

## Artley.mp3

[00:00:00] Okay, this is Emily Stewart and I'm interviewing Mary Artley, who work in the Department of Surgery. It's December 13th, 2019, and we're speaking on the phone. Now Mary, can you talk just a little bit about where you grew up and kind of how you got to Duke working in the capacity that you did?

**Artley** [00:00:22] Okay. Well, I was actually born in Dallas, Texas. But when I was five and a half, I had three younger sisters. When I was five and a half years old, my family moved to Durham. And my father was actually a physician. And he took a job at Duke... Duke Hospital. So, I basically grew up in Durham around Duke itself, the hospital, the whole thing. And then I went to a small college called Lees-McRae... Maybe you've heard of it, in Banner-Elk, North Carolina. Back in those days, it was a junior college and I took a medical secretary curriculum, a two-year liberal arts college, but they also had medical secretary program. After I graduated, I got a job at the hospital, at Duke Hospital, starting in the Department of Surgery at Duke. I never directly worked with Dr. Sabiston in his office, but I was very well aware of him. He was down the hall from me when I first started working at Duke. I was very young and also scared of him. He had quite the presence about him and there was just stories about... he was just so strong willed and not very emotional, not very talkative. So, I kind of grew up at the hospital again, working in the department, hearing stories, meeting the people that worked directly with him. I worked in the Department of Surgery for 35 years.

**Stewart** [00:02:22] Wow.

**Artley** [00:02:23] Yes, even... I definitely knew him, knew of him new, knew the different assistants that he had. I guess that was a longer question... A longer answer then you asked the question.

**Stewart** [00:02:41] No, that's perfect. So, can you just talk a little bit about your... I know you said you were a medical secretary, but what your job entailed. Did you work just generally for the Department of Surgery or were you working for a specific physician?

**Artley** [00:03:01] Yes, I always work for a specific surgeon. My first year there was with one surgeon, but he left Duke to go to another hospital. And then I started working with a general surgeon for a few years and then he left Duke. A lot of them move on up to something else. So, yes, always with a specific surgeon. I'll tell you that in 1980.... Let me think, 1988, I was working with a general surgeon at Duke, just down the hall from Dr. Sabiston again. My mom was diagnosed with lung cancer, it had spread to her brain and was a really sad time. I actually took a leave of absence from the department with the help of the business manager, he was very helpful and I stayed away for a few months. Then I came back and just kind of worked in the department doing whatever they wanted me to do or filling in for anybody who maybe was out for whatever reason. One of my remembrances of Dr. Sabiston during that period of time was and I don't know how he had seen my handwriting. I don't know. The word was, and he never talked directly to me because he always had other people do the talking. He had asked the business manager to... because he had seen my handwriting and he really liked it, he wanted me to address his Christmas cards that year. And I'm like, oh, how nice. During this time when my mom was still sick and I was able to come and go as needed in the department to be with her, if I needed to. I sat one day, I remember specifically sitting there with this long list of people and addresses and addressing all of his Christmas cards for him. He never personally

thanked me. But I didn't expect that. Business manager did because his business manager was his person that did all the talking.

**Stewart** [00:05:28] Right.

**Artley** [00:05:29] That kind of thing. So yeah, I always was with one different surgeon, except for that short period of time when I was able to, kind of, come and go a little easier to be with my mom if I needed to be.

**Stewart** [00:05:47] Do you remember who the business manager was?

**Artley** [00:05:50] Mike Slaughter.

**Stewart** [00:05:52] I actually just spoke with him a few weeks ago.

**Artley** [00:05:56] Oh, good. He would be a perfect person to talk to.

**Stewart** [00:05:58] Yeah. Yeah. That's interesting because he told me a lot about how he acted as a liaison.

**Artley** [00:06:05] Mm hmm.

**Stewart** [00:06:09] Do you remember? I know you just mentioned that a lot of times Dr. Sabiston sent people, individuals to talk to you for him. Did you have a first interaction with him or was the Christmas card thing kind of your first interaction with him?

**Artley** [00:06:30] That would probably be the closest I came to having an interaction with him. But he wasn't personally standing there. He didn't personally ask me. He didn't personally thank me. It was all done through Mike Slaughter. I mean, I would pass Dr. Sabiston over the years. I would pass him in the hallway. I would always speak. I'd be a little afraid of him... I know, so stupid. Now, when I think back on it today, I wouldn't be afraid of him at all, but the older I've gotten. Back then, I would be like, "Hello, Dr. Sabiston" or "Good morning" or "Good afternoon." And he might respond. He might not. I never really knew for sure if he knew my name.

