

Susan Clayton:

Hello, this is Susan.

Taylor Patterson:

Hi, Susan. This is Taylor Patterson. How are you?

Susan Clayton:

I am good. How are you doing?

Taylor Patterson:

I am terrific. Thank you so, so much for taking the time to do this. I know how busy y'all are, and it means a lot.

Susan Clayton:

Oh, I'm excited about this. It just sounds so crazy to be talking about this man that was just... He was something.

Taylor Patterson:

Right.

Susan Clayton:

I'm ready when you are.

Taylor Patterson:

Yay.

Susan Clayton:

I am on my break at school.

Taylor Patterson:

I can hear you perfectly, and just stop me if you can't hear me, or anything. I'm going to do a little sort of introduction at the beginning, and then ask you for some background on your job title and your history, and how you came to Duke, and that kind of stuff. And of course we love any other stories or anecdotes or anything else you remember at all.

Susan Clayton:

Okay.

Taylor Patterson:

Awesome. So it is February 21st of 2022. This is Taylor Patterson. I'm speaking with Susan Clayton for the David Sabiston oral history project for Duke University Medical. Good morning, Susan.

Susan Clayton:

Good morning.

Taylor Patterson:

Thank you so much. Can you sort of give us a sense of where you grew up and how you ended up involved at Duke?

Susan Clayton:

Yes, I am from Roxboro, North Carolina, which is north of Durham. And to be real honest with you, I became a single parent, and I needed to make a little more money, just to be real, real honest with you. And I'm going to have to put you on hold just a second.

Taylor Patterson:

Don't worry. No worries at all.

Susan Clayton:

And I thought, I have got to go to Duke to work. And so I interviewed, and I interviewed for staff assistant position with the Department of Surgery. And I always have a funny tale, because when they interviewed me for the chairman's office with Dr. Sabiston, I thought, "There is no way that I will be able to get that position." And the next thing I know, I am being contacted that I had gotten the position. And I thought, "Wow, this is very exciting!" Because I remember... I had been at Duke prior to this time also, but I had to come home and take care of two little girls. But I remember I used to walk by Dr. Sabiston's office, and I was almost scared to look in there, because I knew just how important it was. I was just really intimidated by that area. And I used to think, "Wow, I'd love to work there someday."

Well, I got the call after I had applied, and I asked someone later on after a couple of months, I said, "How in the world did I get this job as a staff assistant?" They said, "Well, you were the only one that applied." And I don't mean that in a negative way. We all laughed, because when you work there, you work. And I remember going there, and I was just so intimidated by it. And it was very, very, very professional. You were just on top of your game at all times. And it was seven of us in the Sabiston suite that took care of things. And I mean seven of us.

I remember I was just scared to death at first. And then I got the hang of things, I kind of calmed down. And then I was his staff assistant, and then the residency coordinator position became available. I was transferred into his residency coordinator position, which is basically taking care of the process of getting the graduating medical students that are applying to Duke to get through the surgery program, which was one of the top five in the country at the time, I believe.

So many of the prestigious surgeons now, I'm like, "I knew him. He was one of mine." And I felt like their mom in that role, and I just so thoroughly enjoyed it. And after working with Dr. David Sabiston, you could get a job anywhere you wanted to at Duke. They knew we worked very, very hard, and we had to be on our game. I learned a lot. It was tough. It was tough at times, because you had to dot every I and cross every T. I look back on it and it was an opportunity that I'm so thankful I had, because it affected me for the rest of my career.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

I can tell you a few more stories.

Taylor Patterson:

Amazing. Yeah, no, I love that. Yeah, please.

Susan Clayton:

Well, I just wanted to know if you needed to ask me any other questions specifically, and...

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah, I wanted to say, was he part of the interview process initially, or did you know his reputation before beginning your interview?

Susan Clayton:

I knew the reputation, but you never know, really, until you're in the middle of it. And I remember we used to... I don't even know if I should even tell this- He had a buzzer in his office. Have you heard about the buzzer from anybody?

