

## “You Can’t Make Me Cry”

*Gladys Barnes once challenged a teacher with these words, and she’s had small time for tears since in a life that’s been packed with good things for herself and her students.*

By ROBERT TALLEY, '55

The class sat in stunned, embarrassed silence, each child carefully averting his eyes from the familiar scene taking place at the front of the room—all but one, a red-haired girl named Gladys Barnes who was watching grimly.

The dim basement classroom seemed to become more dreary as the tall, thin teacher continued his harangue, aiming smothering sarcasm at the girl in the front row, who covered her tears with small hands.

Suddenly a calm voice halted the action with the explosiveness of a thunderclap. “Why don’t you try me? I don’t believe you can make me cry.”

His face livid, the instructor wheeled to confront the girl who had dared to speak, but seeing her determination, he turned quickly back to the class and muttered, “Let’s return to the lesson.”

That such spunk should be a part of Gladys A. Barnes, now an assistant professor of modern languages, was not at first evident as we sat in the quiet living room of her home. Not until she talked of her early life, and then it became apparent that she combines a rare gentleness and understanding with a strong personality and sharp wit. Her voice is soft, and when reminiscing about something she particularly has enjoyed, it takes on almost the quality of a whisper. Now in her sixties, she has blended into her personality interests from painting to pistol shooting, from polishing stones to wearing a deputy sheriff’s badge. Such variety, however, should not be surprising, considering the environment in which she grew up.

Miss Barnes was born in August, 1890, in Galva, Illinois, of schoolteacher parents. After living in the small town for about

10 years, the family moved to San Jose, California, several years later returning East to settle in Orlando, Oklahoma.

It was here in Oklahoma that she learned rugged Western outdoor life, where horses and six-guns were as usual as automobiles and the sounds of aircraft are common today, and where she pulled escapades that would horrify most of her present-day counterparts.

“One time,” she said enthusiastically, leaning forward in her chair, “my brother, Claude, and I set up a circus ring, or rather a circular path, and trained our horses to run around in it. With them cantering side-by-side, we would leap from one to another.

“Another of our stunts,” she continued, eyes brimming with past pleasures, “was for me to gallop toward my brother, who would come at me on his horse and try to lasso me. I was supposed to dodge, and I did. He never got me.” More conservative now, she declines to consider what would have been the result had one throw been accurate.

Miss Barnes brightened when asked if she had ever owned a gun. “Yes, as a girl, I carried a Colt .44 on a .45 frame; it sagged my hip, but it was a real gun. You see, I used to ride along the Cimarron River (in Coyle County—tough country in those days) and felt I needed to carry it, although supposedly it was illegal.”

In 1940, Miss Barnes decided she would like another gun, primarily to keep in the car on trips to Carlsbad, California, where she has owned a beach cottage since 1937. “After hearing stories about people molesting cars, I thought it might be sensible to have one. I went to the sheriff,” she chuckled, “and he made me a deputy.”

She enjoys telling the story of how Lowell Dunham, '32ba, '35ma, assistant professor of modern languages and an ex-FBI agent, stopped by one day to tell her he had become a deputy. “Shaw,” she exclaimed, “Why I’m your senior. I’ve been one for years.” Her current pistol is a Smith and Wesson .32.

Leaving her early trick-riding, pistol-carrying days, Miss Barnes took college preparatory courses at Oklahoma A&M for two years, and then went to Central State Teachers College for another two, receiving her teacher’s certificate.

(As she was discussing her education, the phone rang, and she scurried into the hall to answer it. After a moment her voice drifted back. “My arm? Oh, it’s doing fine. You’ve heard the story about the woman who ate something that made her ill? A friend came to visit her and she was sitting up in bed eating what had made her sick. That’s what I’m doing with my arm. I won’t let it dictate to me.” Miss Barnes’ left arm had been broken this summer when an unhinged door fell upon her.)

Returning to the living room, she sat back, adjusted the green scarf she used to sling her arm, and continued. “Things were rather mixed up for a while as far as school was concerned. For a time, my father was my teacher—for two years in high school. Then after I started teaching, my brother, Claude (now a retired merchant), was my student.

Miss Barnes held her first classes in a small school at Poverty Knob in Payne County on a November morning in 1906. It was a day that might have driven

a more experienced person into hysterics, but being just 16 and filled with desire to teach, she got through it. She had forgotten to bring matches and had to borrow some from a nearby farm house; then, in trying to fire up the old-fashioned stove, the 20-foot stove pipe collapsed, and, after locking up for the night a student, who had left his lunch pail inside, broke her key off in the lock.

"About that time," she declared, "I began to wonder whether I liked teaching." Her work must have gone well, however, because she was told hers was the best school for a beginning teacher the superintendent had ever experienced. "I was puffed up with pride," Miss Barnes murmured, her voice dropping into that dreamy half-whisper.

From there she continued teaching in rural schools until 1915, when she was promoted to principal of the high school at Jennings during the oil boom. The following year she took on the job of superintendent of Coyle County Schools, and after a term, went to Oklahoma City to instruct at Central High School.

When Miss Barnes arrived at Central High, U.S. Senator Mike Monroney, '24ba, was a yell leader. She related cheerfully how he and suitable cohorts used to sit on the front row at assemblies, and, as the principal started onto the stage, would chant:

"Good morning, dear principal,  
We are glad you are here.  
You think we don't love you;  
What a foolish idea-rr!"

"But he was a top student," Miss Barnes added quickly. "You know, that is one of the rewards of teaching forever. Your students become famous—and you can point with pride. . ."

