

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

### **Dr. Howard Brody**

In recalling Dr. Barnett's many fine qualities, I am not sure that I can do better than reprint the following passage from my book, *Stories of Sickness*.

I paid a visit recently to the home of a retired professor of family practice, B. Lewis Barnett, who had been head of the department in which I did my residency training. He is nationally respected as a leader in the discipline, a wise, "old time country doctor" who nevertheless managed to make a successful transition into academic medicine. The respect in which Dr. Barnett (or "Dr. B." as we tended to call him) is held is attested to by one of his regular occupations while in retirement. Nearly every day he receives one or two e-mail messages from former residents asking his advice on medical dilemmas – usually "psychosocial" problems rather than purely technical diagnostic or treatment decisions.

On the day I visited, Dr. B. had a message from a young physician practicing in a small town in Virginia, asking how to handle a problem in which he found himself enmeshed as a relatively new member of a hospital committee. The problem involved a widely respected, "good old boy" senior physician who was known outside that town as deficient in his medical skills, but who could do no wrong in the view of most of the physicians and townsfolk within the community. The dilemma this young physician faced was a stark one: Should he try to protect the public from the incompetence of his older colleague, and probably antagonize the community and jeopardize his own newly-established practice? Or should he look the other way and add one more brick to the edifice of a medicine which protects its own rather than serve the good of the public?

I asked Dr. B. what advice he was planning to give. His response was to tell me two stories. The first was the life story of the young physician. I was impressed that Dr. B. recalled perfectly which undergraduate college he had attended (an Ivy League school). Dr. B. went on to talk about his medical school training, his residency, and whom he had married. "He talks faster than anyone I know," Dr. B. added, as an indication of how much a fish out of water this physician was in the small Virginia town. The second story Dr. B. told was an incident I vaguely knew about from my own residency years--how one of the very first residency graduates from our program had settled in that same town to practice, had become a lightning rod for various disputes, and after several years had had to leave. "They haven't forgotten him over there," Dr. B. commented, though the young physician was probably unaware of his controversial predecessor from the same residency program.

Dr. B. never flat-out answered my question about what advice he was going to give. But as he spoke, I found myself reframing the ethical question as I had originally imagined it--from "What should the physician do?" to "Who was the right person, in that town, to do what needed to be done?" Dr. B.'s stories had painted a very clear picture of the wrong person to effect any useful change in that community, and one who had arrived in town burdened with baggage that he was totally unaware of. I found myself asking Dr. B. if there was any chance that this physician could ally himself with a more respected and entrenched local physician in fighting for what was truly in the interests of the public. "He has always been the last person to think that way," Dr. B. replied sadly.

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

Dr. B. is probably representative of many people who are revered and trusted by their peers as morally thoughtful and wise, the ones to whom others naturally turn for advice, without having had any formal training in ethical methods. Dr. B. approached his task of deciding what to tell his young protégé by means of the two stories that he told. He did not, it seemed to me, first analyze the moral problem and then tell me a couple of stories to illustrate his point; he seemed to be doing his moral analysis as he was telling the stories and by means of the stories. I suspect that this is how many if not most of us approach the tasks of making moral judgments and trying to live a reasonably good life ..."

### **Dr. Kurt Elward**

This is a moment of my own "Between the Lines," which Dr. B taught me to look for, and which I need to do far more often. This one, however, I could not miss.

Florence walked into our office with a limp and her arm hanging at her side. She had felt dizzy and weak. She was hospitalized and found to have a tennis ball size brain tumor, which was read on the admitting images to be malignant. She had never been ill – just her hypertension and obesity. She told us of her worries about what was going to happen and how her husband would do, and that her daughter was expecting their first grandchild.

As we talked she also told me how she trusted me and most of all, had to turn this over to the Lord. Her faith was strong and I asked her if it would be OK to pray about this. She had tears in her eyes as she took my hands and we offered the situation up, and I asked for God's guidance for me and all the people involved in her care, and to comfort and strengthen her throughout the next steps.

Because of the serious nature of the tumor, she was transferred to the University hospital. As they began their treatment plans, reimaging was done and "didn't look so bad". She underwent the operation and was found to have a benign meningioma. She was able to recover her mobility and strength of her arm and leg. She developed a seizure disorder but was successfully treated for this.

