

Gary Melton, Grant County High School Class of 1971, always knew he wanted to be a doctor. "As a child," he recalls, "I would make my little sign saying, 'THE DOCTOR IS IN', then I'd treat anyone or anything willing to be my patient."

In high school, however, the dream seemed too big and too far away. How could someone from a farm family in rural Grant County - with little or no resources - hope to become a doctor? Life, after all, had not been easy for his parents. Young Gary's father, Charles, had been one of 12 kids, who, upon his mother's death was forced to quit school after completing only the fourth grade to begin helping his father in the family's lumber mill. Gary's mother, Liza Jane, had completed only her eighth-grade year before marrying Gary's father at the tender age of 16 - as was common at the time in their Eastern Kentucky home. Together his parents had left their Clay County roots looking for work, and had moved to Cincinnati before settling in Grant County in 1958.

Understanding the odds, Gary concluded that pursuing a career as a teacher was a more attainable goal. He joined and became president of the GCHS Future Teachers of America organization, but, unwilling to forego medicine completely, thought, maybe, he could be a medical technician during the summer months.

It turns out, however, that his parents had provided him with things much more valuable than material resources. "My mom," shares Dr. Melton, "was a worrier, but she always worried about the welfare of others - never about herself. I guess I inherited that." His dad modeled a tremendous work ethic, working both in town and farming, yet finding time to raise Gary and his younger brother, Mike, in the church. From his church experience, Gary developed another passion - the piano. He took lessons, practicing for over a year on a cardboard box upon which a drawing of piano keys had been pasted. Gary embraced his parents' gifts and created his own life as one defined by faith, family, hard work, and a tireless concern for others.

After graduating high school as one of two valedictorians, he chose Georgetown College, as he was still a little intimidated by the larger schools. It was a good choice, as, within the first 2-3 months of his Freshman year, two of his professors became acutely aware of his dream and his potential. Together they gave him the courage he needed to change majors and pursue Pre-Med. Within three years, Gary had completed a double major in biology and chemistry, a double minor in math and physics, and graduated at the top of his college class. He entered medical school at the University of Louisville, graduated in 1978, then, after completing his residency at St. Elizabeth - Edgewood returned to his hometown - which was, at the time, defined as being in critical need of medical doctors - to open a solo family practice in 1981. Reminiscing, Dr. Melton notes the tremendous intellectual and professional support he received from local pharmacists Bob Wallace and Larry Spears in this rather daunting endeavor.

During college, Dr. Melton met and married his wife, Ruth Iles Melton. He credits her with essentially living alone while he completed medical school, and doing a lot of single-parenting after their sons, Brian and Jason, arrived. In the early days of his medical practice, the day started at 3:30 a.m., rounds were made at 3-4 hospitals (Grant County, the then St. Luke -Florence, and St. Elizabeth -Edgewood) before office calls began at 8:00 a.m. Then there were house calls on the way home. The boys remember often waiting in hospital lobbies, or in the car, and even spending weekends in the little house behind the hospital while Dad took his turn covering the ER at Grant County Hospital. Dad acknowledges rarely making it back to the house, but took comfort in that his family was nearby. The boys, in turn, respected their dad's dedication to them and his patients. "Dad never did anything for himself," states Brian. "He took care of his patients and he took care of us. He became, and continues to be, our best friend."

Through the years, the job changed, but the pace did not. When his practice joined Health Alliance, and then later St. Elizabeth Physicians, he was recognized by both groups as seeing more patients than any other doctor in their network. Inquiry into how he did it revealed simply a lot of hours and a tireless dedication to his patients. Literally, thousands have depended upon Dr. Melton for their medical care.

Dr. Melton retired from his full-time practice in 2015 but continues to work as an Urgent Care physician. His retirement is bittersweet as he recalls how much enjoyment he received from caring for his patients - watching children become adults, then have children of their own, and particularly tending to the needs of his geriatric patients. "The elderly are so appreciative," states Dr. Melton. "I always felt they gave me back more than I gave them."

The sweet part of his retirement, however, is the time he is able to spend time with his wife, children, grandchildren, and his dad - all of whom are proud of the humble, selfless man they shared for 34 years with Grant County.