Taylor Patterson:

No. No.

Susan Clayton:

You haven't? Oh, the buzzer. He had a buzzer under his desk that if he wanted to end the conversation quickly, he would buzz it -I done forgot- one or two times. And then if he needed for me to come to his door and interrupt that visit, that meeting, he would buzz another time, one or two. I remember I would get it so mixed up all the time. I finally had to put a yellow sticky up just right in front of me that would say buzz one time, you do this; buzz twice, to do this. And I remember I would just always get it so mixed up. But actually, I saw him smile one time at me about it.

He was all business. He was all business. But he was one man, I'll never forget this. And I appreciated later on in my career that all the residency letters that went out, whether you got into the residency or did not get accepted, he would hand sign every one of those letters. He would, and it would be hundreds of letters. And this was when I was the residency coordinator. And he would hand sign them, and I'm like, wow. And now, who does that? You know what I'm saying? Who does that?

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow. Oh, that's amazing.

Susan Clayton:

See, my stories are probably funny to you, where the rest of them are not.

Taylor Patterson:

No, it's wonderful.

Susan Clayton:

But I remember that whenever he wanted the chief residents in the office, they would come in that office with their white coats on, long white coats, the chief residents. And so whether or not they had been in surgery or not, they would switch out real fast, and come in there. And they were just like straight as an arrow when they got there, it was amazing.

But also, I remember that when we were doing the interviews for the internships, he saw every applicant, and we would work like five or six weekends straight, almost, during those interview processes. And he would see every one of them for five minutes, five or eight minutes, something like that. And the applicants that were coming would say, "Are we seeing Dr. Sabiston? Are we seeing Dr. Sabiston?" Because if they didn't get to see him, it was like going to Disney without seeing Mickey Mouse back in the day. I mean, really. That's what one told me one time. And Dr. Pappas is going to kill me, I told him I'd be good. But it was like, they all wanted to see him. And he was so kind to them, so encouraging to them. Where he worked us to death and made us cross every T and dot every I, he was so amazingly kind to them, you know?

And I remember being a single parent, I worked every other... Are you still there?

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah, yeah. You worked every other weekend or every other...?

Susan Clayton:

No, I worked- I think it was three weekends out of the month, I would have to go in on Saturday morning. And this is before internet and Google, so he would ask me to go to the library and get these books. I'll never forget loading those volumes. And I had the best arms of anybody at the time, loading these volumes from that library and taking them to that office. And it was amazing. And I think now they'd Google and all of that. But I would just bring those books in, and by the time... I didn't have to work but a half a day, but by the time we were finished, I was totally exhausted from all those volumes that we'd have to go to the library and bring them back for him to read through the weekend, or whatever.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, my-

Susan Clayton:

It really was a very interesting time. It was all business, though. It really was. Except one time, I remember he called me into his office, and I thought, "Oh no, he's going to fire me. I've done something," And he started laughing at me. And I'm like, "Sir..." What I saw was one of his lab coats, was standing up by itself in the middle of the floor. He says, "Susan, don't you think you added a little bit too much starch in this coat?" And this is back in the day when we didn't mind doing this, it was my job. And I remember, I thought, "He's going to fire me." And I remember he started laughing, because I had... I don't know what happened to that coat, but it stood up by itself. And that was a moment I always remembered when times got hard, was me and him, laughing. So.

Taylor Patterson:

Aw. I love that.

Susan Clayton:

You know? That's so sweet.

Taylor Patterson:

And so what you said it was pre-internet. What year, roughly, were you starting?

Susan Clayton:

It was around 18... Good gracious. 1989, '90, something like that.

Taylor Patterson:

199- okay.

