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Habit Of Being Patient Keeps Doug Baxley's Goals In Order

BY TERRY POPE

As a high school student, math, geometry, and physics didn't come easily for Doug Baxley, but that didn't keep the Siler City teen-ager from trying.

It was with extreme patience that Baxley learned to discipline himself to succeed in the difficult subjects he needed to pass in order to attend college.

Those lessons in discipline left an everlasting impression on the Shallotte attorney, who was sworn in last month as vice-chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education. Even before he decided to seek the District 1 seat on the school board, Baxley, 38, was prepared for the battle, having established his priorities in life years ago.

Although he would rather have been studying history or English, his favorite subjects, Baxley grew to appreciate learning the difficult lessons as well through the help of a high school math teacher, Murry Andrew.

"He was concerned about all students, whether you were at the top of the class, or at the bottom," Baxley said. "He embodied what teachers are suppose to be. He was an inspiration. I had to work real hard to get through those classes."

At a time when student attitudes toward the military, government or "the establishment" as a whole reached a troubled phase during the Vietnam conflict, Baxley found himself facing a key decision in life. As an undergraduate at UNC-Chapel Hill during the period 1964-68, Baxley chose to enter the school's Air Force ROTC training program, and to face whatever personal abuse would come from the more hostile students.

"I think there was a lot of unrest at the time on account of the Vietnam situation," he said while relaxing in the law library of his Shallotte office. In his Carolina blue shirt pocket were two ink pens neatly clipped for handy use, adding the final touches to his dark blue polyester businessman's suit.

"It wasn't the most popular organization on campus at the time. It was a period of time in which you had to make some hard choices," he added, adjusting his fingers to form an imaginary church steeple as he reflected on the past.

But unlike most attorneys, Baxley doesn't talk with his hands. Instead, they are sturdy features of his physique, which includes a neatly-trimmed, off-the-ears hairstyle and a boyish, round face. A smile reveals a slight part in his front teeth, the kind that would look natural with a hay straw stuck in between—remnants of his country boy upbringing on a farm in Scotland County.

For at least 10 hours each weekday, this is Doug Baxley, busy practicing law in a small-town environment, altogether different from the area where he and his wife, Dianne, spent three years on a military base in northern Maine. Immediately after graduating from Chapel Hill, Baxley married the nursing student and followed in his father's footsteps by entering the service.

"I felt it was the right thing to do," he said. "All of my family had served in the military. When it appeared the need was there I decided to serve my time."

The couple was stationed at Loring Air Force Base, the most northern military base in the United States, just two miles from the Canadian border. At the strategic air command post, Baxley worked in control maintenance and supplies.

"It's very different up there," Baxley said. "You have very long winters, it's very cold, and you have lots of snow. It was a very remote type of place. It took some adjustment to get used to the weather and being away from home."

The self-discipline he had learned in high school, college and now the Air Force would help him succeed in his one goal in life, to become an attorney. Although his family tree includes farmers, school teachers, businessmen, and doctors (including his father), Baxley is the first from his family to enter the legal profession. He graduated from the University of North Carolina Law School in 1975.

However, Baxley said it was educational to spend some time in a different part of the country, surrounded by potato fields and forests. As a child, the family had vacationed at Holden Beach and nearby Pawleys Island, S.C. It was Baxley's desire to return to Brunswick County, but first he had one goal to accomplish.

"I never really thought too much about it until I was a senior in college," Baxley said. "My undergraduate education lent itself more to that than any other thing."

As an undergraduate, Baxley began taking several pre-medical courses, but after deciding medical school wasn't his goal in life, he settled for a degree in history. His father, who spent his medical residency in Durham, served three years in the Army as a surgeon stationed in northern Africa during World War II.

"I had seen a lot of that type of thing in growing up," Baxley added. "Most people don't experience the degree of commitment on the part of a physician in terms of devotion to the job."

His mother was a school teacher, while his half-sister, who also became a doctor, now practices in Greensboro.

During the filing period for the primary elections last year, a group of friends whom he admires encouraged Baxley to run for the board of education.

"That, coupled with having children of my own in school, led me to make the decision to run," he added. "I had never run for public office before, so I had no experience. It was a learning process."

Both of his children, Kelly, 12, and Kimberly, 10, attend Shallotte Middle School.

Baxley compared his stepping forward as a Democratic candidate like serving on a jury. What the board decides should "reflect community wisdom and the best interest of the school system," he added.

"I don't consider myself outstanding in the community or seeking to be someone that tries to have a large following," he said. "I don't view myself in that form of leadership. When the time arrives and the community feels like you should participate, then you have a commitment."

At the age of 38, Baxley more closely resembles a 28-year-old businessman. He says he has always looked young for his age, and any comment on his youthful appearance is taken "as a compliment," he said, adding, "I've been able to keep my hair so far."

Hidden behind the youthful complexion and solemn voice are the military training as well as the years of discipline and hard work Baxley used to build his law firm, which he shares with Roy D. Trest, a former district court judge.

The political transitions he had experienced during the 1960s and '70s are behind him now.

"I think what we have now is more of a traditional concern among students," Baxley said. "They're star-



SHALLOTTE ATTORNEY Doug Baxley is surrounded with legal matters, either at his office or in the courtroom, for usually ten hours a day. The Brunswick

County Board of Education member was elected vice-chairman of the group last month.

ting to believe in more fundamental things, such as becoming educated to perform life's work and to obtain financial security."

It takes a degree of self-discipline to attain any daily task, he said.

"I don't view myself as a strict disciplinarian, like a drill instructor in boot camp who is cracking the whip all the time," he added. "I don't view myself in that sense. Positive discipline is largely acquiring useful habits used to help accomplish one's work."

When it's time to relax, Baxley likes to take his wife, "a dedicated Carolina basketball fan," to some of the games. They have traveled as far as Atlanta to see the Tar Heels play in the Eastern Regionals of the NCAA tournament.

Around their Tarheel Acres home, Baxley likes fishing and gardening, since he developed a green thumb while living on the family farm in Scotland County.

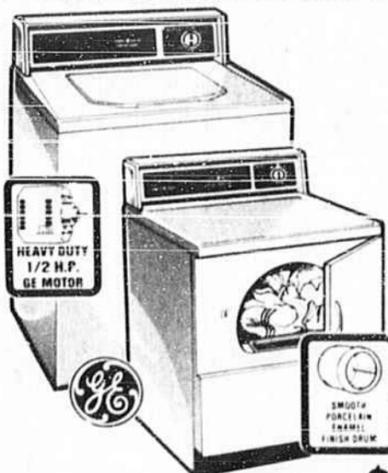
In high school, Baxley played the guitar for a band, was on the football team and participated in the student government organization while keeping up in his studies.

Although he still keeps a busy schedule, Baxley's concerns have shifted from the tough choices and classes that once gave him trouble to making decisions concerning the students. He hopes to add stability to a board of education that has experienced many waves in recent years.

As in life, Baxley said, "You can't sustain too much change in too short of time. You have to maintain periods of stability."

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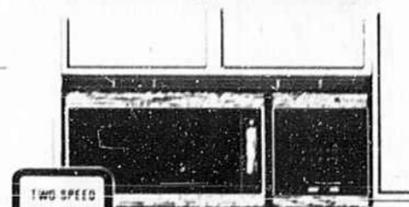
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