

Westbrook

Featured Resident

Sue Porter



Sue Porter's story started with her being the youngest of five children born to Benton and Eliza Clevenger. There was sixteen years between Sue and her oldest brother. She grew up on a farm in the Union Baptist Church area between Excelsior Springs and Orrick. Since the older ones were leaving home, Sue was basically raised with her brother who was six years older than her. She learned to cook and take care of a house by helping her mother. She was given her own garden at age four and fell in love with gardening. (She's had a garden every year since.) Sue loved to read and would get in trouble for reading and letting the chores go or the food burn. She attended a country school through the eighth grade. Her oldest brother, who had been her teacher for six years, offered to pay for her to go to high school. However, with the beginning of the Depression, her parents didn't allow her to go.

Instead, Sue started a new chapter in her life. At the age of 14, she went to work caring for sick people in their homes. She made \$.25 a day. She would also take care of their children and their houses. Her most memorable job was taking care of the young teen-age daughter of Clay County Sheriff Wilbur Perdue while he was running for reelection. She was 19 and earned \$5 a week. Wilbur's wife, Mary, did all the baking and cooking and traveled with her husband on the campaign trail and Sue took care of the children. For six months, she had this job and lived in the Richmond jail. She worked for an older lady as a housemaid for two years and started doing people's hair. Soon she was doing hair for other people and they told her she should go to Beauty College.

This was the beginning of the next chapter of Sue's life. She borrowed \$100 herself, went over to Caster's Beauty College, got her thousand hours of training, went to Jefferson City and got her Beauty License. She went to work at a shop in Excelsior Springs. One evening walking down the street, she caught the eye of John Porter. He was sitting on a bench waiting for another girl. He turned to his buddy, pointed to Sue and said "That's the one." Sue was unaware of this exchange but they met shortly thereafter and six months later, they married. They moved to a farm in the Bethel community in 1939. Sue continued to work at the beauty shop until her son; "Rex" was born in spring of 1940. Thirteen months later, they welcomed Kay into their family and ten years later, they completed their family with the addition of Beth.

They bought their own farm just outside of Kearney in 1943. Living on a farm was a busy life for Sue. John worked hauling Redi-Mix concrete and so the day to day running of the farm fell to Sue. She took care of buying the feed, taking ice off the ponds in the winter and tending to the cattle and pigs. John helped on the weekends and Rex helped as he got older. Her best year – she had 250 fattened pigs to sell. She did this while still taking care of her children, the house and tending to her garden. Sue was very active with her kids. She wanted them to have the things she didn't growing up. She took them to swim lessons, dance lessons, piano lessons, skating, 4H and church activities. They were active members of the United Methodist Church of Kearney. She taught Sunday School and VBS and was involved in the ladies' society.

Sue's husband passed away in 1977 after a two year battle with prostate cancer. And so another chapter of her life ended and a new one began. Sue kept the farm and continued to garden. She also continued to raise calves for another eleven years. She took up China painting, continued to crochet and play Bridge. She even made her own clothes. She took up traveling with a group of ladies including Edith Spencer. They went on bus tours all over the United States. She has also traveled to Alaska, Hawaii, Europe, the Scandinavian countries and the Holy Land. About ten years ago, Sue took up exercising at Curves in Kearney. She is an inspiration to all who attend Curves.

Sue always regretted not graduating from high school. So at the age of 47, she obtained her GED. Education was always important to Sue. Her proudest moments involve her family. All three children are college graduates as well as all eight grandchildren. She has fourteen great grandchildren. She hopes that they too will get degrees.

The most recent chapter of Sue's life started in August of 2014 when she left her farm and moved to Westbrook. It was difficult for her to leave her home of 71 years. When asked what she likes about living at Westbrook she responded with "I don't have to worry about upkeep. I have all kinds of people to talk to. It's a safe, secure and happy place. This has become home to me now."

Westbrook Care Center has been great for my family. They are very available and always positive! My in-laws have loved the afternoon activities they provide, it's such a good place for them. I definitely recommend them. ~Troy G

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