



# ANATOMY OF AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

In the depths of the Great Depression, a kid from the farm fields of South Burlington with just an eighth-grade education came to work at the College of Medicine. Fifty years later, he retired as an assistant professor of anatomy. Now in his tenth decade, **DALLAS BOUSHEY** shares his memories with Edward Neuert of *Vermont Medicine*.

**A**ssistant Professor Emeritus Dallas Boushey's house on Shelburne Road in Burlington stands square and stately, a reminder of a time decades ago when this was a mostly residential district, practically the outskirts of the town. Now, stores and restaurants are mixed in with the homes, and traffic whizzes by at all hours. Behind Boushey's house sits a black four-door Lincoln that has obviously not been driven in a while. Dallas Boushey is almost always home these days, in the house where he and his late wife, Mary Ann, raised four daughters. At 93, his characteristic vigor is somewhat diminished. He spends most of his day comfortably ensconced in an easy chair in a sunny ground-floor parlor room, with everything he needs in easy reach, including a walker that he now uses to get around. His body may be weakened, but his mind is still scalpel-sharp, and he can trace back the memories of his nine-plus decades as easily as he once tracked the blood vessels of the heart for the thousands of medical students he taught during all the years he spent in the College of Medicine anatomy lab, a tenure that lasted formally from 1940 to 1987, but that continued on with informal stints in the lab well into the 1990s.

**VERMONT MEDICINE:** You have some copies on the table next to you of publications, such as *Yankee*, that have written about you over the years.

**DALLAS BOUSHEY:** Now that story in there, in *Yankee*, doesn't exactly start where I really started.

**VM:** Where did you start?

**DB:** Most of my family was from here, but I was born in Kampsville, Illinois, in 1919. My parents were separated and at about 6 years old I moved with my family to my grandparents' house in South Burlington. We had a little house that's still there, across the street from where



Al's French Frys is now. It was a rural place then. We had a lot of truck farmers out there. We had a neighbor who raised asparagus and gladiolas and used to use a horse and wagon to bring his wares into town in Burlington to peddle them.

We were too poor for me to pay tuition to Burlington High School (South Burlington didn't have a high school back then), but we were not poor enough to go on welfare relief and get free tuition, so I left school, or it left me, after eighth grade. It was the Depression, so I worked lots of jobs for very little. Before I got to UVM I did landscape gardening for a house near the Redstone campus for 35 cents an hour. You didn't break the bank with that, or fill it up either! And then I got into painting — sign painting for a fellow on Center Street. I was learning gold-leaf lettering and getting a dollar a week at that time. I wasn't making enough to put parts on my bicycle! So you might say I started out pretty small, and when I got to UVM it increased a bit. My first job there was seven days a week for 15 dollars a week.

**VM:** So where did you start at UVM?

**DB:** Well the College of Medicine decided that they needed an animal research laboratory. And the doctor that was in charge heard of my uncle, who was a sheet metal worker, because they needed a lot of cages made for the animals — rats, pigeons, you name it. So the doctor in charge went over to my uncle's shop, just before you cross the bridge to Winooski. He was an auto body shop and a sheet metal worker. And my uncle said to him — you got anybody to take care of all these



Facing page: Dallas Boushey and two medical students examine "Killer" the skeleton in the anatomy lab in the 1950s. Above right: Boushey at home earlier this year, and his honorary UVM degree. Above left: Boushey's handmade model of the trachea and bronchi.

animals that you're going to get? And the doctor said no, not really. And my uncle said, well I got just the person for you. That was me. And that's where I started.

**VM:** And that was in the old medical building, on the corner of Pearl and Prospect?

**DB:** The little building next to it. I think now it's for the Outing Club. And then they put in another building, a Quonset hut, behind it, and they moved the animals into that, but that was after my time. 1937 was when all this happened — when I started with the animal research department. Then in 1940, the job opened up in the anatomy and neurobiology

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department. They were looking for somebody, and the head of the department at that time was Dr. Newhall — Chester A. Newhall, M.D.

**VM:** We hear a lot of people at Nostalgia Hour at reunions reminisce about Dr. Newhall. Was he a pretty formidable guy?

**DB:** Oh yes, but fair. He’d heard that I was a good worker, and when I seemed a little squeamish about the anatomy lab, he said well, give it a try and if you don’t like it you can have your old job back. That seemed fair enough. So I tried it in 1940, and I retired from it in 1987.



Above: Professor and Chair of Anatomy Chester A. Newhall, M.D.’28, (at right above, holding skeleton’s hand) brought Dallas Boushey into his department in 1940. At right: Boushey’s model of the blood vessels of the heart is still frequently used by today’s medical students.

**VM:** I guess it agreed with you?

**DB:** I stayed. I didn’t know how it would work out — I used to get queasy in the barber chair! I don’t know what happened, but I just took to it. And that lasted nearly 50 years.

