Brett Barnes

What did you want to be when you were a child? Brett Barnes wanted to be the worlds greatest opera singer. From San Antonio, he came to UT as a freshman in 1985, and 47 years later he still has great hair. As an extroverted child he knew he could sing.

“Age of three I sang, Jesus Loves Me, to my church.”

Singing is very public, and very extroverted.

“If you are from the great state of Texas there is always competition.”

In 8th grade he received position to be first chair alto.

“I always knew I could excel.”

After his rebellion against his “witch” of a choir teacher, he joined drama. He loved acting, but always knew singing was my passion. He set his sights on Juilliard, but got his strings pulled for him to get into UT after the deadline.
The day after his 18th birthday was his auditions for University Choir...

“At the time it was legal to drink at 18, so I was plastered at auditions.”

After being bottom chair, he decided to make the best of it. Yet still, he did not succeed.

“Talent wasn’t always going to get me through, I needed to be prepared.”

So he gained responsibility, switched teachers and took on life.

Then there he was auditioning for Juilliard, sitting, waiting in his chair before auditions (“a very sacred place for singers”).

First song went beautifully, but then he was asked to sing his french piece, “Thinking OH, CRAP. THAT WAS IT.” Mistakenly trying something new, he gave it his all, and again failed.

Surprisingly Barnes got call backs,

“Why did you think you got through?”

Brett responding, “I have no idea.”

“Your talent is your talent. Be true to yourself, and that is what is going to get you there.”

After multiple rounds, he gets a letter saying “you have been accepted into Juilliard, but not the opera center.”

The August before he left for school, he found out that his sister was diagnosed with leukemia.

He left to Juilliard but kept thinking, if he should be there or with his sister.

“If you take out the factor that some people are good, and some people suck, it can be a very different environment. It was very bitchy and caddy. But when you have a sister who is sick you take another glance.”

So he left with honors, and invitation to come back at any time. His sister did pass.

“At times you have to be selfless. What is the best course of action?”

He left his dream that would open up doors, for his family.

His dad, depressed from his daughter dying, committed suicide.
“Life is really precious, if you are not being who you are suppose to be, life will be crazy.”

“In the middle of all this, I got married to a girl as a gay man.”

It didn’t work out. It was not who Barnes was suppose to be.

“You mind is such a strong, strong machine. It can make you believe anything you want to be. - So tough break up.”

He was singing and traveling. Not making a lot, but enough to live and eat. After 4 years of living in a suitcase, it was a bit tiring for him.

“You have to take all the jobs you get. I am tired of that life, I want a dog, go skiing, have health insurance.”

Brett Barnes was then offered a position to become a great administrator. He loved fitting all the pieces of the puzzle together. About 5 years later, he was approached with a job opportunity as development director in a non-profit. He realized after 5 years, he needed to try something different.

He went through Leadership Austin, helped kids in the Lifeworks to help people get to the path of self efficiency because he knew his sister would have been one of the kids he would be helping.

“You have to be passionate in what you do.”

He got a job from the Long Center, offered 90,000. “I am good.”

Offered again, he said no still. He was then asked, what will be different next year. Thinking, maybe after 8 years he should get back in the arts. So with negotiating, he has now been there for 9 months.

“The arts are inherently crazy, just with what they do. Often times the art mission is not very clear for everybody.”

His mission is to make that clear for others.

His job is very scientific. He builds profiles, and finds their network and how they can connect to people. If you are good at it, you can make a lot of money, fill a purpose, and have a lot of fun.

Living in East Austin with his dog he advises us to,

“find you passion. and get involved. It doesn't matter if you have money for it. Educate yourself on how you are doing that. It really wasn't until my sisters death that I realized I need to be less self centered, and give back.”