

INTERESTS INTERESTS INTERESTS INTERESTS INTERESTS

# DR. BENTLEY, UP CLOSE



by Lisa Glosson  
Staff Writer

"It was in the spring of 1967, my first year at Mars Hill," recalls Dr. Bentley, "that I went one afternoon to see the guys on the track team working out on the high-jump down at Meares Stadium. They chided me to make a few jumps with them. I felt I was in good condition physically, so I took them up on their challenge. Smugly, I told them to raise the bar from 5-9 to 6-0. Then I took off my tie and jacket. Indeed, I did clear the bar on the first jump, but I ripped the crotch of my pants completely down the seam in the process. Afterwards I had to walk back to my house. I don't think I ever walked so funny in my life."

That episode is one of the events Dr. Bentley laughingly remembers from his first year as the somewhat unorthodox president of Mars Hill College. It is typical, though, for this gangly, now balding gentleman with the big feet and over-sized hands is still a fiercely competitive man with a keen sense of humor.

Sprawled in an over-sized chair in his self-decorated office in Blackwell Hall, this former Baylor highjumper-music major can be easily engaged in one of his favorite pastimes, telling on himself. Listeners cannot help but laugh at the hijinks he prides himself on. As he talks his light brown eyes dance from side to side and he drums his long expressive fingers on the arm of the chair. A sparkling diamond ring catches a ray of autumn sun streaming through the picture window that looks out on Bailey Mountain.

Hijinks seem commonplace to Dr. Bentley, an animated individual who comes across almost as a show-off. One would think his motto might be "Sock-It-To-Me," because he always seems so ready for a new challenge to hit him head-on. The motto seems appropriate because many people have remarked that Dr. Bentley resembles Dick Martin, the co-host of the old Sock-It-To-Me television sitcom "Laugh-In." And, indeed, an interview with Dr. Bentley is an experience that more

people of the sixties generation should have gotten involved in rather than sit-ins, because laughing breaks more barriers than anything else ever could.

The truth is that, early in his administrative career here at Mars Hill, Dr. Bentley actually played the part of Dick Martin at a campuswide performance in the auditorium. The script called for someone to sock-it-to-him during one particular portion of the show; but, instead of throwing confetti on him as was originally planned, they followed the Laugh-In style realistically and threw ice-water instead. The electrical equipment on stage began sparkling, and Dr. Bentley was once again the real center of attention.

When you listen to Dr. Bentley, you hear a volcano of humor. He challenges Mt. St. Helens over which gives the loudest explosion. For example, he puffs proudly on the subject of his wife, Doris, a Mars Hill alumna who was cast in the role of Mrs. Paroo in the recently staged production of "The Music Man." He was totally supportive of her, although she was at first apprehensive over the part.

Explaining that his wife had not had previous acting experience, Dr. Bentley then corrected himself by saying, "...except that she has acted happy with me for 30 years.

The volcano continues spewing as he recalls another episode from his early years at Mars Hill.

"Having been a semi-pro roller skater, I was asked to be a mystery guest at a fundraiser on campus to generate money for equipment for the new radio station. I came skating into the rear of the auditorium and started down the aisle, but little did I know that the physical plant people had waxed the floor. Faster and faster I sped down the aisle and slammed right into the Hilltop photographer. It took a few minutes before I could regain my composure enough to display my skating tricks on the stage."

A conversation with the president is not totally volcanic, however, for he also reveals a tranquil side, especially when he starts talking about his family's off-

campus retreat, a house at Lake James near Morganton. Going there with his family -- he and Doris have three grown children -- is his favorite way to relax. There they water ski and have cookouts.

"Everyone needs a quiet time," he says, "somewhere they can retreat to."

Even when he was growing up in Roanoke, Va., he recalls, he always valued wholesome, natural environments. He lived in a family-oriented neighborhood, and he vividly remembers the park where he played with his friends as being the memory he cherishes most from childhood. That form of congregating was almost as precious to him as the congregating he knew in church.

President Bentley reveals yet another side of himself as he reclines in his big office chair, crosses one lanky leg over the other, and puffs on a pipe but does not inhale the smoke. It is merely one of the hundred pipes he owns. The aroma is enough to lull one to sleep or/almost make you forget what he is saying. He is explaining that he started smoking a pipe because he has so much energy that he needs some way to release it; thus, fondling a pipe with his nimble fingers is a way to calm himself down a bit. The way he smokes that pipe and gazes off into the distance is reminiscent of his artistic nature, and his office speaks of magical things.

The creations of the artistic urge within him fill several strategic spots in his office domain: pottery cups here, a folding screen there on which he has carved nine religious scenes. He speaks proudly of the door at his lakehouse, on which he has carved other original scenes. He says he even has oil paintings at home "on which I let the right side of my brain take control." Such creating, he feels, is a good way to get outside himself.

There are other interesting items in the office that he has collected and arranged with a keen eye for the artistic: a shepard's baby bottle from France, a spike used in the construction of the Erie Canal, a shakeerle from Nigeria, and espresso machine from Italy that he obtained only after spending an hour convincing a woman that he needed it.

Dr. Bentley's quick wit often catches his listeners off guard and produces unexpected answers. For example, when asked how he chose his career in higher education, he replied, "By default!" Then, he hastily explained:

"I attended Baylor University and received a degree in music theory and conducting. I wanted to be a church musician," he said, but I didn't feel I had the talent. I then went to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and received a degree in religious education. Finally I wound up in educational philosophy and administration, earning my doctorate at Indiana University."

He was an assistant dean at the University of Louisville in December 1965, when the trustees at Mars Hill elected him president to succeed Dr. Hoyt Blackwell. He had been recommended by his pastor, Dr. John Claypool, a well-known minister and Mars Hill alumnus.

Dr. Bentley's taste in music reflects personality as well as his training. Baroque and chamber music are his favorite kind of music. He thrives on Bach; and almost croons when he utters the names of his favorite singers, Pavarotti and Freddie Boggs, a tremendous bass he tries to emulate.

Yet another side of this complex fascinating man is revealed in other hobbies and interests. He has a yearning for old cars, and he speaks affectionately of his little 1952 MG-TD. It is a vintage sports car that he rebuilt from scratch with the help of a book. Now and again he drives it and he has shown it at several car shows.

Not quite 31 years old when he took office as president of the college, Dr. Bentley has now reached his fifties. He admits he is slowing down. He still has the competitive spirit and a few trophies to show for his accomplishments in several areas (except snow skiing), but he admits that is beginning to be more of a fire-side hobby.

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of this multi-faceted man is his attitude toward life; he is totally optimistic. Having come from a lower socio-economic background, from a family with very little formal education, he has attained a measure of success. "If I can do it, can't everyone?" he asks rhetorically. Perhaps the answer lies in his personal motto: "No problems, only opportunities."

A man who has complete confidence in himself, Dr. Bentley says he does not accept excuses from others very easily. The word he uses most often to describe himself is "leader." He feels that we have more abilities than we use. Unfortunately, he explains, "most of our limitations are self-imposed." In this context he emphasizes the importance of taking initiative and "stretching to get over the bar," relating to an experienced highjumper's impression.

**SLUMBER...SLUMBER...SLUMBER...SLUMBER...**The All Night Slumber Party will be held on Friday, February 27 in the Timberline. There will be games, contests, prizes and snacks. Movies will be shown and marshmallows roasted. Plan to attend this festive event.

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