**VM:** At first, what were your duties in the anatomy department?

**DB:** Mopping the floors, up on the 4th floor, and then I started working with skeletal material. Painting muscles on them. Red for origin, blue for exertions. At one point in time we had about 50 of them that I had made and painted, so that each student could have an upper and lower limb, besides a selection of bones, a variety from throughout the body — a clavicle, a vertebra, humerus, radial ulna, that sort of thing.

After a couple of years, Dr. Walter Stultz saw that I was able to adapt and learn. He said, why don’t

you come out in the lab and see how you get along with the students? And I was nervous, but said OK. I had to learn every muscle. I had to know the origin, the insertion, the blood supply, the nerve supply, the lymphatic drainage, the venous drainage, the whole nine yards. And after a couple years of doing that I had quite a lot of that information in my little bird brain. So I went out into the lab. I had a dental probe, and I filed the end so it was just a little bit sharp. So when I was out in the lab and looking for a certain thing, if a student said “I can’t find the axillary nerve” I’d say, hang on then, and I’d use the probe and find it and say here it is, and then I’d move on to the next table, wherever they asked me to go. So I kept right on with that. And I was still mopping up the lab and things of that nature.

Of course, once World War II started we had quite a time there with all the shortages. We had an elevator that went from the basement up to the 4th floor that we used to transport bodies that had been donated. But it was only a few feet wide, and it wasn’t long enough for a whole casket or basket, so we’d have to put a body in the elevator and stand it on end to get it upstairs. Well then the elevator broke down during the war, and we couldn’t get



parts for it. Well, we couldn’t carry them up the back stairway, because the turns were too short, and we’d have them in heavy wicker baskets. So we’d have to wait till the traffic through the main lobby front door died down, and then grab a student or whoever happened to be around, and carry the basket through the front stairway! Had to do this for the rest of the war. I was gone for part of the war years, in the Navy medical corps.

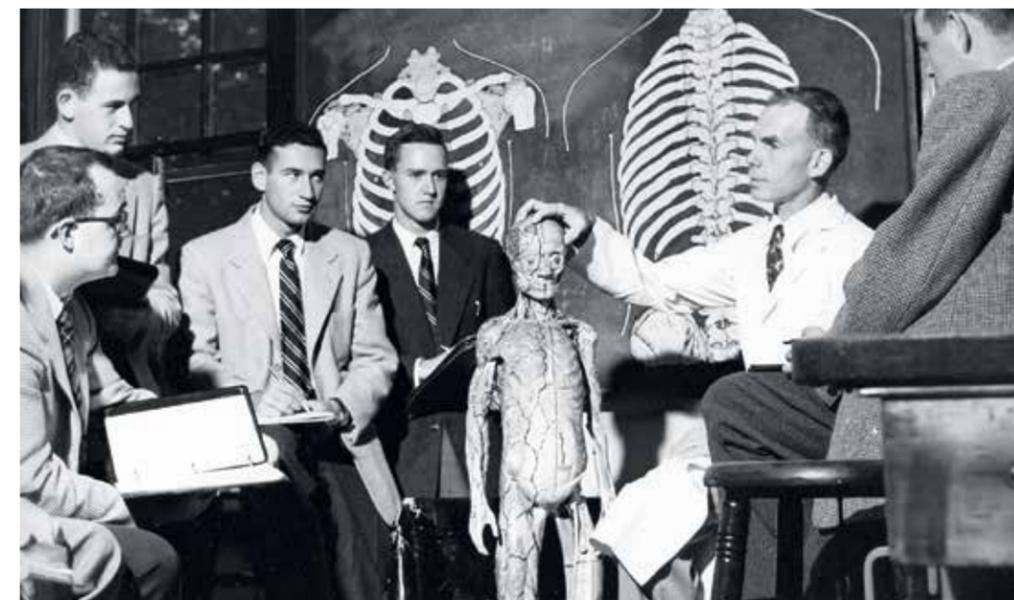
**VM:** Did you gradually over the years take on more of a teaching role?

**DB:** Yes, but I always had stage fright, so I didn’t lecture per se. My job was in the lab, finding structures that the students couldn’t find. And I’d try to find them — I’d find most of them. And then as time went on, in 1972, the fourth-year medical students gave me the Teacher of the Year award, so the people in charge of the anatomy department at the time, they realized that they didn’t quite know what to call me — a technician, senior technician, a demonstrator in anatomy — what can we call you, they asked? You don’t have any degrees! That made the administrators think about doing something else for me. So they made me an assistant professor. Then, in 1990, the university gave me an *honoris causa*, doctor of science degree — me with my eighth-grade education! I don’t think they’ll ever do that again!

I stayed at UVM three years longer than I needed for retirement. Dean Luginbuhl said, “You don’t have to go, you can stay as long as you want.” I stayed because I loved it, and I wanted to round it out at 50 years.