Susan Clayton:

'89 or '90. And I remember when it was time, some of his staff... There was a lady, Catherine Slaughter that edited his book. An elderly lady. And I remember when she retired, he would call me into his office, and he'd say, "Susan, get Catherine on the phone." I said, "Dr. Sabiston, she's retired." And he would just- it was hard for him to face the fact, because they were just about the same age, that he too was getting at that point. And it was very hard. And he'd say, "Well, just get her on the phone." And I remember when she passed away, we all, the whole office went over there. And I remember in his textbooks, she had sat there after her retirement, after dedicating so many years to him, of her sitting there editing what she had already edited in his textbooks.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

In red. I'll never forget that.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

She dedicated her life to it. And I don't know if you want to put this in the book, but I remember she had aged a great deal, and I thought to myself, "Oh, no. If I stay here all these years, am I going to look like that?"

But she had aged, but she worked all the time with him in editing all those books. How many languages? I think it was seven languages, or something like that. I don't know.

Taylor Patterson:

Wow.

Susan Clayton:

But she would sit there and she would edit them, even after she retired, because that's all she knew.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh.

Susan Clayton:

You know?

Taylor Patterson:

So you could call her and she would respond, even in retirement.

Susan Clayton:

Yes. Yes.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, that's amazing.

Susan Clayton:

But I did remember-

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:13:58].

Susan Clayton:

I said... You go ahead.

Taylor Patterson:

I was going to ask about the staff of other people, but please go ahead. We love stories.

Susan Clayton:

I didn't hear you. Say that again.

Taylor Patterson:

So there were seven people sort of in his office. There were seven of you, altogether?

Susan Clayton:

Yes. Yes. There was two in the front office. We called it the hot seats. I started out in one of the hot seats, and then we had a residency coordinator. We had Catherine that did the editing of the book. And I think it was two of them, Catherine and Barbara. And then we had Courtney Ryan, who actually retired from Duke also. She did the OR scheduling and something else, which was under his umbrella. And we

had one other girl, I cannot remember who she was. Let me see, that's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Yeah. At times, we would go through a turnover of people, especially in the front office area.

But you know, he taught me what hard work was about. And he was tough as nails at times, but as long as you-we always knew it would pass, is what I'm just going to say. We knew that it was our time for today, it'll pass. We had a super support group with the seven of us that really worked so well together, and we knew if he was not having a good day with this one, that it'd be my day tomorrow, and this and that. But he was so highly respected. It's amazing that after he passed away, you look back and think, "Wow, wow." He really did a great job with bringing up through the ranks these surgeons that are in such high places, like Dr. Kirk. I remember him as my resident, he's now chairman of the Department of Surgery at Duke.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

I just met so many nice people. He was so kind to the students. We had the core course in surgery. I did do the second year core course in surgery, and the fourth years, and the rotations. And he was so kind to them, so kind. But then to us he was like, he was a little tough. But I knew as soon as I put Sabiston's office down on my resume, I could have went and ran any office at Duke. I don't have a huge education, but I had worked really hard with him, and he wrote letters of recommendation when I needed them. And when he retired, they moved into another building. I don't know why, but he thought I was supposed to go with him. And I didn't mind, but I'm like, "Oh no," because I had been looking forward to not quite as much stress.

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah. Of course.

Susan Clayton:

I called Dr. Anderson's office. I said, "Dr. Anderson, I'm over here in the science building. You got to get me back. You got to get me back." So he moved me back, but gently, though. Very gently. It was awesome.

Taylor Patterson:

Did you have-

Susan Clayton:

Do what, hon?

Taylor Patterson:

Did you have training in sort of like the typing or what kind of-

Susan Clayton:

We had the computer then. And I remember... I'm from a small town in Roxboro and I had not been exposed to that yet. And I got there, and there were the computers, and I thought, "Where in the world do I put this cursor?" I mean, really. And the girl that was in the hot seat, she taught me all about the computers. I got real good. And then the residency program, we had a system in place. It was not electronic, it was all paper. And I met some of the finest young people I have ever met in my life. And the faculty, I know we just lost Dr. Jones and Dr. Wolfe. They used to interview these applicants for me. It was a time I'll never forget.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

Never forget. With the good and the bad.