Late one evening - no, early in the morning six months later, I delivered little girl who was the result of a long labor. The parents were overjoyed, of course. However, the baby was limp and their eyes were anxious as she struggled with her breaths. I took her to the KDC table and quickly suctioned her, and blew oxygen by. She perked up and gave a spirited cry, and the parents hugged each other in their joy. Also in that delivery room was the grandmother - with whom I had prayed six months earlier, before she underwent surgery for what was supposed to be a malignant brain tumor - which turned out benign. I handed the infant – her first grandchild to her, to take over to her daughter and said "Florence – here is that grandbaby you have been waiting for." Her own miracle was almost overshadowed by the sight of this same woman, holding the grandchild she thought she would never see, thanking me for my role in their family. As I drove home at 3AM, I realized I have one of the best lifestyles in the world. And I recalled Lewis – Dr. B – and thanked him for mentoring me to become a family physician.

Dr. B understood the joys of family medicine and mentored us in looking for them whenever we could. Too often we do not. Sometimes however, we can convey to residents and students the great

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

movement in which they are a part, the dedication it takes, and the rich rewards it brings. I might, if I am lucky, be able to help them shed the ephemeral concerns about lifestyle in its most simplistic forms, and call them to think about the career of caring and personal relationships that bring meaning to their lives. I make my kids' ballgames - most of the time. I have a great marriage to a very wonderful woman and best friend. I don't recall many of the sore throats and cholesterol checks [but a few, like when my young patient, always fearful of having his throat swabbed, wanted to do his own strep test. He did it without a problem and was so proud of himself.] I have other memories that will be treasured by me and my patients for years. I am not only a part of the Patient Centered Medical Home; I am a part of my patients' homes.

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"Dr. B" has been an incredible, wonderful gift whose impact has continued to be felt through so many exam rooms, where he still attends with us as our ""silent partner"" but one who makes an impact in so many ways time and time again, whose example lifts us up in the midst of doubt and discouragement, and calls us to be the best version of ourselves for the people we care for. With Christ in our soul and Dr. B in our hearts and minds, people know they have "a different kind of doctor." He has also made a huge impact beyond the clinic room, where so many of his medical sons and daughters have made great achievements, all the while keeping his, and now our values and truths also, in our focus. Whatever we do, wherever we practice, whoever is in front of us, your father seems at our side and helps us reach down into ourselves and bring out the healing of Christ and allow our heart to speak to theirs, and listen to their fears, needs, goals and struggles.

His knowledge and wisdom spans the generations, because he cared about the person, and what made us, what sustained us, and where our gifts were - and how to bring these to the Ned person we were called to care for.

I remember him telling us that he had a hard time learning Robbins Pathology (a huge tome of endless diseases and their multiple manifestations!!) it was incredibly hard to learn all these!

He learned from it by envisioning people from Woodruff or medical school suffering from some of these conditions, and by doing so, the dense forest of diseases became personal to him and he found a reason to know and understand the conditions - because it became about people.

There are so many tributes and stories in people's minds and hearts, those who each felt we were special to him. The glorious thing is, we all were, because he could focus in the good, the possible and the Child of God in each of us, and help us see that also. We also saw how much he really loved his son and daughter, and cherished his family with all his heart - and he mentored us how important it was to do the same.

He made THE difference in my life, more than anything I have experienced. As he was my silent partner for years, I hope he felt my hand on his shoulder as he passed into heaven. The everlasting life

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

he enjoys will be a bold and faith-filled and joyous one, by a servant in whom the Lord rejoices and is well pleased.

### **Dr. H. Glenn Garner**

I do not recall the first time that I met Dr. Barnett, in the fall of 1988. But the memories of his kindness and generosity through the eight years that I spent in Charlottesville have left an impression on me that will last a lifetime. There was never a time when he did not allow for time to sit down in his office and to listen, and to counsel, and to share stories and memories and to impart medical knowledge that seemed to be never ending. I am the doctor that I am today because of Dr. B. As medicine has changed over the last three decades, the art of a good physician who will listen and comfort and counsel his patients is unchanging. I learned those skills from Dr. Barnett.

Su Casa was a huge part of who Dr. and Mrs. B. were, I recall Sunday lunches that I never wanted to end because that meant I had to return to the library for more study. I recall pizza parties in the carport after a morning of raking leaves from the enormous oak trees. And best of all, I clearly remember the day in May 1996 when in the back garden, I married my beautiful bride.

