

REMARKS BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
BARNEE BRESKIN TESTIMONIAL DINNER

Shoreham Americana Hotel

Washington, D.C.

January 22, 1975

Some people have been generous enough to suggest that I am not often at a loss for words. Others have suggested that such a loss might have certain beneficial effects.

Be that as it may, to do justice to the long and richly-varied career of Barnee Breeskin is to tax the powers of a Cicero.

To do so is to return to a simpler and more gracious time -- the age of the great theaters and the great hotels.

Young Barnee had watched his father Daniel conduct the orchestra at the Metropolitan Theater on 10th and F Streets. He had picked up a violin and found he could make it sing. He had mastered the piano as well. And now, in 1930, he was opening at the opulent Shoreham Hotel.

Since then, the focus of national interest has shifted downtown, toward the Tidal Basin. But in those days, the Shoreham was the center of the Washington social world.

Although it was located in what then was the suburbs, the Shoreham drew scores of the elite, the wealthy, and -- for variety -- many of the nation's legislators. They came to see and to be seen. They came to luxuriate in the splendor of the Shoreham's surroundings. And they came to see Barnee Breeskin conduct the orchestra in the Blue Room.

Yes, the Shoreham and the Blue Room were famous. It even is said that President Truman was skinning his friends at poker upstairs while Barnee was introducing Congressmen on the dance floor downstairs.

We live in an era in which rock groups with names like Big Fat and the Pork Barrel are national idols for six months before they disappear into oblivion. But Barnee conducted the orchestra in the Blue Room for 25 years.

By any standard, this is a superlative record, and a testament to Barnee's excellent music and warm personal appeal. But there were other testaments to that charm, too.

Perhaps the most notable occurred one night in 1943, when a promising young opera singer named Dolores DiMinni came to sing in the Blue Room. She struck a melodious chord in the heart of the conductor, and she and Barnee were married two years later.

Mr. Justice Frank Murphy wrote them, regretting that Supreme Court Justices could not perform weddings, since they had only appellate jurisdiction. "In your case," Justice Murphy said, "I am sure you will not need any court of appeal this side of heaven." That sentiment proved prophetic, and is still true thirty years later.

During their years together, Barnee and Dolores had two sons, both of whom are here tonight.

David, the oldest, is assistant manager of Ferguson's piano store in Wheaton, Maryland, and an accomplished pianist in his own right. Steven's talents run more to the area of high finance. He's a claims adjuster for All-State Insurance.

But before either David or Steven were born, Barnee had given birth to a far different sort of progeny when he wrote "Hail to the Redskins" in 1938, the year the team moved here from Boston. In fact, history has it that Barnee and Dolores had to adjust their marriage plans in order to attend a Redskins game.

They were married on Saturday, October 7th. But Barnee had to lead the band at the Redskins game the next day -- thus creating the first football widow in American history.

This second love affair would last for fourteen years, during which Barnee served as the official entertainment director for Redskins owner George Preston Marshall until 1954.

Meantime, Barnee's career at the Shoreham continued, and he played the favorite songs of Presidents and Congressmen -- or what passed for their favorite songs. Harry Truman, for example, did not particularly like the "Missouri Waltz," but he was stuck with it. Then-Senator Lyndon Johnson, however, enjoyed basking in "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." And whether Texas was watching or not, the Shoreham was.

It was watching so carefully, in fact, that in 1951 a group of Senators and other gentlemen of the night decided to give Barnee a party on his twenty-first anniversary at the hotel. He was presented with two pictures of Presidents: an autographed portrait of Harry Truman, and the engraved portrait of Grover Cleveland -- on a \$1,000 bill.

So widespread and respected was Barnee's reputation, that the entire party, including guest list, was reported in the Congressional Record.

If Barnee had been playing during the Nixon years, it might have been interesting to see what favorite songs might have emerged.

One can imagine Bob Haldeman asking for "Secretly," or "The King and I"; or President Nixon requesting a medley of "In My Solitude" and "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

In late April of 1957, Barnee received an unprecedented honor.

No President had ever asked a local musician to entertain at the White House. But when President and Mrs. Eisenhower held a state dinner to honor Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, Barnee was asked to play.

