

# "A Strong, Resilient Woman"

**Katrina Porter honors her mother with Ara's Love Foundation while enjoying a career of her own**

*By Anita Oubre*

**I**t takes a strong, resilient woman to muster up the courage to start a foundation after the death of a loved one and keep that foundation up and running in the middle of a worldwide pandemic.

Katrina M. Porter is no stranger to having a measure of strength. A single mother and the daughter of bassist George Porter Jr., she learned at an early age how to be strong and resilient to life's obstacles.

As she explained, "I come from a line of solid women from Picayune, Mississippi and Lemannville, Louisiana who took on many challenges over the years and were successful in their own right, owning businesses and working in the community."

Katrina has enthusiasm for all of her endeavors and she enjoys the many projects that she is involved in. Professionally, Katrina is the Program Coordinator for the City of New Orleans Office of Hazard Mitigation, overseeing all of the financial components of the Hazard Mitigation FEMA grants, reimbursements and the flow of millions of dollars toward the city's infrastructure. She has worked under the last four mayoral administrations in different roles and departments.

Influenced by her late grandmother, Henrietta R. Porter, Katrina was intrigued with social justice and politics from an early age. Her grandmother was employed by the late U.S. Representative Lindy Boggs as the Community Liaison and Social Worker. Katrina recalls spending time in the office as a child after school where she completed her homework and learned to type up to 90 words a minute. "By the time I was in high school at Mercy Academy I was well-versed in running an office and was able to achieve my service hours by answering phones and filing," Katrina explained.

Katrina went on to attend both the University of New Orleans and Southern University at New Orleans, majoring in Criminal Justice and Business Administration. She graduated from Cameron College with an Associate's Degree in Paralegal Studies and for a brief time worked for a local attorney's office.

"I was educated at good Catholic schools. I had good friends who stayed out of trouble and basically I thought I lived a normal life," said Katrina.

Katrina made her formal debut at eighteen with the Royal Dynamic Social and Civic Club. She loved being in the social spotlight with her grandmother by her side. She remembered her grandmother being announced as queen and taking her, as a young girl, to be her princess.

"My grandmother was very well-known and respected. She was a community leader and worked very hard. She was just as comfortable in a grand ballroom as she was hitting the streets to canvas a neighborhood," Katrina fondly recalled. "My grandmother instilled in me the importance of giving back by volunteering in the

community and working in the church."

That influence led Katrina to join the Knights of Peter Claver, Inc., Ladies Auxiliary, a dedicated member for fifteen years, starting out as a junior daughter and later served in various positions, including Grand Lady for Court #22.

"Growing up in a musically gifted family, I was drawn to music and I wanted to sing, but my dad discouraged it," Katrina said. "He wanted me to pursue a law degree." She sang first soprano in the choir while attending SUNO and, as a devout Roman Catholic, she always sang in the Gospel Choir at St. Joan of Arc Church and



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Top (l to r): Katrina, daughter Ciara, and Ara (mom); Middle: Katrina; Family: Daughter Ciara, George (father), Ara, and Katrina; Katrina at her Foundation event; Bottom: Katrina; Ara's Divas who performed at the brunch: Saint Amethyst, Sharon Martin, Wanda Rouzan, Naydja Cojoe, Barbara Shorts, Vanessa Williams. PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATRINA PORTER



with Tyronne Foster & the Arc Singers Community Choir.

So putting on another hat, for Katrina, was an easy thing to do. The Ara's Love: Pancreatic Cancer and Lupus Awareness Foundation was founded as a way to foster education, as well as awareness.

Naturally Katrina is passionate about the foundation and keeping her mother's memory alive. Aralean Hawkins Porter, affectionately known as Ara to all who knew her, was loved and adored by many. Katrina wanted to keep the spirit of her mother, who she described as "a very caring and giving person."

"Mom loved her family and friends," Katrina said. "She would do almost anything for anyone. She had no enemies; everyone just adored her. My dad said she was 'the real celebrity in the family.'"

It was that kindness and respect for others, that inspired Katrina to believe, as Ara believed, that there were still good people in this world and to live her life with total regard for others by putting them first. Katrina said she had to start this foundation to honor her mother's legacy.

"People hear about breast cancer all the time, but there is not enough information

out there about pancreatic cancer," said Katrina. The mission of the foundation is two-fold, she explained: first to educate and bring awareness to the New Orleans community regarding the cause and prevention of pancreatic cancer and lupus, and secondly, the foundation strives to provide support to patients and caregivers with resources that will assist in that support.

Katrina knew she wanted to do something different to honor her mother who passed in 2017; she did not want to sponsor a walk or a race. Katrina said that she wanted to raise funds and wanted those funds to go to someone who was directly affected by the disease. She knew firsthand how exhausting fighting a deadly disease can be, not only for the patient but also for the caregiver.

When Ara's pancreatic cancer took an unusual turn, Katrina sought the advice and partnership of her mom's oncology surgeon, Dr. Emery Minnard. "We needed to first bring awareness to the African American community by having the difficult conversations: how do we cope, how do we survive, how do we prevent this disease in the first place?" she said.

"I also wanted to give monetary gifts to patients and caregivers to help out with basic living expenses such as co-payments, groceries or medication."

Katrina announced that the Ara's Love Foundation will select five people to award at an annual brunch that will take place in November during Worldwide Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

Another hat that Katrina wears is that of an event planner. Her company, Julane's Bridal & Events, specializes in



*Katrina's parents George & Ara Porter (50th Wedding Anniversary photo)*

PHOTO BY ERIKA GOLDRING

weddings, conferences and special events. This is a true passion, and for Katrina, the work feels more like a hobby to her. She says putting on elegant events relaxes her.

"This is my enjoyment. My clients let me take away their headaches," said Katrina. Her events have been called "detail-oriented" and she takes great pride in coordinating special touches that bring memories for years to come.

Katrina was able to use these very talents to coordinate the Inaugural Jazz and Blues Brunch to benefit Ara's Love Foundation a year ago and the results were dazzling. Last year's event was attended by almost 300 people. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, this year's seating will be very limited with socially distanced seating and mask required.

As for Katrina's future plans, she said, "I am hoping to retire in the next few years so that I can dedicate all of my energy and passion into further building up Ara's Love Foundation."

*To order tickets for the Second Annual Ara's Love Jazz & Blues Honorees Brunch on November 21st go to [www.araslove.rsvpify.com](http://www.araslove.rsvpify.com).*



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