None of those memories would be possible without Dr. Barnett. He touched so many lives and he touched mine and I will always be thankful for the time that he gave so willingly and freely.

### **Dr. David Slawson**

I'm sorry that I can't be there for Lewis' memorial. As many of you know, I would not be a family doctor now if it were not for Lewis and the keys to his house which he gave me over 30 years ago. I still carry them with me every day and think of him and his mentorship and guidance nearly every day. As many of us have done, I've tried to model my career from his sage advice. I'm very proud to be the B. Lewis Barnett, Jr., Professor of Family Medicine.

### **Dr. Dan McCarter**

Dr. B was an educator, physician, friend and mentor. It was amazing how well he combined all of these roles. Often when he was "thinking out loud with a patient," I know that the patient was getting the highest quality of care, but Dr. Barnett was also teaching the learners about the doctor, the patient, and his or her illness.

Having been a student, resident and the colleague, I have enough memories that would fill multiple volumes. In thinking about his teaching, I cannot ever remember him using slides except maybe for a dermatology session, and even then, I can't remember him sticking to the script. But what I do remember were the stories. Whether he was communicating to the patient or a learner, he would use vivid stories that would communicate the facts as well as the important emotions in a way that was not to be forgotten.

In thinking about Dr. B recently, I reviewed his address to the medical school class of 1992. At that time his advice to them was, that when all else fails you have one more thing to give, one more thing to do: You can give yourself, your presence at the bedside. You can be a "human splint" for a "fractured life."

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

While he was talking to the students, then, I feel like he was also talking to his fellow faculty members and it is as if he has reached out and touched me again today. I can think of many times over the course of my time with Dr. Barnett, which I like most other people in the healing professions or for that matter in any profession had “fractures in my life.” However, Dr. Barnett was always just a visit, a phone call or an email away, being that human splint. Just as bones are strongest where the fractures heal, Dr. Barnett, by helping us with our fractures, has given us an enduring legacy and example to help others with their problems. He not only helped his patients and his students, but his work will be passed down for generations of medical professionals to come.”

### **Dr. Dexter Campinha-Bacote**

I have two fond remembrances of my many interactions with Dr. Barnett. One is when I was considering transferring into the Family Medicine Residency Program at UVA because my wife had been accepted into the PhD in Nursing Program at UVA. I told Dr. Barnett that the reason I was considering transferring was because my residency and program directors at Duke would not pay my resident's salary if I didn't complete all of my rotations at Duke. When Dr. Barnett heard that, he said, if you were our resident, we'd pay you if you did rotations away from UVA. Right then, I knew where I needed and wanted to be.

Secondly, when I and my fellow residents were graduating and going into our respective career paths and practices, Dr. Barnett met with us at his home and said that there would be times in our careers when we would be at a loss for solutions to clinical problems and situations facing us. He said that when those times occurred that we could call him and he would walk through those difficult situations with us. I never forgot that and have not only shared the story many times, but have also followed his lead and offered myself as a resource to graduating residents in future times of need. He was and always was a pillar of strength and wisdom to me. I am forever thankful that he and Dr. Richard Hays allowed me to transfer into the residency program during my second year of residency training.

All the best, Dr. Barnett.

### **Dr. David Schriemer**

It is not possible for me to put in writing how much Dr. Barnett means to me. Dr. Barnett was a mentor, teacher, example, colleague and friend. I sought his advice while a resident and continued to seek it long after residency.

Dr. Barnett was an excellent clinician. He was one of the smartest men I've known. He knew medicine. More importantly, he understood people. He knew and taught the power of listening. There is an inherent humility in listening that sprang from Dr. Barnett's deep faith. Dr. Barnett's ability to listen seemed to alter time itself. He was fully engaged and never rushed. He did not have more important things to do at that moment. Listening to me, now, in this place was the most important thing. That is what made his interactions so meaningful and healing. In his first book, *Between the Lines*, Dr. Barnett wrote “There You Are,” a short vignette about affirming the significance of patients. He concludes,

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

"This is an art. This is something to be sought after in the practice of medicine. 'There you are,' not 'Here I am.'"

I grieve Dr. Barnett's death and miss that I can no longer call him to discuss patients or life. I am so grateful for the profound impact he had on my life personally and professionally."

