

From Humble Beginnings

“My father was a farm worker,” Barbara Brown explains. “My husband’s father had early-onset Alzheimer’s by 50, so we didn’t come from any money at all. We worked our way through Arizona State University and almost killed ourselves doing it.”

Working nights at Motorola, the couple attended classes during the day and caught up on their sleep Sundays. Barbara finished with a double major in Fine Arts and Art History and went on to teach briefly at California State University, Long Beach. Phil became an aerospace engineer – one of the first to graduate from ASU – and worked on Apollo. He later had a long-running contract with NATO.



Reflecting on the lifestyle their education afforded them, she says, “We had a wonderful life. We didn’t have to worry about money like our parents did.”

Phil and Barbara retired to Prescott in 2004, and Barbara has been active in OLLI-Prescott for nearly a decade, now. “This place is different,” she says. “I love this school. This school is much more uplifting than some of the big colleges I’ve been involved with. It’s like a big family.”

When her husband passed away, she wanted to do something to help other people and decided scholarships would be the way. “I wanted to make it so someone wouldn’t have to work quite as hard as we did.”

With the help of Mary Talosi, Executive Director of the Yavapai College Foundation, she created two scholarships: The Phil and Barbara Brown Endowed Pre-Engineering Scholarship and the Phil and Barbara Brown Endowed Nursing Scholarship. Through the process, she and Mary became friends.

“I used to teach at a four-year school. ASU – where I went – is a four-year school. The mentality is so much different at Yavapai College. This College gives people the chance to do all kinds of things to better themselves. I like that you can become a carpenter, an electrician, or you can be an EMT. There are great opportunities for people that perhaps don’t have the time, money or either to put in for a four-year degree.”

She also likes how affordable YC is compared to four-year schools. Her gift can go further at a place like Yavapai College. Help more people. Help people who are part of her community. “ASU has over 100,000 students now,” she marvels at the exponential enrollment growth of her alma mater. “Here, it’s like – oh the kids that just graduated from the local high school which is across the street from where I live. They’re my neighbors’ kids.”

Not wanting to forget what brought her to YC in the first place – OLLI – Barbara also changed the beneficiary on an annuity she’s held since the 1980’s to the Yavapai College Foundation, for the benefit of OLLI-Prescott. “The annuity has grown quite a bit since I got it and I just put right of survivorship to the Foundation – so easy peasy. My son knows all about it, and he’s supposed to send you my death certificate,” she laughs, “so they’ll actually give you the money!”

Always an advocate for YC, she's been counseling some of those friends and neighbors of hers with kids who are juniors and seniors in high school. "Just come here for the first two years, I tell them. It's the same thing they're going to get at ASU, but it's going to cost so much less. I'm very pleased with how Yavapai College has kept costs down for the students."