**Stewart** [00:07:21] Do you know what it was that made you kind of timid with him?

**Artley** [00:07:26] Say that again.

**Stewart** [00:07:27] Do you know what it was that made you... Like what you were afraid of?

**Artley** [00:07:32] Oh, I guess because he wasn't real, he just seemed very intimidating. Just because I would... People would talk about him all the time behind his back and you would just hear these stories about how he would treat the surgical residents or how he would treat... There were two women who were the constant people in his office. One was named Nancy. The other was named Catherine. They had a position, a third secretary, a third person in the office. At that position, for whatever reason, they never could keep anybody in that position. We would always call that the revolving door position in that office because people would go work for him and say, "Oh, I can handle him. He's not going to bother me." Something like that. Nobody could stay. He would just... The way he treated you and talked to you or talk to them. And then we would hear about it later on. Not

everybody could take that. He would talk down to you and he would belittle you. It was interesting that the other two, the constant women. I guess they just learned to take it. I mean, he would not get away with the treatment that he gave the third secretary. He could not get away with that today in the culture and climate that we have today. Back then, we called it the revolving door. I do remember one time when one surgeon left and I was looking for another surgeon. Mike Slaughter came to me and he goes, "Mary, would you please go work in Dr. Sabiston office?" And I said, "No, I'm not going to do that. I'm not gonna put myself in that position." I mean, I remember saying that and then there was some other surgeon that came along and said, "Oh, yeah, I'll work with him." But, yeah, he was he was something.

**Stewart** [00:10:00] Yeah.

**Artley** [00:10:02] You may be interviewing other people. Maybe you're hearing similar kind of thing. He was brilliant. He was smart. He did lots of good for the Department of Surgery, but his personal skills were terrible. Just kind of like he ruled with an iron fist kind of a thing. Some residents were so afraid of him. They knew if they got a page on their beepers to his office or whatever, they would start being really worried all the time. He was... He just had that kind of a reputation.

**Stewart** [00:10:39] Yeah, that's very interesting. And you're offering, kind of, a new perspective as someone who worked in an office with him. That's interesting. Do you have any specific stories about Dr. Sabiston that you wanted to share today?

**Artley** [00:10:57] I think I've already shared all... You know, the Christmas card thing is the one that really sticks out in my mind. The fact that he didn't personally ask me, but to this day I'm like, how did he ever see my handwriting? To know that he liked my handwriting. I thought that was odd.

**Stewart** [00:11:16] Yeah.

**Artley** [00:11:16] Was he like sleuthing around in the middle of night, looking at notes on my desk from some other office? I mean, that's just... It's just interesting to me. The funny thing is, the following year, I guess I was... The following year, I would have... I was back permanently again because my mom had passed away. And I was then working with another surgeon. The Christmas card thing was during that period of time when my mom was so sick and I was kind of coming and going to the department because my mom lived close by. So, I was able to go and help her whenever I needed to. That was the Christmas card deal. The following Christmas, I remember wondering, was he going to ask me again?

**Stewart** [00:12:02] Did he?

**Artley** [00:12:03] No. I'm like, well, I wonder who he got the following year. You couldn't type labels. He had to have a handwritten Christmas cards on the envelopes. Anyway.

**Stewart** [00:12:17] Did you ever interact with Mrs. Sabiston?

**Artley** [00:12:22] Maybe, maybe once. Just a sweet, lovely lady. Very, southern. Totally opposite, totally opposite of him. They had, I believe they had three daughters, so he didn't have a son. So, he didn't have a son to carry on the tradition, so to speak, because he's very old school. Too bad he didn't have a son to raise up to be another surgeon. But she

was just a very gracious, lovely lady. But just maybe one time I remember meeting her. And I remember going, "Why is she married to him?" I mean, it was just kind of a feeling.

**Stewart** [00:13:12] Were you around when Dr. Sabiston started to experience his health issues?

**Artley** [00:13:20] Yes, I remember when he had a stroke. He had already... He was... Let me try to remember. I can't remember now if he had his stroke when he was still the chairman or if it was after.

**Stewart** [00:13:40] I think he had stepped down.

**Artley** [00:13:43] It was Dr. Anderson, I think, was the Chairman. Bob Anderson was the Chairman after Dr. Sabiston. And then, yes, I was in the department for sure. I was in pediatric surgery then. I do remember that Dr. Sabiston had a stroke and just being like, oh my gosh, how awful, that kind of thing. For someone, so, vibrant and well known, just who Dr. Sabiston was and how he was revered by everyone, to have a stroke and have no control over that. He could not control that.