### **Dr. Paul Fitch**

I recall meeting Dr. Barnett for the first time when I interviewed for a position in the UVA Family Medicine Residency. My personal statement lay open his desk with yellow highlighter marking each occurrence of the word "privilege." He had counted and commented about the word. I explained it was how I viewed my life as a physician. With outstretched arms and open hands he invited me to place my hands in his. His gaze varied between my wondering eyes and our joined hands. For moments, there was silence and then he spoke. "I don't know why. I just don't know why. I don't know why it is that patients get better for some doctors and not others." There was again silence as he flipped our joined hands so either his or mine was on top. Then with our joined hands held in a vertical position he spoke again. "It has to do with the space in between. It's not about the doctor or the patient. It's the space in between where the healing occurs."

Dr. Barnett cherished that space in between people where life occurs. He cherished each of us as his own and invited us and our families into his family and his home. He cared. I recall seeing his smiling countenance on the hospital floors as he did "Rambling Rounds" to make sure "his" residents were "pink" as we worked long hours in our formation as physicians. He always had time for me, even if I did not have time for myself. By his warm embrace and personal stories (often told with a tear), he touched my heart with healing when things had not gone well. Dr. Barnett had a way to make time. His office door might have been closed, but it was not shut. One had only to follow the directions on the door sign "Knock, and then come in."

Gathered with classmates, faculty, residency staff, and family in the Rotunda at the conclusion of our three years, he beamed with pride at the physicians and people we had become. We were changed, largely because of Dr. Barnett. Now 23 years later, I carry Dr. Barnett with me every day. I speak with colleagues and patients about that sacred space in between where healing begins. I remind myself that there is time, even when my task bucket is as full as Dr. B's desk was with charts that had "Pink (message) Slips" attached. I pray as he did. My life as physician has been and continues as a journey. Few occurrences on that journey are more cherished than meeting and sharing the sacred space of life with Dr. Barnett. It is my privilege to count Dr. Barnett as my mentor and my friend.

### **Dr. Robert Steward**

"Let me just call Mrs. B and tell her I will be a few minutes late for supper." So began our conversation in the bright orange residents lounge in the Department of Family Practice at The University of Virginia after all others had left for the evening. Dr. Barnett, chairman of the program that was nationally recognized for its excellence, and me, an undergraduate student searching for my place and purpose in the world. I am still amazed he would take that time with me, but he had a keen sense

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

of when someone was seeking guidance, and in taking that extra time with me, he changed my life. That conversation continued over the span of 30 years, and through it I was the beneficiary of his wisdom, knowledge and kindness. I left that evening with the feeling Dr. B knew me better after that hour than anyone other than my parents, and that I wanted to be a family practice doctor.

I was fortunate to continue my relationship with Dr. B through medical school and residency at UVA. The "Doctor, Patient and Illness" series that he led during the first two years of medical school was an oasis for me, giving life and a clear focus to the study of basic sciences. He made himself available for extra sessions to teach the finer points of the physical exam to us during our clinical years, using his years of experience seeing with his hands at the bedside to show us the power of a thorough physical exam. He allowed us to make house calls with him, and encouraged us to make them.

Residency brought long hours in the hospital, which he brightened with late night visits to the ICU just to let me know I wasn't alone. There were many teaching sessions I still call on daily, lectures such as "Getting through the day," "When all else fails," "Clinical pearls," and others. When I ventured out to start my practice, he was there to help with my most difficult cases, consulting with me from 3,000 miles away. I am privileged to say I have never felt alone when treating a patient. As my silent partner, he has helped me through the most challenging of situations and his voice continues to resonate in my heart and guide me today.

Dr. B's impressive intellect was used with great benefit to help others, and he viewed it as a gift to be shared. He truly wanted us to be better doctors than he was; this is a goal I will continue to pursue with the realization that it is not attainable, but, in my efforts, I know I will better serve my patients. Being a devout man of God, his steadfast example and deep faith patiently helped bring me closer to the Lord.

