

SURGEON GOES BACK TO SCHOOL FOR DEGREE IN BELOVED HISTORY

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PUTNAM COUNTY -- Once you step inside **Dr. Sam Barnes'** Putnam County home,



you're surrounded by history. The walls are stacked with antique guns and cutlasses, memorabilia of Sgt. Alvin C. York's, even a document that notes the land grant given to his great-grandfather's brother by Tennessee Gov. Sam Houston in 1827.

Even the house is historic, dating back to the early 1900s as the old Holladay School.

But many people know Dr. Barnes in a completely different sense, as an **orthopedic surgeon who practiced for 23 years.**

He followed the medical path in education as a pre-med student at Vanderbilt University back in the 1950s before going on to medical school in Memphis, where he graduated from in 1961.

But he never did graduate from Vanderbilt with the standard bachelor's degree that students now receive before moving on to medical school.

"As soon as I had enough courses and grades, I was accepted into medical school," he said. "This was not rare at that time."

And the fact that he never did earn that bachelor's degree combined with his love of history fueled his desire to go back to school, but he didn't want to go to just any school. He wanted to go to Tennessee Tech.

"I've always tried to support TTU," he said. "I've always felt like TTU has put the bubbles in the air that's made Cookeville such a pleasant place to live."

Dr. Barnes took continuing education-type courses at TTU over the years such as scuba diving and participated in fundraising efforts, but about two years ago, he decided to enter as a history student to pursue that bachelor's degree he'd never achieved.

His reason for doing so also stemmed from the fact that he was becoming more involved in historical efforts including a group called "Doom Prevention" which evolved into the Upper Cumberland Heritage Foundation and another group, Friends of the Cookeville History Museum.

"I felt if I would continue this path that it would be good to have credentials," he said. "And I wanted to graduate from Tech."

Of course, Dr. Barnes' two youngest children, Jessica and J.P. (he has a total of five) were about the traditional age of starting college about the same time that he enrolled.

His three older children, Molly, Frank and Jamie, all graduated from TTU, and Jessica and J.P., have been attending there as well.

As to how they felt about their father's presence at school, Dr. Barnes said, "We don't run into each other. I think they're used to their dad being eccentric."

And as to what it's like to be the oldest student in class -- Dr. Barnes is 69 -- he said, "It's stimulating to be in there with all those freshmen."

"I go into these classes probably pretty cold," he said. "But the other students, I don't know what they know, but it's the flexible, young, absorbent mind. It's good to be around them."

Dr. Barnes said he's been pleased with the professors he's taken so far including Dennis Lепley, Michael Birdwell and George Webb, and he's made pretty good grades so far.

"Dr. (Larry) Whiteaker gave me a B," he said. "I guess I deserved it."

But it was a class he learned a lot from.

"Him (Dr. Whiteaker) teaching about the constitution, I couldn't believe how interesting it was," he said.

After he graduates from TTU, which will probably be another year or so, Dr. Barnes said he hasn't really given much thought to what he will do.

"I wouldn't mind teaching, even if it's just at a high school as a substitute," he said.

But most of all, a degree will mean that he will be able to prove himself to his historian friends.

"It will make me feel like I have more credibility when I'm talking to other historians," he said. "I feel pretty confident in naval history, and I'm getting there with Upper Cumberland and Tennessee history."

"I'm expected to have read so much, and I want to anyway," he said. "What feels so good to me is wanting to learn."

Published January 15, 2007 10:56 AM CST: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

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