

Gravens by Design: Family, Faith and Neonatology: Memories of My Uncle Stan Graven

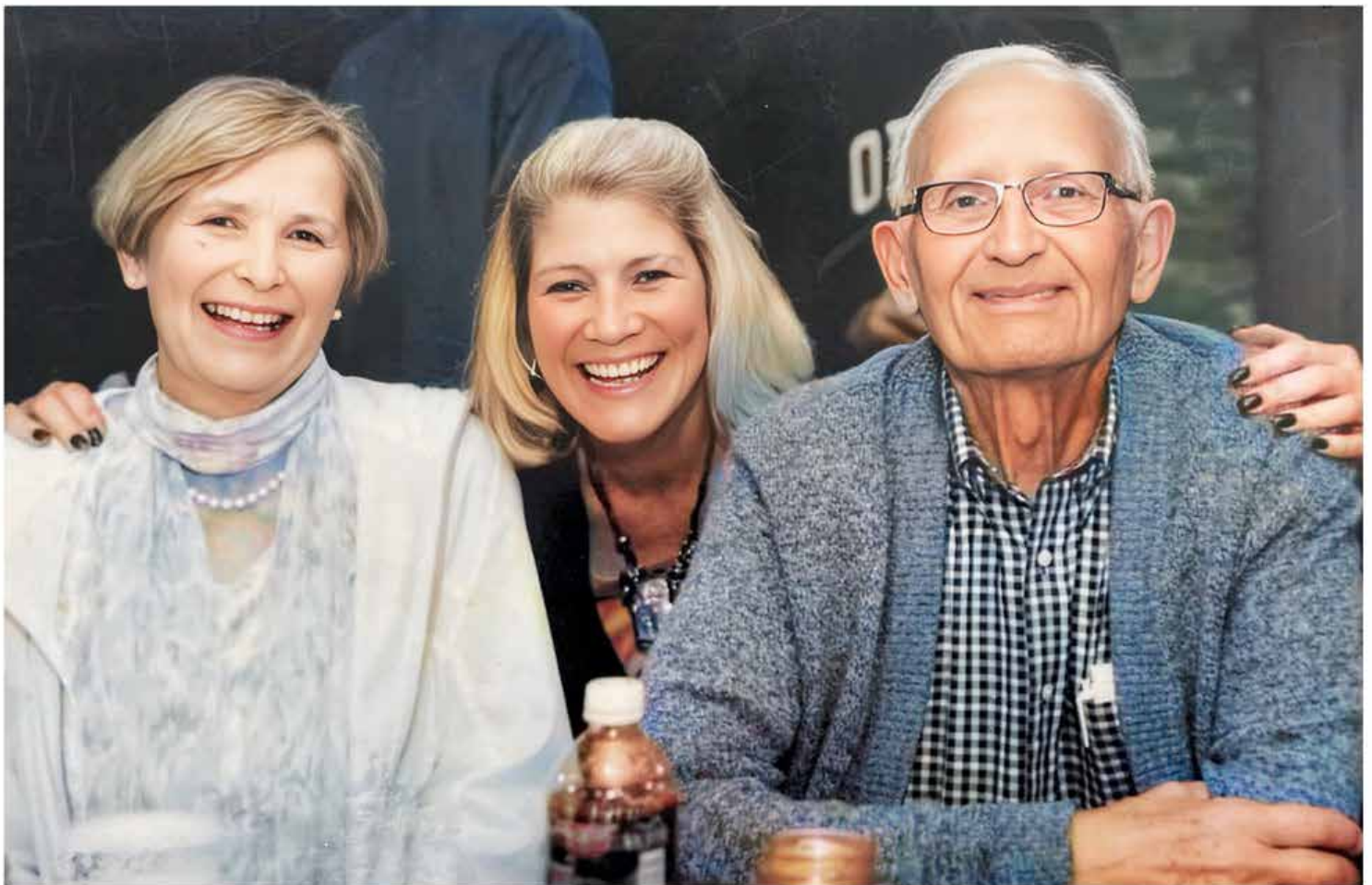
Kari Graven

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My Uncle Stan was a man who wore many hats, but the one he cherished most was that of a neonatologist. He saw life in its most fragile and miraculous form in his work each day. His compassion extended to every baby he cared for in the neonatal unit and their worried parents. He brought hope to families who needed it most, and each night, he returned home to the warmth of his own family, where love and faith were the pillars of his life.

