Dr. Reuben Bareis retires to a familiar place

Reuben and Marloe Bareis pose for a photo at their West Hills Village home.

By Cindy Card Buchholz
Photo by James Van Nuys
Dr. Reuben Bareis of Rapid City is proof that doctors never truly retire.

In August, Dr. Bareis discussed health care reform on South Dakota Public Radio. He writes occasional letters to newspaper editors about healthcare topics that concern him and has been on a crusade to educate the public about an advanced directive called Comfort One.

“A law was passed in 2004 and amended in 2005 that makes it possible for somebody to declare they don't want to be resuscitated,” he said. After a person fills out the proper application through South Dakota Emergency Medical Services, he or she receives a bracelet to wear that declares their wish.

At 81 years old, Dr. Bareis wears the bracelet to alert emergency medical service providers, hospitals and other medical personnel about his cardiopulmonary resuscitation directives and protocols. “Almost five years have gone by and there are still lots of people who are not aware of it.”

He's also been involved with the Arthritis Association, and he's regularly asked for free medical advice. Although he retired 10 years ago, neighbors of Dr. Bareis still seek his professional advice when they run into him in the dining hall or elevator at Westhills Village Retirement Community in Rapid City. He says that never gets old.

“A few times a month or so people will tell me about their afflictions and one thing leads to another with them asking my opinion. I always tell them, 'my opinions are worth what I'm charging you for them,'” he jokes. “They're not worth very much.”

The truth is his opinions are worth quite a lot. Dr. Bareis spent a good portion of his medical career caring for senior citizens. He started his Rapid City practice in internal medicine in 1957, and as he and his patients got older, his practice evolved into a geriatric practice. “I always say it was kind of a providential progression,” he says.

In 1987 he obtained a Bush Fellowship and took a three-month sabbatical to England where he spent some time in the geriatric departments of a number of nursing homes and where he saw his first hospice house. “They'd been having them for 20 years before we ever thought about having them in the United States.” One thing led to another and he became interested in chronic care.

He also attributes his interest in geriatrics to his grandparents on his father's side. His father grew up on small farm in Missouri. His mother died when he was three years old.

“As a result, my grandparents and my three aunts on my father's side kind of became my 'mother' for a time until he remarried. Maybe that's behind it,” he says.

“You don't know why things happen. Your interest is whetted by a number of things and somehow you are carried along. I've been very happy with my practice, and you get to know your patients as people, not as numbers. They become your friends. I have found a lot of joy in that.”

After he retired, he wrote a book detailing the historical accounts of the founding of the nursing homes in the Rapid City area. The book, “Compassionate Caregivers: A Memoir,” was published in 2003 and celebrates the “unsung heroes serving the twilight years of life.”

Dr. Bareis happens to be one of those unsung heroes, although he would probably dispute the title. He was one of the founders of Westhills Village, which, without the drive and compassion of a small group of men, would probably not be in existence today.

Daryl Reinicke, CEO Westhills Village Retirement Community, said he has always been amazed at how Dr. Bareis has committed himself to his profession. “He's always been devoted to helping others, and his dedication to seniors, those in skilled nursing facilities, certainly represents this,” Reinicke said. “His vision and passion were driving forces in establishing Westhills Village Retirement Community” Reinicke said Dr. Bareis’s involvement has made a positive impact all across the Rapid City community as well as the State of South Dakota.

When nursing homes were required to have medical directors back in 1975, Dr. Bareis served as the first medical director for Meadowbrook Manor (Strathavon Manor) in Rapid City. He did the job gratis. He held that position for about 10 years and later served as the medical director of Clarkson-Mountain View Health Care Center until his retirement. In 2000, Westhills Village purchased the facility, which is now named Clarkson Health Care.

Dr. Bareis and his wife Marloe, a retired registered nurse, have lived at Westhills Village for nearly three years. The couple celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on Sept. 12. Dr. Bareis said they have been very blessed throughout their entire marriage and especially now that they are a little older. “She has her limitations, and I have mine,” he said. “I don't walk too well. I have neuropathy and use a walker. She has some early memory problems. She always says, ‘He's my head and I'm his feet.' We complement each other, and we respect each other and have a wonderful relationship.”

That wonderful relationship resulted in four children and eight grandchildren. Their oldest daughter and her husband, Anne and Randy Baker, have three children and live in Fairbanks, Alaska. Anne is a retired elementary school teacher. Their son and daughter-in-law, Paul and Mary Bareis-Columb, have two children and live in Denver, where Paul is a Montessori
instructor. Son Steve and his wife Eva Bareis live in Rapid City and have three children. Steve is a civil engineer with Forefront Design Inc. The youngest child, Jean Bareis, is a hospital chaplain in the Denver area. Dr. Bareis said he and his wife are overjoyed and blessed to have their grandchildren and to have the ability to now follow their progress.

Dr. Bareis finished his residency in internal medicine in Michigan and completed his basic training in Colorado, but he and his wife chose to live in the Black Hills. He calls the Black Hills the miniature Rocky Mountains with clean air, good water and good school systems. All four of the Bareis children went to Stevens High School. "We thought we may have wanted to go back to Colorado, but there wasn't a ready opportunity. We came to the Hills, and thank God we did what we did."