Taylor Patterson:

Of course, of course. But it sounds like you had a really good close knit group of women, sort of supporting each other there?

Susan Clayton:

Well, we did. And actually, he and I ended up one day- the girl in the hot seat, something was said that wasn't very nice, and so she didn't come back at lunch. She just didn't come back, and she was fantastic.

And I went... You had to knock before you went in. And he said, "Yes, Susan?" And I said, "Dr. Sabiston." And I remember just letting it go. I said, "Sir, we've got another one that's just bit the dust." He said, "And what does that mean?" And I told him. I thought to myself, "I got to be honest with you, because we can't do this work without Marsha/Marcia."

And so he's like, "Susan. What?" And I said, "We got another one that's bit the dust." And that's when he wanted me to explain what happened. And I'm the kind that I say it with respect. And I said, "Sir, what you said to her didn't sound very kind, and it hurt her feelings, and she's gone." "Get her back in here, Susan. I would like to talk to her." I said, "Oh no, no. Not now, because she'll know I told you!" But he did apologize, and she came back. But I know we lost a lot of people in between, but I tried to keep it peaceful, is what I did.

Taylor Patterson:

Of course.

Susan Clayton:

You know?

Taylor Patterson:

Can you talk a little bit about his daily routine? What would he be early enough for... Are we having coffee in the office, or is he there before you get there? Or are you the first-



Susan Clayton:

Like I said, this is back in the day when we didn't mind doing this kind of thing. I'm just very blessed to not being ever- me getting coffee for somebody, I was never abused in any way with things.

But yes, we actually had a lady who did all of our copying, our mail, and went and got that coffee; and it had to be sitting outside of his office at a certain time in the morning, and it was there. She had her own little space in the file room that she would be available to him for copying, because we were all so busy. And actually it was eight of us then, and actually she's still at Duke. He had to have his coffee, and then his appointments would start. We could only have these appointments for maybe at the max 15 minutes, I think it was. And if he wanted it to end sooner, he'd do that buzzer thing. But it was a constant thing. It was a constant with the faculty coming in, because at that time he was over all the orthopedics, neuro. It wasn't different departments back then, it was all under David C. Sabiston Junior.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

Yes. All of it. I may have to get you to call me back a little bit. I don't have to yet, but I think they may be coming back.

But I remember one time, another tender moment; because I know with you interviewing [crosstalk 00:21:57], those may be far and in between. But one time he sent me to the bookstore. One of his grandsons... I think he only had maybe one, maybe two grandsons. But this one, he only had one at the time. He went and told me to get the smallest lab coat that I could get, and so I did -it was his grandson's birthday- and a stethoscope.

And so I went, and they actually had lab coats for children. I went and got that, it was probably a little bit big on him, and a stethoscope. He wanted to give him that for his birthday.

Taylor Patterson:

Cute. Aw.

Susan Clayton:

I know.

Susan Clayton:

But I also remember... It's coming to me now, I'm just rolling it off. Stop me if I need to.

Saturday mornings was grand rounds, and the chiefs' meeting. And on Monday morning, I would get this piece of paper of who attended grand rounds. If anybody fell asleep in those grand rounds, he had written beside their name. And he'd say, "Susan, get them in. Could you make an appointment for them to come in here, please?"

Taylor Patterson:

Uh-oh.

Susan Clayton:

Oh, yeah. But I look back now, I laugh a little bit, but they probably had been working all weekend. But it was just amazing. Some of the head surgeons there, I remember them as my residents and my interns, and they survived it all, and so did I. In a good way, in a good way.

Taylor Patterson:

So you mentioned sort of that dotting the I's and crossing the T's, stuff like that. Was there anything sort of in the office routine that he was especially particular about? Was it like that for grammatical stuff, or just the whole...

