

barbara BROOME

BARBARA BROOME HAD PARLAYED

her high-school diploma into a successful administrative career, advancing from business-office cashier to admissions clerk to admitting supervisor at St. Joseph's Hospital in Warren in less than a decade. But in 1981, a year after she left the hospital to take a better-paying office-manager position with a group of otolaryngologists, she was downsized out of a job. The married mother of two young children immediately began considering becoming a nurse. She and her autoworker husband viewed the occupation as one that would always be in demand. And she had never forgotten the fear, confusion and helplessness she felt when her father died in 1980.

"I just wanted to do something to help others who might go through the same experience I went through," she says. "I can remember going in and seeing my father and knowing that he was dead. There was nothing that I could really do."

Broome devoted a year to getting a licensed practical nurse diploma from the Hannah Mullins School of Nursing in Columbiana. In 1986, after stints in a number of area nursing homes, she returned to St. Joseph's Hospital, where she spent the next 10 years in an intensive- and coronary-care step-down unit. By 1989 she'd added a bachelor's degree in nursing from Kent State University to her resume, a move that helped ensure she'd have the skills to remain employed as a nurse. But the dedicated caregiver's career took an unexpected turn during her continued studies: She began tutoring KSU students to earn extra money and developed a love of teaching.

"I enjoyed helping the students," she explains. "And I really enjoyed seeing the light bulbs go off in their heads."

Today, she's the dean of KSU's College of Nursing.

"I always thought it would be nice to be dean," the 62-year-old says without a hint of wit, sarcasm or ego. "But you always quell that thought because you think, there's no way."

Broome officially entered academia in 1991, when she completed her master's degree in nursing at KSU and accepted an assistant professorship at the university's Trumbull Campus. Eager to attain the security of tenure, she began working on her doctorate in nursing at the University of Pittsburgh in 1994. For the next three years, she maintained a brutal schedule: working full time at KSU delivering class lectures and supervising students in their clinicals: driving to Pittsburgh twice a week to attend her own classes and work 20 hours a week as a graduate research assistant; and taking at least one shift a week at St. Joseph's Hospital to keep her skills sharp.

"You can't teach students what you don't know," she declares. "It was my way of staying relevant."

In 1999 Broome received a phone call from a friend at the University of South Alabama who suggested she interview for the school's vacant chair of community mental health. Much to her surprise, she got the job. By 2008, she was the department's chair and associate dean as well as full professor. Another phone call, this time from a KSU Trumbull Campus secretary advising her that the university was advertising for a College of Nursing dean, ended up bringing her home. She assumed her present post in March 2014.

Although she gives the occasional guest lecture, Broome admits that she misses teaching. But as dean she's been able to make changes, such as hiring more faculty with doctorates, providing current faculty with access to university doctoral programs, increasing online learning, and reducing the number of students in clinical instructors' groups.

"I think that's why I am enjoying what I do — I've [taught], and I know how difficult it is," she says.



WHEN MY MOTHER was diagnosed with [cervical] cancer — it was during the time I was working at the hospital — her attending physician walked up to me and told me that my mother had cancer and that if they didn't do surgery, she was going to die. And if they did do surgery, she was going to have bags for her urine and for her bowels. He just turned on his heel and walked away from me and left me with that. Of course, I didn't really know what to do with it.

"If you take no risk, then you never know what you can or can't do."

I OFTEN THOUGHT, I never, ever want to do that to anyone. I really think that you take the time to explain it, help [patients and family members] to process it, give them a chance to make some sense of it.

MY HUSBAND HAS A NAME FOR ME — he always calls me a pit bull. You could almost take that negatively. But he says no. [He says,] "When you sink your teeth into something, you're not giving it up until you get what you want."

I ENJOYED EVERY MOMENT of [my time in the step-down unit]. The individuals who you are taking care of, they're just a different type of person. They've suffered a really enormous amount of illness — for example, if they're in intensive care, they've had a major surgery, or, if they're in coronary care, they've had some major heart problems. I suppose that really brings out the nurturing in you in a different kind of way.

MEMORIZATION isn't really learning — it's memorization, and you quickly lose it.

WHEN YOU'RE A NURSE, you don't punch a clock in the same way other people do. If you're there, and something happens, you stay until it's done.

SOMETIMES, when you're at one place for so long, you're part of the fixtures. Sometimes people don't see your skills.

WHEN I START to come to work and say, "Oh, my God! I'm here again!" it's time to let it go.

LIFE LESSONS

JASON MILLER