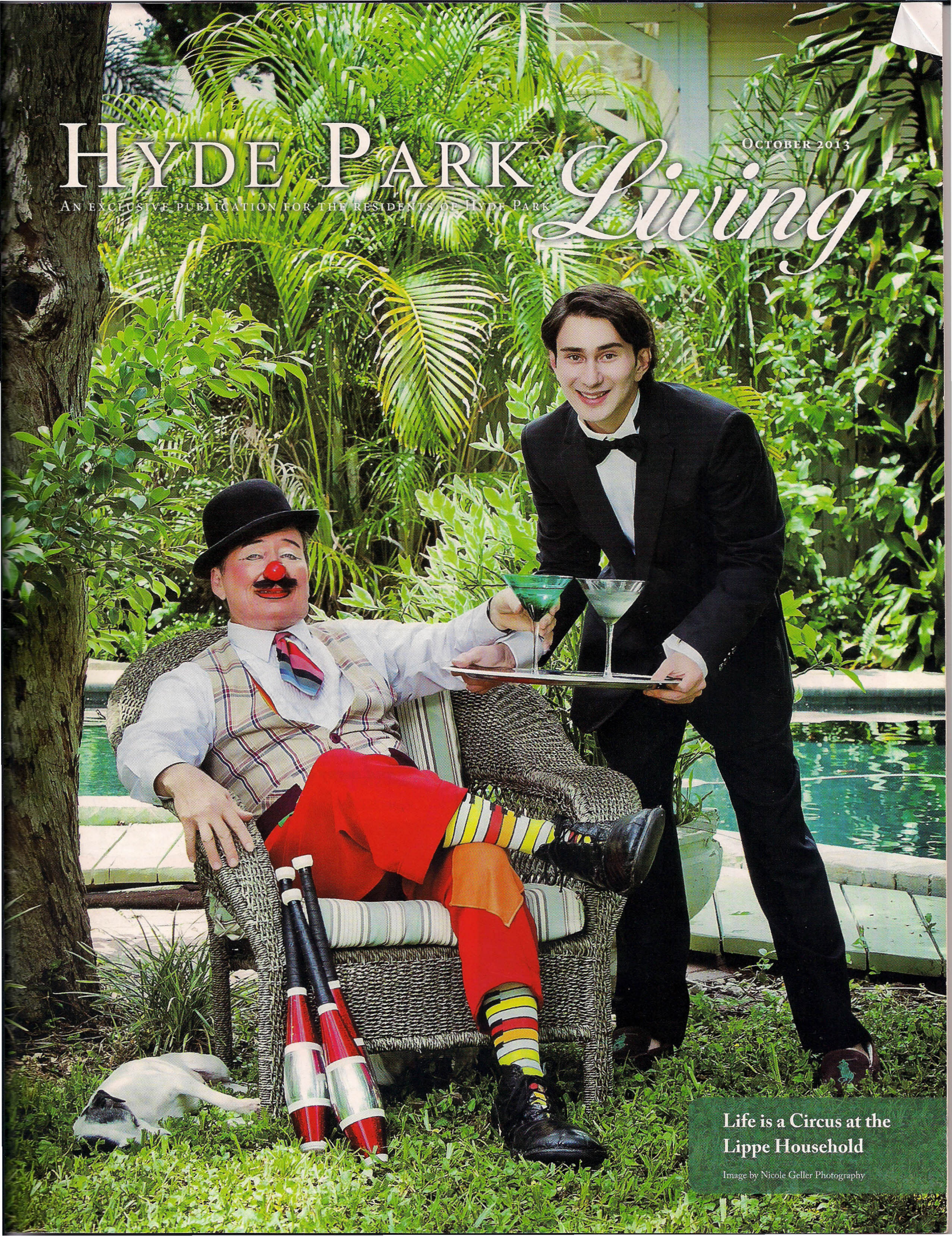


HYDE PARK

AN EXCLUSIVE PUBLICATION FOR THE RESIDENTS OF HYDE PARK

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Living



Life is a Circus at the
Lippe Household

Image by Nicole Geller Photography

Meet Your NEIGHBORS



A Single Father's Commitment Is a Choice of Love

By Melissa Spring, Hyde Park resident | Photography by Nicole Geller Photography

Stewart and Cort Lippe are testament to the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child," or, in their case, a neighborhood: DeSoto Avenue, a pretty, old brick-paved street with a tree-lined median connecting Bayshore to the Soho restaurant district.

Stewart, who grew up in Beach Park, and who until recently owned the family business, Tampa Blueprint, has been a homeowner at 1506 S. DeSoto since 1980, when he moved in as a bachelor. He became a single parent when his wife of several years, Lee, died of cancer when their only child Cort was 3. "When my mom passed away," says Cort, a handsome, dark haired, dark eyed communications major at George Washington University whose name, like his father's brother, is a

shortened version of a family name Cortier, "our neighborhood came together in raising me—my next door neighbor, Lyla; the Gracianos across the street (whose two children, Alex and Lee, are like his brother and sister) are like an extended family; the Calhouns, the Villas—who lived on the corner of Bayshore and DeSoto but have since moved—I watched their children be born. They still come over and visit. It's a community. My dad stopped working to be at home and raise me."

Lippe has two Masters degrees (one in film and one in photography) and has worked as line producer for several successful films, including *Ulee's Gold*, for which Peter Fonda won an Oscar for Best Actor. When he became a widower, his lifestyle



necessarily changed to take care of a toddler, but now he says being a father has been a wonderful experience he wouldn't change for anything.