Susan Clayton:

Well, I'm not sure about the medical staff. In his office, it was middle initials. Everybody had to have a middle initial. I know that sounds silly now. And he said, "Everybody has a middle initial." So when I would be doing letters for him, for anything, it had to have a middle. Some people would spend hours looking for a middle initial, because we knew we were going to get it, if we didn't find that darn middle initial. And I know this sounds silly. One day, one of the ladies said, "Susan, why does he not chew on you like he chews on us?"

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah?

Susan Clayton:

And they said, "How did you find all those middle initials?" I said, "Well, after I've looked for 30 minutes and I don't find one, I think there must not be one, so I'll make it up."

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Susan Clayton:

I thought, "I am not spending more time, I'm making it up." And I think they all started doing it. But most times, most people do have a middle initial. Oh, yeah. It was a middle initial thing. It was crazy.

Taylor Patterson:

So in a similar vein, do you know the full name of... I guess it was an assistant that they called Brad, or maybe it was Brad, or Bradsheer, or something like that?

Susan Clayton:

Brad? Brad... Wasn't he his driver?

Taylor Patterson:

Or something like that?

Susan Clayton:

No, Brad was in his lab. That's what that was. Brad was in the lab. I cannot speak much on Brad for some reason-

Taylor Patterson:

Yes. But they were just wondering if that was his full name, or if it was like short for... or if they called him Brad because his last name was Bradsheer, or something like that?

Susan Clayton:

Oh, gosh. I hadn't even thought about him in years. Wow, I can't remember. It seems like he was in Dr. Sabiston's lab, and was with him forever, it seems like he was. I can't remember. Let me think who you could ask about that. Have you interviewed Courtney Ryan? She was with him for a while, and she actually ended up-

Taylor Patterson:

I didn't speak to her personally, but I'll check and see if the other interviewers have...Sorry, go ahead.

Susan Clayton:

Go ahead, honey. No, you go ahead.

Taylor Patterson:

Did you have any interactions with Mrs. Sabiston a lot, or was she sort of in and out of the office, or not as much?

Susan Clayton:

Mrs. Sabiston, I didn't see her a lot, but she called often. We had a list of put-throughs on the phone, and she was one of them, of course, and the chancellor, and the president of the university. We had our put-throughs. She was so- such a southern belle, such a southern lady. So kind. So we've always wondered, "What in the world, I wonder how he acts at home." But she was amazing, she was amazing. Very kind. Very, very kind.

Susan Clayton:

But when he passed away... I know there have been some horror stories, I know that. But to see the people that came back to show their last respects made me cry. Made me cry.

Taylor Patterson:

I love that.

Susan Clayton:

It was just so many there. So many.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

So many. Yes, yes. He built a great program.

Taylor Patterson:

Right. He touched so many people. So you're starting in '89 or '90, and he still had this reputation for... it's an intense work environment. Did you get a sense that it was always like that, or had he mellowed out a little, or was it-

Susan Clayton:

I think it was always like that, to be real honest with you. I think it was intense. When I went to work there, I had been told that. Catherine, the lady that passed away that had been editing his book, she was there maybe a couple of years before she retired, maybe three. I can't quite remember. But I remember when I went there, we all thought the retirement age was 70, but they increased it to 75, and we all about had a heart attack.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh my gosh.

Susan Clayton:

We're like, "Oh no, it's going to be longer. It's going to be longer." But it was intense, but it was also... Taylor, I would go to different meetings across the country for residency program coordinators, and I was always so proud to say I was from Duke Department of Surgery, and Dr. David Sabiston.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

It was like everybody kind of looked to me for the way we did it. You know.

Taylor Patterson:

Really?

Susan Clayton:

I do remember those positives. I remember I was just proud, just proud. I mean, like I said, I know there's so many horror stories, but... Oh, I need to tell you this. He had a memory, he had a photographic memory. If he told you he saw something, you better look til you could find it, because it was there. He had this photographic memory that was crazy. Crazy.

Taylor Patterson:

Wow.