He was so proud of the care, innovation, and work of his team. I visited him in the neonatal center in Sioux Falls. His inspiration and insight into what was important and vital to newborns left a lasting impression on me as a person and even more as a mother. The newborn and human need for touching, holding, lighting, sounds, talking, music, and the joy and miracle of life itself.

What made Uncle Stan remarkable wasn't just his skill with the tiniest of patients but his ability to see something special in everyone he met.



Mavis, Kari and Stan Graven

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Uncle Stan had a gift for storytelling. He could captivate an audience with his knowledge and understanding of people and tales of life experiences. He had a knack for coming up with ideas that were ahead of their time, like when he thought that South Dakota needed more bagels long before they became popular. He had a vision of opening a bagel shop, convinced the community would benefit. This was just one of the many ways Uncle Stan showed his love for people—always thinking about how to bring something good into their lives.

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Reading my dad's college letters recently, I discovered more about the man Uncle Stan was. Returning after a weekend away to St. Olaf, where my parents attended as well... in a new shirt, there was a “choir” of “ohs and ahs” from all the gals. (He had not yet met Mavis- not until he went to Wartburg) He was “the looker” of the family—proof of his charm and warmth. Uncle Stan was undeniably handsome, with a special smile and twinkle in his eye.

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What happened at my parents' wedding was a testament to the bond he shared with his family. As the best man, Uncle Stan wasn't just there for the ceremony—he was there for my dad and my mom, who was stressed out because other wedding party members decided to “steal my dad away.” My mom ended up with hives, and Uncle Stan convinced them to return my dad to the ceremony. Later and over the years, there were other deeply sad events for my parents, like a stillborn baby--Stan offered comfort during the most difficult times. And in those times, his presence was a source of strength and solace. My Dad described Uncle Stan as a “really good brother,” someone who was always there, dependable, and kind. But he was more than just a good brother; he was a good uncle, a devoted husband, a father, and a dedicated doctor.

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Uncle Stan was a man of many endearing qualities to me also, from him calling me “old Kar,” a nickname that always brought a smile to my face, and saying I had “pulchritudinous.” He holds a special place in my heart, not just for the lives he saved or the people he inspired, but for the moment that changed everything for me. When I was eleven, my entire family was in a car accident. Tragically, my mom passed away.

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It was Uncle Stan who gently broke the news to me. In that moment, he did something profoundly difficult with such grace and compassion that I will never forget. I needed to be transported from the hospital in Mason City, Iowa, back home to Minneapolis with my leg in traction from a broken femur. He arranged everything and even had them pull into my elementary school parking lot so that I could see my friends. I always knew I could turn to him, whether for medical advice or simply a comforting word. I trusted him to be there for me and knew he would help me in any way he could. When I was attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a transfer student from St. Olaf, Stan and Mavis gave me a place to be; “a home away from home,” a meal, and a place to feel the love and comfort of family.

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Uncle Stan wasn't alone on his journey. By his side, always, was Aunt Mavis. She was his partner in every sense-- at work, at home, and in life, they shared a love and passion for helping infants and children that was almost palpable. Together, they were a force of nature, a beacon of kindness and dedication in their work, community, and church. Their marriage was a partnership of equals, grounded in mutual respect, unwavering support, and a deep, abiding love.

Uncle Stan and Aunt Mavis were very proud of their cabin in Ely, Minnesota. Growing up, we would spend time in the beautiful, pristine northern woods and on the glistening crystal-clear lake. Stan would tell us how they built the cabin and how much they loved it there—an early appreciation for nature and how we can take care



Kari, her brother Mark, Stan's daughter Nadine and Grand dad Henry is holding Mike, Stan's oldest son

of our planet. The call of the loon, catching fish, the tall trees, and the infinite stars in the night sky -paint pictures in my mind to this day.