Not only was this unprecedented, it was amazingly bi-partisan. It was common knowledge that Barnee used to play piano duets with President Truman, and had performed for all of Mr. Truman's birthday parties.

But Ike invited him anyway, and the evening was a great success, even for Mr. Sam, whose ear for music was not perhaps as keen as it might have been. The Speaker of the House grudgingly conceded that he had enjoyed the performance because, as he said, "Barnee gave no encores."

By this time, Barnee had left the Shoreham to enter the world of public relations.

In a sense, of course, he had always been in the field. But he heard Pan Am playing "Come Fly With Me," and he had to go. Since that time, he has developed more contacts than a printed circuit and more stops than Metro.

But when he is not building corporate images, Barnee is building good will. He has found time, in his enormously crowded schedule, to serve on the Board of Trustees of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, stay active in the Almas Shrine Temple, and, as a Colonel in the Civil Air Patrol, to head the International Cadet Exchange Program. He also is a member of the National Press Club.

Barnee recently was re-elected to a third term as President of the Circus Saints and Sinners, an organization dear to my heart: I became a member four years before Barry Goldwater.

Parenthetically, I might add that even with all this activity Barnee assures me he still can find time for new clients. So if you know anyone who needs a good public relations man

I realize that nothing as short as this brief tribute can hope to do justice to the career of a man who has so enriched the lives of others. But perhaps some day Barnee will tap that vast reservoir of his memory and give us the biography that so many have asked for. And whatever the future holds, I know that Barnee still will be playing our song.

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SOME PEOPLE HAVE BEEN GENEROUS ENOUGH TO SUGGEST THAT I AM
NOT OFTEN AT A LOSS FOR WORDS \ OTHERS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT SUCH A
LOSS MIGHT HAVE CERTAIN BENEFICIAL EFFECTS.

\ BE THAT AS IT MAY, TO DO JUSTICE TO THE LONG AND RICHLY-
VARIED CAREER OF BARNEE BRESKIN IS TO TAX THE POWERS OF A CICERO!

\ TO DO SO IS TO RETURN TO A SIMPLER AND MORE GRACIOUS TIME --
THE AGE OF THE GREAT THEATERS AND THE GREAT HOTELS,

\ YOUNG BARNEE HAD WATCHED HIS FATHER DANIEL CONDUCT THE
ORCHESTRA AT THE METROPOLITAN THEATER ON 10TH AND F STREETS. HE
HAD PICKED UP A VIOLIN AND FOUND HE COULD MAKE IT SING. HE HAD
MASTERED THE PIANO AS WELL. \ AND NOW, IN 1930, HE WAS OPENING AT
THE OPULENT SHOREHAM HOTEL.

L SINCE THEN, THE FOCUS OF NATIONAL INTEREST HAS SHIFTED DOWN
TOWN, TOWARD THE TIDAL BASIN, BUT IN THOSE DAYS, THE SHOREHAM
WAS THE CENTER OF THE WASHINGTON SOCIAL WORLD.

ALTHOUGH IT WAS LOCATED IN WHAT THEN WAS THE SUBURBS, THE
SHOREHAM DREW SCORES OF THE ELITE, THE WEALTHY, AND -- FOR VARIETY
-- MANY OF THE NATION'S LEGISLATORS. THEY CAME TO SEE AND TO BE
SEEN. THEY CAME TO LUXURIATE IN THE SPLendor OF THE SHOREHAM'S
SURROUNDINGS. AND THEY CAME TO SEE BARNEE BRESKIN CONDUCT THE
ORCHESTRA IN THE BLUE ROOM.

(N) L YES, THE SHOREHAM AND THE BLUE ROOM WERE FAMOUS. IT EVEN
IS SAID THAT PRESIDENT TRUMAN WAS SKINNING HIS FRIENDS AT POKER
UPSTAIRS WHILE BARNEE WAS INTRODUCING CONGRESSMEN ON THE DANCE
FLOOR DOWNSTAIRS.

WE LIVE IN AN ERA IN WHICH ROCK GROUPS WITH NAMES LIKE BIG FAT AND THE PORK BARREL ARE NATIONAL IDOLS FOR SIX MONTHS BEFORE THEY DISAPPEAR INTO OBLIVION. BUT BARNEE CONDUCTED THE ORCHESTRA IN THE BLUE ROOM FOR 25 YEARS.