He impressed upon us the importance of knowledge and the power of the heart in healing. To watch him interact with a patient in need was an enlightening experience, carefully assessing the situation and then empowering a person in their most fragile state with hope and the realization that they were not alone. They would leave with their burden lightened. Dr. B was a true master of the art of medicine, and a humble servant. He epitomized all that is good in what is still a noble profession and was quick to remind us of the unique opportunity afforded us when a patient put their faith in us as their doctor. In the face of the shifting tides of change in health care, Dr. B's message of honoring the sanctity of the doctor-patient partnership is the beacon that will allow us to remain true to our patients and ourselves. He was a man who achieved great things but was always quick to point out that he couldn't have done any of it without the support and understanding of the love of his life, Mrs. B. What an incredible example he set for us!

I miss him dearly. I am so grateful for our many times together, talking late into the night in his study or at his favorite place, his cabin in Black Mountain. He inspired me, taught me, amazed me, encouraged me, counseled me, mentored me, prayed for me and loved me. Dr. B has enriched my life

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

beyond measure. I remain deeply indebted to him, and to his family for allowing me to have the time I shared with him. I will continue to try to repay him in the only way he asked of me: to pay it forward.

### **Dr. Brian Bonnyman**

He was an incredible role model for his warmth and compassion and for his ability to connect with anyone on some level. As a resident, I always knew that he was looking out for me, as evidenced by his "hotline" phone in his office. He could teach about both the art and the science of medicine, without one contradicting the other. I still have his "When All Else Fails" handout in the drawer of my office desk."

### **Dr. John McGovern**

What a wonderful privilege it is to know Dr. B! From when I first met him in 1986 during a medical school interview/visit, through medical school and residency at UVA and in the years since then, I have benefited from his sharing a remarkable understanding of medical practice, of humanity, and of each person he encounters. His caring spirit has become part of me, and a part of so many others. He remains with us, in this way, forevermore. He said it best with his final remarks at the gathering for his retirement, where so many of us were there honoring his friendship and guidance. "It's about the love ... it's about the love."

### **Dr. Scott Rabon**

Dr. Barnett has been a wonderful friend, teacher, counselor, philosopher, guide, mentor, and example to me. He has influenced so many of us in wonderful ways and has truly left the world a much better place. He instilled the virtues of really listening to a patient, looking at their whole family and situation, and compassionately caring for them in my medical practice. I have been greatly blessed by knowing him.

### **Dr. Michael L. Coates**

I remember a very special moment while visiting Lewis in August of 2014 which also happened to be the last time we had time together at his home in Georgia. He was in his home office and navigating quite smoothly with his walker. On his desk was a list of many people's names, many of whom I recognized over the 40+ years Lewis and I have known each other. I asked him what this was and he said, "My prayer list."

Many individuals say they will pray for you out of a perfunctory response or just sounds good. But Lewis really meant it. He prayed for so many on a daily basis, and he would place a check by the name so he would not forget. And as many know, his memory for names and details was quite formidable. As he explained this list, there was the trademark twinkle in his eyes.

The list of memories I have of Lewis is somewhat endless, but this one vignette is emblematic of my dear friend, Lewis.

### **Dr. George Brown**

As a program director of a family medicine residency, Dr. Barnett still has an influence on the things I



## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

do every day. As one of his residents, I aspire to the example he set. And he not only taught me to be an excellent physician, he taught me to be a better person.

The thing I would most like to share about Dr. Barnett comes from when he gave the Thomas Stern lecture at the family medicine program directors workshop in Kansas City, shortly after he retired. I remember thinking how inspiring his talk was. But I also thought the 500 directors and faculty in the audience probably did not appreciate it the way I did, since they did not have the close personal tie I had. But at the close of his talk the audience stood and applauded for at least five minutes. Dr. Barnett was the most inspiring person I have ever known.

### **Dr. and Mrs. William Fintel**

Dear Dr. B and Mrs. Barnett: Connie and I were graciously adopted into your family of family practice residents when Paul and Karen Klas wouldn't stop bragging about you. Both of you. Being an internal medicine resident didn't faze you in the least. Without the bat of an eye, we were invited to your parties and your lovely home and to even bring our babies/toddlers along. I remember with horror changing a diaper on one of your oriental rugs, and having just a little accident off to one side. It cleaned right up, and your ever gracious hosting passed it off as something you might see every day of the week. I can only now speak of it! But, it let me see to the core of the two of you, and your love for young doctors in training, and their spouses and their children, and the emphasis you placed on all of our hearts that this calling to serve never stops. Thanks for being you.

