

**By Dr. ROBERT C. BONE**

Although Dr. Joe and I have been friends and professional colleagues since the early 1960s, it was 10 years ago that, while undergoing treatment for cancer, I saw another side of Dr. Bryant as my physician and myself as his patient under his care.

Hardly a day passed that he did not visit or call to check up on me. He knew all the right questions to ask. His calls were simple and straightforward. "Joe," he'd say. "How's Robert?" My wife Connie would report on my latest condition. "Just checking" was often his response. His humility was well known in the community for his good works and I experienced this first hand when I later learned he had studied at the most prestigious hospital in the world for my kind of cancer, the Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital in NYC.

Dr. Bryant and Mrs. Jeanette Rudy RN, founder of the Rudy School of Nursing, not only shared a long, close friendship and commitment to Cumberland University and this community but also a keen interest in history. I remember Mrs. Rudy wanted to attend the second funeral of a Confederate general, a Cumberland University graduate, who died along with six other generals in the battle of Franklin. Dr. Bryant took Mrs. Rudy and me to the new gravesite where the general was to be honored. We all sat together, reflecting on the impact of Cumberland and its connection with this great historical event.

Dr. Bryant was instrumental in relocating the School of Nursing from the Cumberland campus to the McFarland hospital campus. Being close to his own home, he was able to continue to be intimately involved in the development of the School. Dr. Bryant and Mrs. Rudy's leadership were pivotal in developing this school for nurses as the largest and most successful undergraduate school in Cumberland's history. Because of the phenomenal success of this school, Mrs. Rudy was recognized as Chair of the board, followed by Dr. Bryant.

As Chairman of the Board of Trust, Dr. Joe Bryant believed that the remaining debt should be retired. He worked diligently each year to accomplish that goal. He subscribed to the strategy that Cumberland should live within its means; for example, Dr. Bryant supported the notion of "boot-strapping" and always got more than a dollar's worth for every dollar spent. In previous years, the independent William D. Baird Wilson County Scholarship Fund had been nearly depleted. Dr. Bryant invested wisely and restored the corpus of the trust, leaving it financially healthy.

Joe Bryant and I shared the vision that the principal historical influence in Lebanon and Cumberland's importance was the Cumberland Law School. He and I met many times brain-storming and strategizing to find a way to return a law school to Cumberland. From decisions of the federal court to allow a law school to be built, to a positive feasibility study from the American Bar Association, to donations of land, to visits and negotiations with other law schools, we were encouraged that this dream was possible. I often wondered why Dr. Bryant was so knowledgeable about all this.

Only in the past month I learned that while Dr. Bryant was beginning medical school in Memphis, he was also going to law school. No wonder he understood so much about our project. Characteristic of Dr. Bryant, he was a man of few words.

At the hospital and elsewhere, Dr. Bryant's signature attire was a scrub suit with a fresh towel around his neck. The hospital was his second home where he felt most comfortable in the doctor's dining room, walking the halls but most of all, in the operating room. Always a gentleman, never raising his voice, he spoke quietly during surgery. But what he said carried great weight.

He not only helped those hospital personnel who needed him but also helped the senior surgeons who were already accomplished broaden their perspective to serve their patients even more. Dr. Joe would go anywhere to learn new procedures; I remember his asking me to go to Richmond, Va. to learn about new robotic surgery techniques.

Dr. Bryant's primary commitment as a physician and surgeon was to champion the cause of the patient. He believed that the physician had a better understanding than any other element of society of what really mattered for the greatest well being of a person. He felt that this role of doctors was being replaced by administrators, health care companies, insurance companies, and government. He felt that the physicians should be in charge of the health care system.

Dr. Bryant was the type of physician from the "old school" who did it all. He could deliver babies, perform C-sections, treat heart attacks, perform heart surgery, set hip fractures, as well as abdominal surgery from appendectomy to aortic aneurysms. He had a keen sense of medicine and a wealth of medical experience that he brought to the bedside of many patients whose condition warranted intricate care.

## **The late Dr. Joe Bryant**

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

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I was always deeply impressed with his profound medical knowledge and compassion. I know the people of Lebanon and Wilson County, Cumberland University and the entire medical community will greatly miss him as much as I will.

**Editor's Note: Dr. Robert C. Bone is a general surgeon at University Medical Center in Lebanon.**