Uncle Stan believed in the power of education, in the strength of community, and in the importance of giving back. His strong

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faith and beliefs provided the pillars of his life that guided him in all things. He lived by example, and above all, he was a servant at heart. He put others first, always looking for ways to help, heal, and bring joy. His life was a testament to the power of love, faith, and selflessness, leaving a legacy that will continue to inspire those who knew him.

I will continue to tell his stories... with love. I am proud to be his niece and a Graven.

“Old Kar” misses you.

Disclosure: The author has no conflicts of interests to disclose.

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Oldest niece of Stanley Graven
Daughter of David Graven (Stan's oldest brother)
Albuquerque, NM, The Land of Enchantment*



Grandparents from Norway
Norway



Brothers and sisters a la Graven
Lloyd Annelise David Mavis Stan Grands



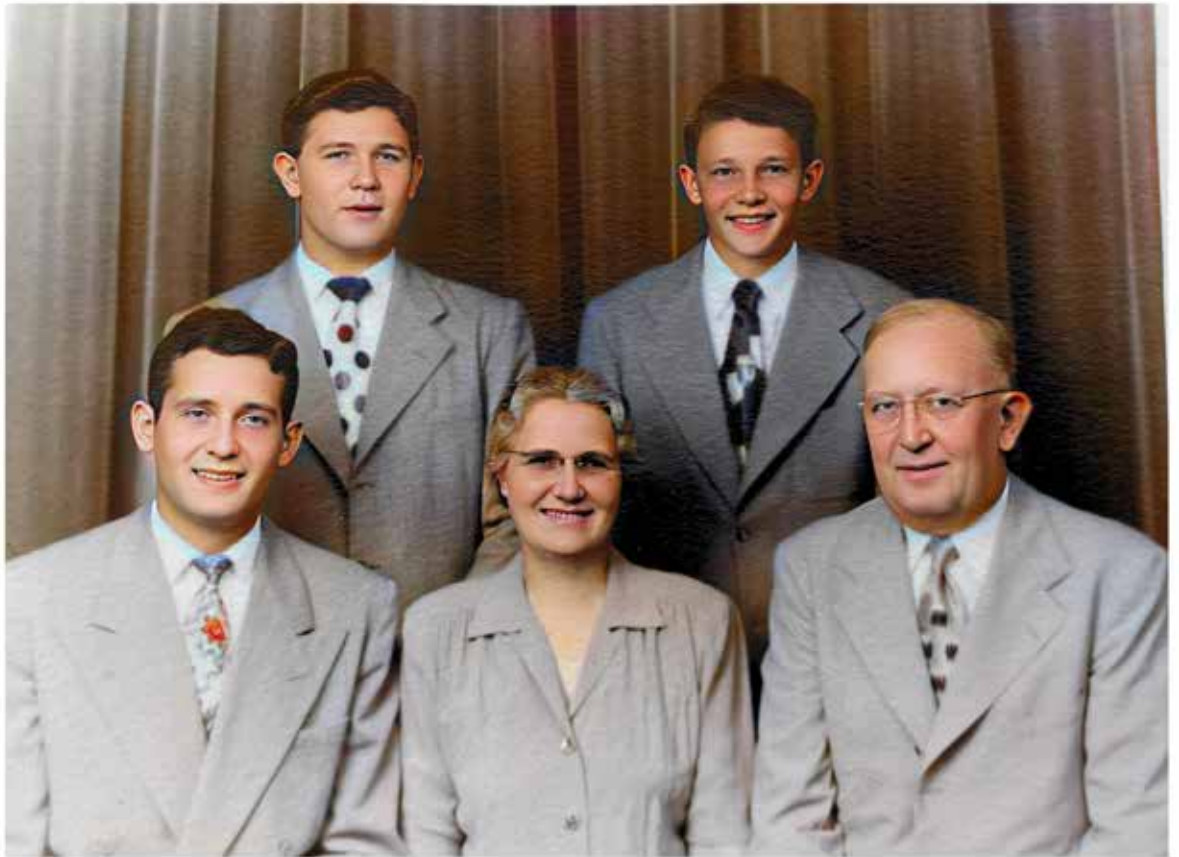
Graven home in Greene, IA



Stan 1 year, David 2 ½ years



Stan with hat on, sibs, friends and dog.



Gravens family. Stan David Lloyd and parents