Never one to look back over his shoulder and wonder "what if?" he and his wife have been quite happy with their decision to stay in Rapid City and would not trade that for anything. In 2006, Dr. Bareis completed his autobiography, "Making a Good Life," a fascinating, well-written and very readable history of his roots, his interests, his travels, and his family. Impressive by any standard, the spiral-bound, 160-page book is lavishly illustrated with dozens of historical photos. "Half of our life relates to our family," he says.

He has been actively involved with the Rotary Club for more than 50 years and with the First Presbyterian Church in Rapid City. He and Marloe share a love of the arts and take advantage of the outings available through Westhills Village, such as attending the Black Hills Symphony Orchestra, Rapid City Concert Association performances and Black Hills Community Theatre productions. And no portrait of Dr. Bareis would be complete without mentioning one of his favorite activities: singing. "I've been singing in choirs and barbershop quartets my whole life—for more than sixty years."

Over the years, he was on the Playhouse board and city arts council. He has many philanthropic endeavors that he is passionate about. "I have had a conviction that has become sort of philosophical. We are put on this earth to try to make the place a better place to live. And that means some involvement."

He realizes that his activities as a Rotarian took some time away from his family, but that experience exposed his family to the fact that there was a world out there. "And that there were third world countries that needed our assistance, and we got to know people from other parts of the world. Personal exchange is how we learn to get along with each other."

Dr. Bareis keeps very busy with reading, writing and with activities through his church and at Westhills Village. "There are so many opportunities. I'm not ready to sit down and watch TV," he said. "I'm waiting for the next stage when I'm totally confined to a wheelchair, and if I can still deal the cards, why then there will be time to do that."

"One thing I've said to my patients and my friends all my life is 'Keep on plugging.'" And he happily follows his own free advice—which, after all, is worth quite a lot.
end of a year, it now has 540 students and is still known as the "Esther Gumper School." Feeling that the local native ministers were now sufficiently prepared to carry on and desiring their older children, now early teenagers, to get a high school education in the States, the Gumpers returned home in 1951. I've always been proud to have two uncles and two aunts as fraternal workers in foreign mission. They've helped me develop and maintain a universal perspective.

Meanwhile back on the farm, Grandpa Bareis, moderately deaf, sat next to his Zenith radio to absorb the events leading up to WW II. As a conservative isolationist, he had little stomach for getting involved in "John Bull's" war. Undoubtedly he listened to Father Charles Coughlin; today he probably would have also listened to Rush Limbaugh. He later had no use for FDR! Known as a "tightwad," I'd prefer to think of him as thrifty; he would occasionally give me two nickels and say, "Now you can buy an ice cream cone with one but put the other one in the bank." Or, "If you only have 99 cents, you really don't have a whole dollar." Despite his "stinginess," he made certain that all of his children were educated and he had the first automobile, a "Tin Lizzy" or the cheapest Ford, in the community. Sadly though, his wife and sisters thought him to be too strict with Reuben (a source of contention). Even though working "like a Trojan" when he came home during the summer, Reuben was denied privileges like spending much time with friends such as Rodney Heckman in town or his Uncle Ervin (same age) on the farm. But I loved Grandpa Bareis and my perception is that he mellowed considerably before he died.

Speaking of the farm, it was the delight of our young lives when Bob and I could spend a summer on the Bareis farm, later the Brinkmann farm. We'd help with the chores, run the cream separator, and help gather the produce from the two-acre truck farm. We'd get up and go to bed with the chickens. Supper would be late at night; sometimes we'd use limited dishes—eat our dessert out of a glass—to reduce dishwashing. We'd climb the fruit trees for fresh fruit, including mulberries.

Once when the grandparents were napping and having procured a Sears-Roebuck catalog (used as toilet paper) from the outhouse, Bob and I wriggled into a small chicken coop, rolled some of the pages, and smoked a "cigarette" (with matches stolen from the kitchen). The smoke gave us away. Grandma spied us; I'm sure the discipline was appropriate! That was the first and last time! All in all we had fun, and Aunt Alma was like a second mother to us. Yes, I truly loved the Brinkmanns and my grandparents and had no doubt that that love was reciprocated.

About the time WW II began, in September 1939, with the Nazi invasion of Poland, the family moved to Hoyleton, IL, a small town 70 miles east of St. Louis. Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church served the town, the surrounding rich farming area, and a local orphanage. My most joyous memory there was playing softball and basketball in an adjoining field with our neighbor boys, Stan and Wally Horst. Our folks also relished playing pinocle with their parents. For the first time Bob and I attended a large school—20 students to a room.

We couldn't join the Boy Scout troop since it assembled the same time we attended Confirmation Class on Saturday morning, but Dad drove us to Nashville—15 miles away—once a week for piano lessons. LeRoy Niermann was my best friend; how troubling to gain friendships only to see them dissolve with our frequent moves. The folks had their usual gardens; Mom spent a lot of time crocheting and canning; and Dad pampered his pet dogs, pigeons, and canaries. We boys mowed lawns and worked in the peach shed during the fruit season for some needed cash. One unwelcomed incident: cut the tendon on the index finger of my left hand playing "Kick the Can." Afraid to tell my parents, it