In 1920, at what Miss Barnes calls "the instigation" of Dr. Roy T. House, the chairman of the modern languages department, and of the late Kenneth Kaufman, '16ba, '19ma, then head of the modern languages department at Central High School and later professor of modern languages at O. U., she was asked to come to the University as an instructor. She had obtained her A.B. degree at the University during summer sessions, and in 1921 was to go on to receive her masters in English, with a minor in Spanish.

As she remembers the invitation: "I was in Cuba with a friend, Olive Rittenhouse, who was an accountant (now an attorney) in Oklahoma City. Her office cabled her for information on some documents, and she certainly felt important! A few days later, a cablegram arrived for me from President Brooks, asking me to teach at the University." She laughed, "Then I felt important!"

"And, I've been pretty much O.U. ever

since." From the way her face glowed, the relationship has been thoroughly satisfying. She has enjoyed it, and has become one of the most popular teachers on the campus.

A friend brought out this facet of her personality. "Miss Barnes, in the course of the years, has had as many students who were and still are devoted to her as I have ever known a teacher to have. She is not easily imposed upon, but if she's convinced a student is playing the game, she will go to any length to help him, inside or outside of school hours." She has held many study parties in her home, inviting students before an examination to drop in, make candy, and review with her.

In addition to teaching—and considerable writing in both English and Spanish publications—she headed the modern language sectioning committee for 15 years, served as faculty sponsor of Las Dos Americas "for about 20 years" and of the Mortar Board for two years, and has lead and worked with a long list of other campus bodies. Away from school, her membership in organizations reads like an index of women educator's groups, including the Business and Professional Women's Club and the Faculty Women's Club, serving each as president, and the Norman Welfare Board.

Another of her interests at present is a

collection of Border Spanish, words that have melted into the languages of both sides of the Rio Grande. A prize example was obtained upon overhearing two Mexican girls on a shopping tour. "Vamos a la tienda second-hand," said one. "Let's go to the second-hand store." Many of these Miss Barnes has gathered over a period of 18 years in "eight or nine" visits to Mexico, and on her annual trips to California. An inveterate traveler, she spent the summer of 1927 in Spain studying at the Centro de Estudios Historicos, in addition to the three months in Cuba in 1920.

As though her life were not already crammed with projects, Miss Barnes has collected and polished about 10,000 semi-precious stones (she delights in telling about her gastropods, rocks taken from the "gizzards" of dinosaurs), goes trout and deep-sea fishing, paints beautifully in oils, plays the piano, hikes, writes some fiction besides her language articles, and rides, but not as much now as she would like. At one time horses were so much a part of her University life that the late President Bizzell, who remembered people by their hobbies, would recall Miss

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MISS GLADYS BARNES

. . . From Poverty Knob to the University

## "You Can't Make Me Cry . . ."

Barnes as the Spanish teacher who owned the two horses.

Miss Barnes sometimes considers buying another mount, but at present is content with a smaller pet, Misifusi, a well-mannered, four-year-old Persian cat who shares her modest Norman home during the winter and the California beach cottage each summer.

Her beach cottage at Carlsbad will play a more important part in her life as time passes, for in 1960, she will retire to live there permanently.

In explaining her plans, she gave the impression of holding a youthful interest in moving to California and developing a portion of the six-room house into a foreign-language bookstore. This was mixed, however, with a regret at the prospect of leaving the University, her students and activities here.

Reciprocally, many here at the University would not look forward to a campus without Miss Barnes, including Dr. House, who is now David Ross Boyd Professor Emeritus of Modern Languages, and editor emeritus of *Books Abroad*.

"There are few teachers at O.U. who have been as popular as Miss Barnes," Dr. House declared, looking back over his tenure as chairman of the Department of Modern Languages. "She always had a hold on students; she took an interest in serious students and they realized it and appreciated it.

"She had three strong points," he said, making a statement as valid today as it was yesterday, "an instinct for clarifying things so that she was particularly successful with beginning students, and a genuine interest and affection for them—and a respect for their personalities. The students responded by working for her."

This is high commendation for the gentle grey-haired woman whose students have given so much to her life, and to whom she has returned so much of hers.

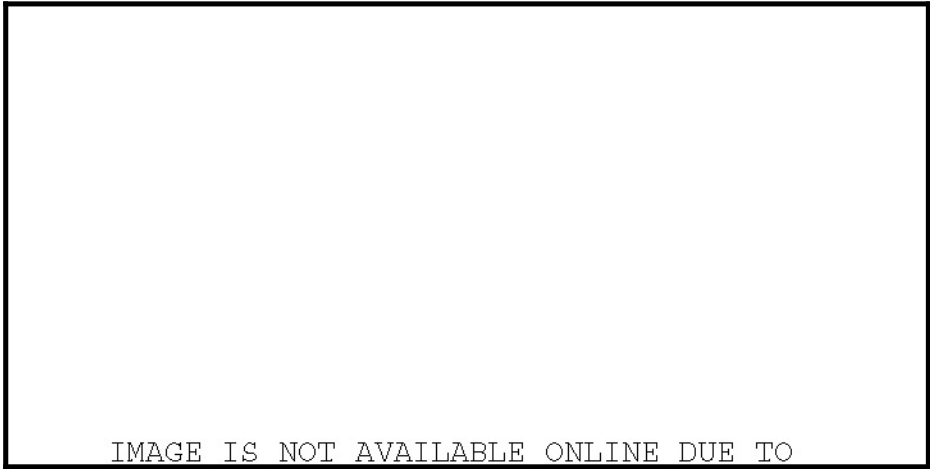


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