Susan Clayton:

See, now you've got me started before my students come back. We used to have... Was it for the second years? I think it was the second years. We'd have a spaghetti dinner... Or maybe it was for the interns.

When they first come in, we'd have a spaghetti dinner at his home. And I remember going up to his home. I'd have to get there early, and get the name tags out with the picture composites and things on it. And I remember my husband was with me. And I said, "Now, Donnie..." As soon as we walked up to his house, got there early... It's like, all the people in the yard just kind of disappeared, because they were manicuring the lawn and all that. I told my husband, I said, "Now, he's going to tell you how wonderful I am." And as soon as we got there, he goes, "Donnie, I just want to tell you what we couldn't do without Susan here." He was kind in that way, but when he got me in that office, man, I knew I had to work. But he would do this spaghetti dinner for the interns, and it was like a different person. It was like a different person. Isn't that interesting?

Taylor Patterson:

The social stuff, or kind of like

Susan Clayton:

Yeah. Oh, yes. Very kind and laughing. But we could make him mad, and he'd get real red in the face. He could get really mad, and he turned red, and we thought, "Oh no."

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, no.

Susan Clayton:

We've got a red face going.

Taylor Patterson:

Was it just that y'all couldn't find something, or...

Susan Clayton:

Well, we were very, very busy, and it wasn't always any big deal at times. It's just, you knew you better be on your game at every moment. I think it was at every moment. And I'll never forget this, this office. It was two of us in the front office. This is before the residency coordinator. We were in a horseshoe area where the third floor waiting room is now. And they had these hanging lights over the desk, and I think it was that the lights were down, like a study. I remember so many times he would buzz me, and he would seem on edge when he buzzed. He would buzz me, and I would jump up, and I hit my head on that dang lamp so many times it wasn't funny. And I'd go in there, and you'd have to knock, and then he'd tell me to come in. And it wasn't as bad as I thought it was. We were just on edge, we were on edge. And all his faculty knew that he was gone when they'd walk in our suite, and the lights were on.

Taylor Patterson:

Right. Right. Aware he's out of town?

Susan Clayton:

Yes. They knew he was out of town.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, that's so funny.

Susan Clayton:

I know.

Taylor Patterson:

I know the residents had to have the immaculate white coats and the neck ties, and everything like that. Was there any kind of similar attention to detail with you... Did y'all sort of make sure to be very buttoned-up and tucked in and everything?

Susan Clayton:

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I even believe at the time...it was during his days there. And I think this might have been throughout Duke. Oh, gosh, we could get in all kinds of trouble nowadays. But I think we had to have the pantyhose. I'm pretty sure we all had to wear the pantyhose, unless you wore the pants. But we were all looking good.

Taylor Patterson:

Right.

Susan Clayton:

We did, we were dressed to represent that office in the way that he wanted us to.

Taylor Patterson:

That he wanted, right. So, in terms of his physical space, was his office sort of very immaculate, or what was his set-up like?

Susan Clayton:

Well, the front office where people would come in... I don't keep a clean desk, but I knew to keep whatever it was in the drawer, if it wasn't in an orderly manner. His office was pretty clean. It really was, because I remember we would go in, and straighten up his desk a little bit when he was out of town. And he maybe would have boxes under his desk, but other than that, not that much on top. I do remember that.

Taylor Patterson:

So, it was fairly organized with that?

Susan Clayton:

Yes.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, that's amazing.

Susan Clayton:

Yes, that's the word, yes. You've got me just thinking about all those times. I remember, as staff assistants or residence coordinators, people would say, "Y'all make more money than us up there." And we'd say, "Come on up. We get combat pay."

Come on. Come on, and join us. I hope I've given you some insight of some really nice moments.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

Susan Clayton:

I'm not going to downplay, because I know that some people had some really hard times. But I really felt like after working there- I had to work there, because I was a single parent. I needed that job, I needed that money. And I know that gave me the stamina to hang in there. Not to be abused, by any means, because I'm not going to do that. I'm a strong woman, but it made me be able to try to... I'm the kind of person that I try to see through it, and just try to find the joy bombs in every situation, and we had some of those moments. We had some of those moments.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, I love that. Like you were saying the starched coat...