BY ANY STANDARD, THIS IS A SUPERLATIVE RECORD, AND A TESTAMENT TO BARNEE'S EXCELLENT MUSIC AND WARM PERSONAL APPEAL.

BUT THERE WERE OTHER TESTAMENTS TO THAT CHARM, TOO.

PERHAPS THE MOST NOTABLE ^{event} OCCURRED ONE NIGHT IN 1943, WHEN

A PROMISING YOUNG OPERA SINGER NAMED DOLORES DIMINNI CAME TO SING

IN THE BLUE ROOM. SHE STRUCK A MELODIOUS CHORD IN THE HEART OF

THE CONDUCTOR, AND SHE AND BARNEE WERE MARRIED TWO YEARS LATER.

↳ MR. JUSTICE FRANK MURPHY WROTE THEM, REGRETTING THAT SUPREME COURT JUSTICES COULD NOT PERFORM WEDDINGS, SINCE THEY HAD ONLY APPELLATE JURISDICTION. "IN YOUR CASE," JUSTICE MURPHY SAID, "I AM SURE YOU WILL NOT NEED ANY COURT OF APPEAL THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN."

↳ THAT SENTIMENT PROVED PROPHETIC, AND IS STILL TRUE THIRTY YEARS

LATER.

↳ DURING THEIR YEARS TOGETHER, BARNEE AND DOLORES HAD TWO

SONS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE HERE TONIGHT. — DAVID & STEVEN

↳ DAVID, THE OLDEST, IS ASSISTANT MANAGER OF FERGUSON'S PIANO STORE IN WHEATON, MARYLAND, AND AN ACCOMPLISHED PIANIST IN HIS OWN RIGHT. STEVEN'S TALENTS RUN MORE TO THE AREA OF HIGH FINANCE. HE'S A CLAIMS ADJUSTER FOR ALL-STATE INSURANCE.

~~George Allen~~

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BUT BEFORE EITHER DAVID OR STEVEN WERE BORN, BARNEE HAD
GIVEN BIRTH TO A FAR DIFFERENT SORT OF PROGENY WHEN HE WROTE
"HAIL TO THE REDSKINS" IN 1938, THE YEAR THE TEAM MOVED HERE FROM
BOSTON. IN FACT, HISTORY HAS IT THAT BARNEE AND DOLORES HAD TO
ADJUST THEIR MARRIAGE PLANS IN ORDER TO ATTEND A REDSKINS GAME.

↳ THEY WERE MARRIED ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7TH. BUT BARNEE HAD
TO LEAD THE BAND AT THE REDSKINS GAME THE NEXT DAY -- THUS
CREATING THE FIRST FOOTBALL WIDOW IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

George
Allen

wrote the Redskins
THIS SECOND LOVE AFFAIR WOULD LAST FOR FOURTEEN YEARS,
DURING WHICH BARNEE SERVED AS THE OFFICIAL ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR
FOR REDSKINS OWNER GEORGE PRESTON MARSHALL UNTIL 1954.

MEANTIME, BARNEE'S CAREER AT THE SHOREHAM CONTINUED, AND HE PLAYED THE FAVORITE SONGS OF PRESIDENTS AND CONGRESSMEN -- OR WHAT PASSED FOR THEIR FAVORITE SONGS [HARRY TRUMAN, FOR EXAMPLE, DID NOT PARTICULARLY LIKE THE "MISSOURI WALTZ," BUT HE WAS STUCK WITH IT. THEN-SENATOR LYNDON JOHNSON, HOWEVER, ENJOYED BASKING IN "THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU," AND WHETHER TEXAS WAS WATCHING OR NOT, THE SHOREHAM WAS.

[IT WAS WATCHING SO CAREFULLY, IN FACT, THAT IN 1951 A GROUP OF SENATORS AND OTHER GENTLEMEN OF THE NIGHT DECIDED TO GIVE BARNEE A PARTY ON HIS TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY AT THE HOTEL. HE WAS PRESENTED WITH TWO PICTURES OF PRESIDENTS: AN AUTOGRAPHED PORTRAIT OF HARRY TRUMAN, AND THE ENGRAVED PORTRAIT OF GROVER CLEVELAND -- ON A \$1,000 BILL.

