



## Christopher Charlton

# The Measure of Life

“Some people say life is measured by how many breaths you take. I believe life is measured by how many times your breath is taken away. My kids and wife just take my breath away.”

From the outside, the historic Grosse Pointe Farms home of Christopher T. Charlton stands stately and proud. On the inside, it's a protective inner sanctum to a loving family life. Each room has a story — from bedtime rituals to milestone birthday parties.

Everyday moments breathe life into this home. Simple moments when the world pauses and the focus of his entire being comes to rest on ordinary things: a little

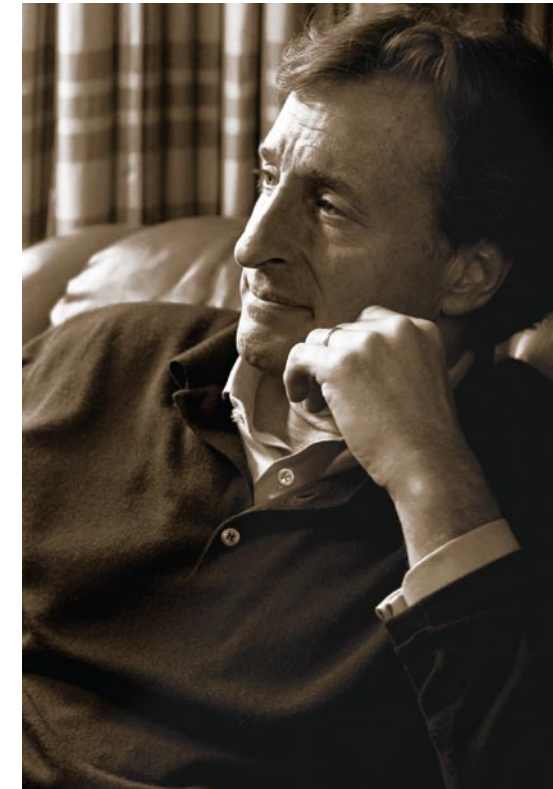
note from his wife, Kristen, the sound of his daughter, Jenny's, laugh or the expression on the face of CT, his son. Chris Charlton has the ability to zoom in and hold precious those life moments that most people gloss over. And the feelings they evoke in him stay fresh, whether it happened yesterday or 20 years ago. “To me, relationships are everything,” he says. “It's amazing, when you just sit there and listen, you tend to listen with your heart.”

Although attentive listening seems to come as naturally as breathing for Chris Charlton, he's the first to admit that it wasn't always so. “I'm a typical guy who wanted to solve every problem in a few words. That doesn't work. When I finally learned to listen, I recognized others are a lot smarter than I am,” he says. “And sometimes listening is all that's needed.”

He approaches his professional life in much the same manner as he does his personal life. Two years after putting himself through college and graduating from Michigan State University, he founded The Charlton Group. Today, as president of the company, Chris Charlton directs and oversees corporate development and is responsible for overall operations. He has built strategic alliances and lasting relationships in all areas of the automotive industry and still has the same partnerships he did in 1978. With business interests in 26 countries, his company includes manufacturing, oil and gas, real estate and the initial company that started it all — sales liaison for manufacturers that supply products for the world's largest automotive groups.

“Our loyalty, hard work and relationships have paid off tremendously,” he says. “It's funny, but it's become much more than just business to me; it's become worldwide friendships and relationships that have meant so much. When I speak to other leaders around the world, I say that English isn't the universal language; it's business. When businesses come together, governments come together, and cultures intertwine. Friendships develop and we come to know and understand one another as individuals.”

People often ask how he has managed to accomplish all that he has. “I always say that my greatest accomplishment and joy is my relationship with Jesus and my family — especially my children,” Chris says. “Some people say life is measured by how many breaths you take. I believe life is measured by how many times your breath is taken away. My kids and wife just take my breath away.”



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“Every one of us will face hard times in our life. And who is there for you when you really need them? Only those special people — like family. I believe in angels simply because I've seen my mother give lovingly to my family and others throughout her whole life — unconditionally. She truly is an angel. And my father, well, the greatest gift he ever gave me was his expectations of me — he believed that I could do anything. And he transferred his confidence in me to me. I've watched my parents share with others; they've passed that spirit on to me, and I hope to do the same for the next generation.”

Chris Charlton is a Principal Benefactor of Mayo Clinic. A painting of him and his family graces the Charlton Building lobby at Mayo Clinic.

“The older I get, the more I watch what people do along with what they say,” he says. “At Mayo, there's not a lot

of talking. It's all about serving — and serving with kindness. So I'm comfortable sending my friends and family there.”

“I'm a person who loves giving, especially to family, and Mayo falls into that category — as part of my family. I've been blessed beyond my dreams.”