Dallas-
Anatomist
Extraordinaire
By Pamela Polston

learned more in five minutes talking to Dallas Boushey than in an hour of studying," states first-year medical student Peter Bellaire.

"He's awesome," chimes in fellow student Tony Savo, "really inspiring. I think it's safe to say he knows more anatomy than anyone."

Dr. Pat Powers couldn't agree more. "It's amazing how much he knows," she says flatly. "When I first came here, I was supposed to be his boss and I was so terrified. I didn't want to be the boss of the man who knew everything! But half an hour after meeting him, I knew there's no one I'd rather work with. That's never changed."

Dr. Powers is Director of UVM College of Medicine's Gross Anatomy course. She's worked for 17 years with "the man who knows everything," Professor Dallas Boushey. Along with course lecturer Bruce Fonda, the three compose what Fonda calls the "A-Team" (A for Anatomy). But at the end of this calendar year, Professor Boushey will retire, leaving not only a compatible and productive partnership, but a legacy unmatched by anyone in the history of the school. It's not likely that the myriad "Dallas stories," fondly told and retold by his students and colleagues (e.g., about the former student/now surgeon who called from the operating room to ask Dallas a question) will provide a satisfactory replacement for the man himself. And his human replacement will not likely be, as he was, a high-school dropout.

Dallas Boushey couldn't have guessed, when he was forced to leave school after the eighth grade, that he would someday be a highly regarded professor and authority on human anatomy.

At the age of six, Dallas came to Vermont; his mother and father had separated and he grew up with his grandparents. In the middle of the Depression, family economic hardship spelled the end of his formal education, and Dallas set out to look for work. The variety of his early jobs presaged the multiskilled, "handyman" mentality of his later years: landscape gardener; sign painter; and assistant and occasional chauffeur for an ambassador to the United Nations (US Senator Warren R. Austin).

It was 1937 when Dallas first took a job at UVM in the animal lab. "I worked seven days a week, for $15 a week," he recalls, "working with doctors doing research." Although he began with basic cleaning and animal care duties, it wasn't long before the diligent Dallas was injecting animals and getting more involved in other research responsibilities.

Drafted into the Navy, Dallas left for a while to be a hospital corpsman. School in San Diego, he then went to Brooklyn Naval Hospital, where he worked in the Tumor and Cancer ward.

There, "they asked me to give their shots," Dallas says. "They liked my technique." After that, he was sent to Sampson Naval Training Station and worked in what he calls "VD control." Finally, Dallas returned to his job at the College of Medicine.

He was described as a "model employee," one who worked overtime cheerfully, and never came late or took time off. After a couple of years, then-Chairman of Anatomy Dr. Chester Newhall offered Dallas a job as technician in that department's lab. Although he claims not to have even known what the word "anatomy" meant, Dallas accepted the offer. Within weeks he had mastered embalming procedures, and became solely responsible for them. (To this day, Dallas is on constant "cadaver duty." Either he or Fonda must be prepared, at any time of day or night, to receive and prepare donated bodies.) And he began to study, poring over Gray's Anatomy and other texts at home in the evenings.

Lab director Dr. Walter Stultz recognized the innate intelligence, curiosity and uncanny gift for learning and retaining information displayed by his new assistant. He began to train Dallas in dissection, teaching him the names of everything as they went along. Two years later, Dallas was asked to become a teacher. Lacking the usual degrees, he was given the title "technician."

To help his students visualize diffi-
cult anatomical concepts, Dallas began to build 3-D models for them to hold and study. His first was completed in 1944. Since then, Dallas has constructed—and even invented—models of nearly every part of human anatomy. These models, says Fonda, who learned model-making from Dallas, have been shown at AAA (American Association of Anatomists) conferences nationwide. "They are a service to the medical community," he states proudly. The models are viable works of art, constructed from thick wire, plaster, plastic, gauze bandage (soaked in shellac) and wood. "We're scavengers," Fonda says. "Anything not nailed down we'll use—plus little bits from the hardware store." The customized pieces are sturdy, durable and brightly painted to show details of, for example, nervous or arterial systems. [Ed.: Dallas exhibits these models during reunion weekend each spring.]