Susan Clayton:

You had to do that. And I don't know how the faculty, or the residents, could change from OR, and come in there... They'd come in, straightening up their ties sometimes, and then we'd send them on in. Now, that was a little over the top at times, because I mean, they're operating. But that's how they would come in, with the starched coat.

Taylor Patterson:

Wow.

Susan Clayton:

It really was. Until that time I put too much in his. . .

Taylor Patterson:

I love it, yeah. Did you get the sense that people just sort of, would emulate each other, or was there any kind of orientation at the beginning? Like, oh, these are the things you're going to want to be wary of?

Susan Clayton:

Yeah. You mean wearing?

Susan Clayton:

I think it had the reputation. I think they knew, I just think they knew. I don't remember going to an orientation like that. I think that probably it was mentioned in the orientation for the interns, I'm not certain about that. I think that was just well-known.

Taylor Patterson:

I love it. So did you get a sense that he was sort of championing women and minorities in the residency program during that time period? Or was that a little earlier?

Susan Clayton:

Well-

Taylor Patterson:

Or hard to say?

Susan Clayton:

I know it was all men at one time, now. But I think we already had a lady there in the residency program, when I came. When you saw the Hall of fame, it was few. I don't know why that was, at the time. I can't say, because I never heard that. Well, I would hear that now we have more women coming into our residency program.

Taylor Patterson:

I see.

Susan Clayton:

I never really heard him say that, but later we did have lots more women...Go ahead.

Taylor Patterson:

Well, I was just going to say, in terms of, you would sort of start out in the hot seat, and do your first year or so there. Is that right?

Susan Clayton:

Well, I started out in what they call the second seat. I didn't want the first seat. It was number one and number two. But I don't know why it was one and two, we were both up front there. And then I moved to the residency program, which was right outside his office. He had a door that had a shortcut to my office.

So when he came in, whatever he needed, I needed to be able to give it to him immediately. And I do remember one time, right before an interview, he was asking for something. I could tell he was getting a little upset. And I said, "Sir, if you'll step outside that door for just a minute, I will find it." Because I remember I was getting very frustrated with it. And he did it. He stepped outside, and then I said, "Here it is."

Taylor Patterson:

Here it is. Oh, I get that. Yeah.

Susan Clayton:

Yes, yes. But-

Taylor Patterson:



He was anticipating that you would know what he needed based on his schedule or something, or he would ask for it?

Susan Clayton:

Yes. We did, but it was just when someone's standing over you-

Taylor Patterson:

Of course.

Susan Clayton:

... "If you step outside that door for just a minute." But we just knew we had to have it, we had to know it. And it was anxious. It was anxious at times, because you just... Even though I don't know of anybody that he really fired, they just kind of left, and didn't come back.

Taylor Patterson:

Right.

Susan Clayton:

And I'm talking about the staff.

Taylor Patterson:

Just kind of took off, right?

Susan Clayton:

Yes. Yes.

Taylor Patterson:

That's so interesting. And he had sort of a very formal interpersonal manner, is that true?

Susan Clayton:

Very formal, very formal.

Taylor Patterson:

Okay.

Susan Clayton:

Very formal.

Taylor Patterson:

So would he just pop into your office through the adjoining door, when you were the coordinator for the-

Susan Clayton:

Residents, yes. But I'd hear it opening, and I was like, "Oh, get ready!" I got to where... I'm not a timid person. If you were timid, it just didn't work for you. And I knew I was giving him my best, and I'm like, "You just give me just a minute." And like I said, I got to where I'd make up those middle initials. I'm like, "I've got to make this work."

Taylor Patterson:

I love it.