### **Dr. Larry Sabato**

Lewis Barnett was beloved, and his contributions were many – which is why he won the University's highest honor, the Thomas Jefferson Award. Dr. B was more than a physician to his patients; he was their friend, and we knew he cared deeply about our welfare. Dr. B was also a model teacher, whose experience trained his lucky students well. One example: An acquaintance of mine had an illness that was not easily diagnosed, or at least two interns were stumped. Into the room came Dr. B. The interns tried out their theories. Dr. B simply pointed to a fat medical book on the shelf and said "See page 132." His diagnosis was spot on! The patient and interns were in awe. Rest in peace, Dr. B. But we all miss you.

### **Dr. Chet Gentry**

Lewis Barnett was like a father to me. In having experienced him in such a way, I became a part of a worldwide force of messengers, carrying the gospel of Family Medicine to the rest of the world. I was a naive medical student seeking a residency program in family medicine when my medical student preceptor, David Slawson, recommended me to interview at the University of Virginia. I was impressed to learn that, under his leadership, family medicine residents were respected enough to be charged with teaching first-year residents in the Department of Internal Medicine.

As soon as I met him, I was taken by his spiritual presence. He had the capacity to be fully present and make you feel like you were the center of the universe to him at that moment. When you left his presence, you left affirmed and empowered to serve whatever God had in store for you. He had the

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

ability to do this at the individual level, and with a group of people.

Every Sunday the family medicine residents were invited to dinner which his wife orchestrated as a coordinated potluck. Family and extended visiting family were invited. Graduated residents and their families, curious medical students and their families were all not just welcome, but taken in as family. Whether you were the resident or the spouse, or the child, you were equally family and equally important in carrying the message of hope to the suffering.

My time with Lewis resulted in transforming the spark of hope I had in what I could do as a physician, into an unquenchable force, confident in the power of the Spirit of God to serve others effectively. The Gospel of Family Medicine according to Lewis Barnett is not about medicine at all – it is about love. Medicine is just the vehicle that catalyzes our presence in that sacred space between the doctor and the patient, which he called "the both" – that space in which the power of God transcended the power of the individuals present. Being adept in medicine is the ticket to the human heart at its most vulnerable times: a time in which the presence of our loving competence can restore faith in God, faith in humanity, and, most important, faith in self as a created child of the Maker of the universe.

We students of Lewis are all excellent clinicians, but not because of some academic method or rigor. We were carried almost effortlessly to study and learn, and get it as right as we could – not to look good on the wards, but to be competent for the patient; to be a more effective teacher, to be a more effective leader; an agent of transformation. We were armed and empowered with the belief and affirmation that Lewis had in us. We knew that, as long as we had the humility to know what we knew, and what we didn't know – and as long as we were powered by love and the fellowship of support of others – we could change the world. We knew it, because we had experienced the effect of the Master – a simple, quiet, powerfully loving man, whose love led him to incredible skill, mastery, and effectiveness – not just medically, but with the human spirit. We had watched his influence transform lives, communities, and penetrate the fabric of massive hospital and academic institutions.

We students of Dr. Barnett are also not cookie cutter products either. He listened to know each of us intimately – our strengths, our weaknesses, our fears, and our faith. He nurtured that God-created individuality in each of us so that each of us in his family were encouraged to shine by the individual spirit within us. He celebrated our differences, and you always felt like you had been hand-picked and planted to bloom in a special place in the program, to then be set free to flourish along a path determined by God.

I ponder frequently about my experience with Lewis. I play back my memories of Lewis' interaction with others frequently – seeking the nuggets of wisdom packed into his words and actions. I still don't understand the methods and the mechanisms of transformation, other than that I know I was loved, and that he believed in me, as he did everyone else. As a result, I have within me an unquenchable message to be written on the tapestry of relationships with people. Lewis was the Master who taught me how.

## *Remembering Dr. Lewis Barnett*

### **Dr. Russell Sawyer**

I am honored to be able to share my memories of Dr. Barnett. He was a personal man and he went out of his way to make each resident and student feel welcome in his home and during his work day at the hospital. I learned from him to be patient and listen carefully to my patients regardless of the time pressure of daily medical practice. I appreciate the practical advice that he gave me during my residency in learning about the total patient, including their physical problems, beliefs, family background and personal life stories. All of these things have helped me to become a better family physician and for that I am eternally grateful.