"We've been working for years," Fonda continues, "on a conceptual 3-D model of the inguinal canal" (a region in the groin on the lower abdominal wall). "A lot of what we do are trouble areas for students. Pat, Dallas and I will talk it over, then just sit down and start putting it.

The results of that putting have become, over the years, as much a source of renown for Dallas as his encyclopedic mind and humble demeanor. (As Dr. Powers puts it, "He's never gotten too good to take out the trash.")

In the sixties and early seventies, College of Medicine administrators had not known what other titles to confer upon Dallas Boushey: the man who had become an acknowledged authority on anatomy, but who still had no degrees. Then in 1972, the students bestowed upon Dallas the prized "Teacher of the Year" award, and that act apparently galvanized the college into action. That same year, then-Chairman of Anatomy Dr. William Young recommended Dallas for an assistant professorship with tenure and the UVM Board of Trustees concurred. It was the first time in the University's history that a person lacking formal credentials had been made a professor.

Subsequently, Dallas has received other, perhaps less auspicious accolades as well: He was the subject of a spot on Paul Harvey's radio show, and was written about in Yankee magazine (April 1983) and the National
Enquirer (August 1983).

Today, sitting in his sunny office on the fourth floor of the Given Building, Dallas reflects on his 50 years at UVM. He is surrounded by pleasant, orderly clutter: the plaques from his teaching awards; photos of his dogs; the cabin he built for his family in Bakersfield and his grandchildren; multiple volumes of thick anatomy texts, including the latest Gray’s Anatomy, with his name printed in gold right on the cover; and what may be the world’s largest geranium.

In the next room, skeletons, charts and jars of preserved body parts share space with odd bits of materials in varying degrees of model-building. Dallas is delighted to explain this work; he holds up an arterial model and casually rattles off some very long words. He shows the huge compendium of bound pages that makes up the Gross Anatomy course, which he helped illustrate. With characteristic modesty, Dallas credits the faculty and students with giving him a “well-rounded education.” “I feel fortunate to have learned from them over the years,” he says.

Typically, Dallas must be prodded to talk about himself, but he warms to topics like his beloved dogs, or carpentry projects for his family (including his wife, Mary Ann, four daughters and grandchildren), or his work. With gentle humor, he shares anecdotes about that part of his job that anyone outside the field would find unsettling: cadavers. There was the time, for example, that Dallas received an incoming donation, found that all three elevators of Given had been jammed by a prankster, and there was no available help to carry the body up four flights of stairs. He had to surreptitiously stroll the body, at 11 p.m., over to the Medical Center’s morgue. There were countless calls and embalmings in the middle of the night, in sub-zero temperatures. “I lived by the telephone,” he says. “Maybe I ought to write a book of my ‘instances.’”

No one, not even his family, can imagine Dallas Boushey retiring. “I’m concerned that he will be bored out of his mind,” says his colleague Dr. Powers. “He won’t even take more than a week’s vacation.” But, she adds, Dallas is a member of both the Masons and the Shriner’s, and plans to spend time with those groups’ activities. “He wants to get a little Shriner motorcar,” she smiles.

But Dallas doesn’t seem worried. Although it’s hard to imagine him not at the Anatomy lab, it’s equally difficult to think of him being bored. His family will put him to work, he says, only half-joking, and something about his expression says he doesn’t mind.
DALLAS R. BOUSHEY
(1937 - 1987)

ANATOMIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

MAY SOME OF HIS WISDOM, ENTHUSIASM
AND KINDNESS BE PASSED ON TO FUTURE
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN THIS LABORATORY.

Editor: On Wednesday, December 1, 1987, over 300 faculty, staff, students and friends gathered in the College of Medicine's dining room to honor and toast Professor Boushey on the occasion of his pending retirement from the active teaching faculty. Among many personal gifts and awards presented to Dallas that afternoon was a plaque which will hang in the Gross Anatomy laboratory in lasting recognition of his 50 years of service to the University and particularly the alumni/ae of the College of Medicine.