

from *Music* to *Medicine*

KCOM student chooses med school over jazz scene

“You name it, I played it,” Nathan Holbrook, OMS II, says. “Big band, funk, rock, jazz, blues, swing, bop, classical ...”

Holbrook began playing trombone when he was 11. After many years of marching band outfits and band camp he decided to pursue professional jazz music, mastering the trombone, guitar, bass, and didgeridoo. He also learned the harmonica, euphonium, and tuba.

“Jazz became my obsession,” he says, adding that he played gigs throughout high school and college.

Studying jazz trombone at the University of North Texas, Holbrook graduated in 2006 with a B.A. in biology and minors in music and chemistry. Along the way, he earned the Louis Armstrong Award, as well as several jazz festival awards.

At 19, Holbrook traveled to Manhattan on a music scholarship to play a memorial concert at

Pace University for Al Grey. Grey played jazz trombone with Count Basie, who was among the most important bandleaders of the swing era. With a full theater and his musical idols Wycliffe Gordon, Steve Turre, Robin Eubanks, and Ray Anderson listening back-

stage, Holbrook played “Makin’ Whoopie,” Grey’s signature song.

“It was euphoric,” he says.

Holbrook learned early on the difficulties of a musician’s life on the road, quickly realizing most professional musicians had little to no family life. “Day-to-day life for a traveling musician is tough, and I decided it wasn’t for me.”

Holbrook’s journey from music to medicine began when his mother broke her toe, and he set it. “When the emergency physician asked who set it and I told him it was me, he said, ‘You should be a doctor.’” He took that suggestion to heart, and not long after applied to the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine.

“The people made KCOM stand out from other schools I visited,” he says. “Everyone I spoke with thought very highly of KCOM.”

He also worked with KCOM alum David B. Hall, D.O., ’89, for five years in the Denton, Texas, emergency department, who gave him a new outlook on the College. “I not only heard about KCOM’s reputation, but was able to see the type of physician it produced.”

As a second-year medical student, Holbrook finds he learns best when putting together pieces of a puzzle. “Things like hard work and repetition fall into place when you stay curious about how the body, mind, and spirit work,” he says, adding that he enjoys using what he’s learned to help his classmates. “When a person turns to you and thanks you for your time and effort, it makes those sleepless nights worth it.”

And, Holbrook still plays music in talent shows, at church, and in jam sessions. “I get to have it all – a wonderful family life, a great career, and I play music whenever I feel like it.” ❧

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By Lee Cashatt



Holbrook with wife, Celeste, at the 2007 KCOM White Coat Ceremony.