**VM:** Can you talk about the models you made? You are well known for these, and they continue to be used to this day.

**DB:** I know they use the whole skeleton — we called it “Killer.” I added a lot of wires to it representing the arteries and nerves. And I made over a dozen other models, like the brachial plexus, blood supply of brain, venous drainage of the brain. These were all wire models, using



At top: Walter Stultz, M.D. [in white coat] lectures students in the anatomy lab in the 1950s. At Stultz’s urging, Boushey began one-to-one instruction of students in the 1940s that continued [above right] into the early 1990s. Above left: Boushey holds his well-worn, personalized copy of *Gray’s Anatomy*.

stovepipe wire, and wrapped with gauze strips about a half inch wide and soaked in shellac. When they were dry, I’d put red latex, liquid rubber, over the gauze, and then I’d color the different branches of the bronchial trees, for instance, different colors and then label them. They are still using a lot of my old models. That’s nice to know.

**VM:** Do alumni still come back and visit you?

**DB:** Yes! Rick Houle, he’s from the Class of ’72, he’s been here two or three times with breakfast. I remember after the lab sessions were over, I’d still have to do a lot of washing up and cleaning, and I

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See a slideshow of anatomical models, and read the 1988 *Hall A* profile of Dallas Boushey written to mark his retirement. Go to: [uvm.edu/medicine/vtmedicine](http://uvm.edu/medicine/vtmedicine)

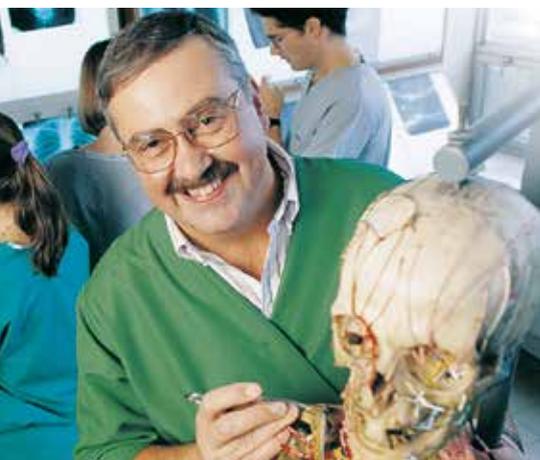
remember Rick several times coming in to help me — I really appreciated that. So he still comes and looks me up when he's here.

**VM:** You must have always had an incredible memory.

**DB:** My memory was pretty good at that time. I've got my *Gray's Anatomy* here — this is what I learned most from. This is a special copy the publishers gave me, and they put my name on the bottom. It's had a bit of use. They sent that to me *gratis*.

**VM:** There's a story that you once received a phone call from a former student who was calling from an operating room to ask you an anatomy question. Did that really happen?

**DB:** Yes, I recall he was calling from out of state.



At top: Dallas Boushey's protégé and successor Bruce Fonda, M.S. Above: Associate Professor Patricia Powers, Ph.D., was a colleague of Boushey's for many years.

**VM:** You retired in 1987, but you still saw your old colleagues often?

**DB:** After I retired I used to go up and cover for the person who took my job, Bruce Fonda. I had about six people up interviewing for my job when I was about to retire, and as soon as I'd mention cadavers, they say "see you later"! And of course I knew Bruce, because he'd gotten his master's degree in our department. So I knew him quite well. He used to take pictures of my kids' weddings and was very good to me. So we worked together for about seven years and then I retired and he took over. He called me the Big D and he was the Little-D-in-training. We had a good association. And he'd come down, and sometimes Pat Powers, after I'd retired, and we'd get in my old Lincoln, and we'd go down to the Ponderosa for lunch.

*Editor's note: Bruce Fonda died in 2005, and Patricia Powers, Ph.D., passed away in 2007.*

**VM:** How long have you lived in this house?

**DB:** Since 1952. This was my wife's family's house. I said "we'll never fill it up with furniture," and now I have too many things! We raised four daughters here. My daughter Suzanne checks on me every day, brings the *Free Press* and any groceries I need. I've been borderline diabetic for years. I stick myself every night and do a blood sample, and if it's a little bit off I know how much of something sweet to eat, like a Little Debbie cake. I've got that all scaled out. That's so I'll wake up in the morning!

I've been in Masonry for 70 years, so that took up some of my time after I retired. I've got 70 years in Washington Lodge No. 3, and 50 years in the Scottish rite. I've been a member of the Mount Sinai Shriners in Montpelier for 25 years.



One of the larger models made by Dallas Boushey is this showcase of the layers of the abdominal wall, which allows each component of muscle, fat, etc. to be pulled away like the pages of a book.

**VM:** Ever drive one of those funny little cars?

**DB:** No, but I've owned three-wheel ATVs — owned three of them, and I used to take them up to some land I owned in Bakersfield, up in the boonies.

I also did Meals on Wheels for about five years after I retired. I was the runner. Upstairs — downstairs — you name it. That was an experience.

**VM:** Well, you're still fondly recalled at the College of Medicine.

**DB:** I hear there's a plaque on the wall up there. Students must see that today and see "1937 to 1987" and I bet they think — well, he must've died in 1987! But no, here I am. Still here, for now.

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*The UVM Board of Trustees, by special vote, approved the naming of Dallas Boushey as an assistant professor of anatomy in 1972. He remains the only UVM professor in modern times without a formal degree. As he notes in his interview, the university presented him with an honorary Sc.D. degree in 1990. **VM***