SO WIDESPREAD AND RESPECTED WAS BARNEE'S REPUTATION, THAT THE ENTIRE PARTY, INCLUDING GUEST LIST, WAS REPORTED IN THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

L IF BARNEE HAD BEEN PLAYING DURING THE NIXON YEARS, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTERESTING TO SEE WHAT FAVORITE SONGS MIGHT HAVE EMERGED.

L ONE CAN IMAGINE BOB HALDEMAN ASKING FOR "SECRETLY," OR "THE KING AND I"; OR PRESIDENT NIXON REQUESTING A MEDLEY OF "IN MY SOLITUDE" AND "DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE."

L IN LATE APRIL OF 1957, BARNEE RECEIVED AN UNPRECEDENTED HONOR.

NO PRESIDENT HAD EVER ASKED A LOCAL MUSICIAN TO ENTERTAIN AT THE WHITE HOUSE. BUT WHEN PRESIDENT AND MRS. EISENHOWER HELD A STATE DINNER TO HONOR SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE SAM RAYBURN, BARNEE WAS ASKED TO PLAY.

John Rhodes

L NOT ONLY WAS THIS UNPRECEDENTED, IT WAS AMAZINGLY BI-PARTISAN.

IT WAS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT BARNEE USED TO PLAY PIANO DUETS WITH PRESIDENT TRUMAN, AND HAD PERFORMED FOR ALL OF MR. TRUMAN'S BIRTHDAY PARTIES.

Pres Eisenhower
L ~~BUT HE~~ INVITED HIM ANYWAY, AND THE EVENING WAS A GREAT SUCCESS, EVEN FOR MR. SAM, WHOSE EAR FOR MUSIC WAS NOT PERHAPS AS KEEN AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN. THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE GRUDGINGLY CONCEDED THAT HE HAD ENJOYED THE PERFORMANCE BECAUSE, AS HE SAID, "BARNEE GAVE NO ENCORES."

BY THIS TIME, BARNEE HAD LEFT THE SHOREHAM TO ENTER THE WORLD
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS.

IN A SENSE, OF COURSE, HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN IN THE FIELD. BUT
HE HEARD PAN AM PLAYING ^(ITS VERSION OF) "COME FLY WITH ME," AND HE HAD TO GO.

SINCE THAT TIME, HE HAS DEVELOPED MORE CONTACTS THAN A PRINTED
CIRCUIT AND MORE STOPS THAN METRO.

BUT WHEN HE IS NOT BUILDING CORPORATE IMAGES, BARNEE IS
BUILDING GOOD WILL. HE HAS FOUND TIME, IN HIS ENORMOUSLY CROWDED
SCHEDULE, TO SERVE ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE MULTIPLE
SCLEROSIS SOCIETY, STAY ACTIVE IN THE ALMAS SHRINE TEMPLE, AND,
AS A COLONEL IN THE CIVIL AIR PATROL, TO HEAD THE INTERNATIONAL
CADET EXCHANGE PROGRAM. HE ALSO IS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL
PRESS CLUB.

BARNEE RECENTLY WAS RE-ELECTED TO A THIRD TERM AS PRESIDENT OF THE CIRCUS SAINTS AND SINNERS, AN ORGANIZATION DEAR TO MY HEART: I BECAME A MEMBER FOUR YEARS BEFORE BARRY GOLDWATER.

PARENTHETICALLY, I MIGHT ADD THAT EVEN WITH ALL THIS ACTIVITY BARNEE ASSURES ME HE STILL CAN FIND TIME FOR NEW CLIENTS. SO IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO NEEDS A GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS MAN

I REALIZE THAT NOTHING AS SHORT AS THIS BRIEF TRIBUTE CAN HOPE TO DO JUSTICE TO THE CAREER OF A MAN WHO HAS SO ENRICHED THE LIVES OF OTHERS. BUT PERHAPS SOME DAY BARNEE WILL TAP THAT VAST RESERVOIR OF HIS MEMORY AND GIVE US THE BIOGRAPHY THAT SO MANY HAVE ASKED FOR. AND WHATEVER THE FUTURE HOLDS, I KNOW THAT BARNEE STILL WILL BE PLAYING OUR SONG.

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