"He was a very involved parent," says long-time next-door neighbor, Lyla Haggard. "He changed his life 20 years ago for Cort." Changing his life meant not traveling most of the year as he had been doing as part of the "Franzini Family" circus and juggling act, which he started in 1980 with long-time partner, Pat Fenda, owner of Strictly Entertainment, a talent agency, as well as his older sister Anne, at the time a renowned belly dancer. They "lucked into" a contract with the Department of Defense, through Anne's contacts which began in the "Year of the Family" performing at over 109 Air Force bases around the country. The following year, they did a tour of the Orient and the third year embassies throughout Europe.

Instead, he became the parent who was always home in the day, where all the neighborhood kids would come and play. "We have gone through different phases in our yard," laughs Stewart. "We had two trampolines, a zephyr line, and then we built the pool." There were five kids in the neighborhood. "All the parents worked, and my dad was home," Cort reminisces. "My dad played with us all the time." You might imagine that someone who is wearing a clown outfit on a magazine

cover as normal day-wear might be a little more creative than most.

One Christmas, his father gave Cort and his friends chickens, which turned out to be four hens and a rooster. "The chickens would roost in the trees at night," said Stewart. "We would have to climb up in the trees with little flashlights on our heads with nets and capture them and then put them into dog kennels with blankets over them to keep them from waking up all the neighbors."

Life was an ever-unfolding adventure at the Lippe household, an all-male stronghold—save, their performing dogs, Rosie, an 18-year-old Jack Russell, just retired, and Chopstick, a fluffy white 16-year-old Maltese who is still part of the act.

Cort's first airplane ride was when he was 6-months-old, and his first birthday was celebrated in Oregon, where his dad was working that summer. He began traveling to Vermont with his dad when he was four, where Stewart performed in a circus for a month each summer.

He was seven when he traveled on what would be the first of continuing trips to Europe for the summer, going to Santorini and Crete. When asked about his favorite trip, Cort ponders for a long moment. "They are all amazing and unique," he says. "Venice was cool

and Crete—we've been like three times! Provence was pretty nice. We rented a house with the Gracianos in lavender fields." They traveled to Greece and Crete often staying with Stewart's brother Cort and his family, whose wife is from Greece. Stewart had always wanted to go to Japan, and they made the pilgrimage when Uncle Cort was teaching music at the University of Tokyo and had an apartment there.

"We often traveled for my work—and often not," Stewart says. They used frequent flyer miles for tickets and often had places to stay. Sometimes there were exceptions, such as Provence.

One place they both agree they would not revisit is Mongolia where they went, three years ago when Cort was a senior. "That was rough. I lost 10 pounds," he grimaces. I missed the first two weeks of school because we were in Mongolia." Not your typical summer vacation. They were there for Stewart's work in a circus, giving out information on the Domestic Violence Center, part of a non-profit called Mission Mongehai and Cort did a documentary film, which is now used to raise monies to help stop domestic violence in Mongolia.

When I arrive at their house, a charming, eclectic Bungalow just off Bayshore, guarded by stone lions on either side of

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the walkway, with comfortable furniture on the welcoming front porch, I walk through their living room, filled with a drum set and piano: the center during the Lippes' yearly Holiday party. What first started out as a DeSoto Neighborhood event over the years grew to include other neighbors and friends, many of whom add their musical and dancing talents to the mix!

I am greeted by Stewart, Cort, and his best friend since high school, Dominique Garcia. I am fortunate to catch both the Lippes at home in between trips. Stewart will be departing soon for work in Canada and Baltimore, where he often goes to visit his significant other as well as work. He is continuing work on a film about his friend, my brother, who died last year from ALS.

Cort is just back from three weeks in Israel: his "birthright" trip, from his mother's side, and three weeks just traveling Europe on his own. "He traveled this year without me," complains Stewart, half-joking. "You know that book I used to use traveling through Europe on \$5 a day," jokes Stewart. "Cort has rewritten the book—\$500 a day!" In discussing accommodations, Cort's sophistication for his age is apparent. "I don't stay at youth hostels. I did once and never again. I have an app on my Air B&B that gives you people's homes with your own bath for the same price or a little more than the hostel." He has spent, as he does every summer, several weeks out on Long Island with his mother's family and cousins—to whom he remains close. Stewart joined him to attend a 70th birthday party for sister and aunt, Anne, on her husband's family estate on Long Island, once a steel magnate's home, now open to the public. They mingled with close friends from around the country. Now, for a brief time, they are here together, at home. Asked about what they enjoy



doing together, their answer? "We built a patio together," Cort says. "I yell at him a lot," laughs Stewart. Travel has been their biggest shared activity.

Back to being Hyde Park residents and what they love about it: "Having been in this house 33 years, there are different phases of things I have enjoyed about this neighborhood," Stewart says. "When I moved into this house, the guy next door had a Confederate Flag hanging from his front porch and sting rays he had caught in the Bay," Stewart relays, "and chickens in the yard. The first 10 years I enjoyed the diversity of the neighborhood; the second 10 years I enjoyed watching the revitalization of the neighborhood, and

the last 10 years I have enjoyed the fruits of that revitalization: the widened sidewalks on Bayshore where Cort enjoys running and I used to ride my unicycle (I now bicycle)."

DeSoto really was galvanized in fighting the high-rise on Bayshore and DeSoto. They failed to win over the court, but in the process everyone got to know each other. Every Christmas—or any other reason for a party—the Lippe house is the place to be. There's always lots of yummy food, laughter and definitely dancing. It is a community compared to other neighborhoods," says Cort. "People live here and stay here," agrees Stewart.