**Stewart** [00:14:30] Right.

**Artley** [00:14:31] He couldn't change that.

**Stewart** [00:14:36] Yeah, I've heard several people comment similar things about his stroke. Do you remember the change in leadership from Dr. Sabiston to Dr. Anderson?

**Artley** [00:14:52] Yes, I knew Dr. Anderson. He actually had been at Duke previous to being the chairman. He had been on the faculty in 1974-5-6, somewhere in there. I knew him then. And then he left and went to Minnesota. But he came back. He came back as the Chairman. That's right. I was trying to think a minute. He came back, was recruited to come back to be the Chairman of Surgery.

**Stewart** [00:15:32] Did his... Was his leadership style different than Dr. Sabiston?

**Artley** [00:15:38] Oh, totally different. Totally. Breath of fresh... Breath of fresh air. Yes.

**Stewart** [00:15:46] Would you have worked for him?

**Artley** [00:15:47] Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Stewart** [00:15:53] Do you still work at Duke?

**Artley** [00:15:56] I do. I did retire once about ten years ago. I had been there 35 years. And then five years ago, I went back to Duke part time. I went back through Duke Temporary Services. They placed me in a job in the Department of Medicine with just one physician. But I do most do his research papers, do his travel, I do his meetings. Those kind of responsibilities, I don't do anything clinical, no patient reports or anything like that. It's just three days a week. Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays. So, that's what I'm doing now.

**Stewart** [00:16:43] Well, that sounds like a fun part time.

**Artley** [00:16:47] Yeah. He's really... He's older than me, so he's kind of old school also like me. And so, yeah, he's pretty laid back. He's totally different than surgeons. Surgeons are a little more high strung. I really miss the Department of Surgery. I still go over and see different people that are still there. And the current chairman, Allan Kirk. I remember Allan as a medical student at Duke. That's when I first met him back in the early 80s. So, I've talked to Allan, Dr. Kirk, excuse me, a few times. So, I run into him every now and then and that is even better fresh air, cleaner air, clean air or whatever in the department now. It's just totally different. Totally different than when I first started working at Duke. Totally.

**Stewart** [00:17:48] Do you know? Can you describe how it's different? Do you even...

**Artley** [00:17:52] It's just a little more easygoing. I mean, I think the residents, the chairman's office is, let me try to think of the words... The chairman is more approachable, is more listening, is more caring, is more trying to help everyone have a good experience through that program and all of the staff... They're not afraid of the chairman. They're not afraid of him. Everybody was afraid because of Dr. Sabiston was just so demeaning and so demoralizing in so many ways. How he interacted with people. And like I said, I don't think he could get away with all of that in this day and age, but he... That's the way he was back then. That was his style. And maybe that's the style of a lot of people from that era. But he, I mean, people will say a lot of good things about him. What good he did for the whole surgery and heart surgery was his specialty. It was just his style, his way of interacting with people. I mean, I heard of one resident who would... Who when he finished just trying, he refused to come back to Durham to ever come back and be involved in anything that had to do with Dr. Sabiston. He was not going to come back at all. I remember when Dr. Sabiston passed away, I went to the service, it was Duke Chapel. I don't know if you've ever been there before. It's huge. It's big, right there on campus. Place was packed full of people.

**Stewart** [00:19:48] Wow.

**Artley** [00:19:49] A lot of residents who had trained under him were there. Just a lot of people. I remember saying that one resident who had moved to Virginia, if he was there, I never saw him, but he swore he would never come back. He had been mistreated. He felt like he'd been mistreated. Now, I don't know the details of why he felt that way. But... But yeah, I do remember going to that service. There was all kinds of dignitaries and well-known people there, as well as different members of the Department of Surgery, past and present.

**Stewart** [00:20:32] Well, is there anything else you think we should know about Dr. Sabiston or anything else you'd like to share?

**Artley** [00:20:43] I pretty much said all that I can contribute. I mean, I did not directly work with him and I did have an opportunity long ago. But I remember I just said, no, I'm not gonna do that. They were begging people to fill that position. I'm serious, because people would be like "I'm not going in there. I'm not going to deal with that man." That kind of thing. And I just said, "I'm sorry. No, I'm not going to do it." "Oh, we'll pay you more." I went, "No. I don't want to get in there." I always felt bad for the other two women that just plugged away every single day. I just kept doing what they were doing. They just took it.