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.

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.

VERMONT MEDICINE: Where did you start?

DALLAS BOUSHEY: 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.

VERMONT MEDICINE: So where did you start at UVM?

DALLAS BOUSHEY: 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 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.

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

DALLAS BOUSHEY: 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.
“Dr. 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.”

— Dallas Boushey

**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 ried it in 1940, and I retired from it in 1987.

**VM:** At right, 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 vertebo, 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 of 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 it upstairs. So then I started working with the dental probe, and I’d find the end so it was just a little bit sharp. So when I was out 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 do with 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 honorary 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 Lugnibuhl 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 then label them. They are still using a lot of my old models. That’s nice to know.

**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 stovetop 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

“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.”

— Dallas Boushey
VM: You must have always had an incredible memory.

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 “are you late?” 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 kid’s 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. 

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.

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.

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 take a shot... 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: 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 take a shot... 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: 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.

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 take a shot... 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: 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 take a shot... 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: 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.

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 “are you late?” 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 kid’s 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.

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.

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.

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 take a shot... 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: 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.

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 “are you late?” 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 kid’s 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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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!

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.

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!

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.

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!

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.