Susan Clayton:

But I just became very organized working there. I became where I could wear multiple hats. I could juggle a lot of things. And a lot of times, like I said, I know there are horror stories, and I'm not going to get into all those horror stories. It was just a stressful working environment. But I had also been with him at his home, and the dinners, and I kind of would focus on those a lot of the time.

Taylor Patterson:

Right, right.

Susan Clayton:

The spaghetti dinners, and things like that.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, that's so sweet. So was he in the kitchen helping with the sauce and stuff?

Susan Clayton:

Oh, no. No, no, no. And he wasn't the type that would come in and say, "Good morning. How was y'all's weekend?" Nothing like that, it was not that.

Taylor Patterson:

No small talk.

Susan Clayton:

It wasn't that warm and fuzzy. No.

Taylor Patterson:

Okay. And you had a sense that, I mean, even compared to other surgical offices and stuff, it was very-

Susan Clayton:

It wasn't like that, no. It wasn't like that.

Taylor Patterson:

Okay.

Susan Clayton:

Because I had Dr. Friedman and his assistant right beside me, and then I had orthopedics right down there. And they were not like that. No.

Taylor Patterson:

Okay. Okay.

Susan Clayton:

No. And when you'd see him coming, it seemed like everybody was straightening up down the hall.

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah. We've heard great stories about people like throwing coffee cups, because they didn't want to get caught drinking coffee in the hall, or something like that?

Susan Clayton:

Yes, yes.

Taylor Patterson:

I love it.

Susan Clayton:

And I knew it going to be a lot of that. But I just had to share some of those moments that I could... you know, about his grandchild, and just the time about the coat. I mean, they were far and few, but still, he taught us all. He taught us all so much, and he built a fantastic program that we were all very proud of.

Taylor Patterson:

And then you could just go anywhere in the country, and work in any kind of office, right?

Susan Clayton:

Absolutely. Absolutely. After they knew I worked with David Sabiston. That's true.

Taylor Patterson:

Really? Oh, wow. Oh, wow. And just when you first met him, you already kind of knew that reputation in advance? Would you say that was pretty common, nationally and everything?

Susan Clayton:

I don't know if it was nationally known. I think especially among the office staff. I remember when he was away, when I first came. There's the group, and we were all sitting there having lunch with the lights on one day when he wasn't there. And I hadn't been there long. "Gosh," I said. That's when I told them. I said, "How did I...I couldn't believe I got this job." They said, "Well, you the only one that applied." Within Duke, within Duke. So, nobody within Duke applied. Really. And he had a business manager. I don't know if you've interviewed Mike... Oh, geez, what was his name?

Taylor Patterson:

He was a business manager? We can look it up, yeah.

Susan Clayton:

Oh, gosh. What was his name? It just left me. Anyway, if he had trouble, he would call this man that was head of the business office, and he would get him to handle different things for him, as far as if they were not handling things as he wanted them to. He didn't really like confrontation, with telling you, "I want you to answer the phone better. I want you to do this, and that." So he would call Mike, I cannot remember Mike's last name, but he would come over, and address it with us.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, okay. So it was sort of like a step removed a little bit?

Susan Clayton:

Kind of, not any confrontation like that.

Taylor Patterson:

Good. Interesting. Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

I know. Michael Slaughter. That's who it was.

He would call Mike, and said, "Can you handle that? Susan's being too loud, or something answering the phone."

Taylor Patterson:

I like it.

Susan Clayton:

That happened one time. I'm like, "Why couldn't he have told me?" That's what I told Mike. I said, "Why couldn't he tell me?" He said he doesn't like things like this.

Taylor Patterson:

He doesn't like it. So you said when he was out of the office, you said you would have the desk lights on or off?

Susan Clayton:

On. We would brighten it up.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, okay. Because he wanted it more like a study atmosphere or...?

Susan Clayton:

Well, no, we wanted it. We'd only have two hanging lights in the office area. And with the computer lights, of course. So it was like a study, or a library. So when he was out of town, we'd cut all the overhead lights on. And that's how everybody knew he was out of town.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, that's so funny. Oh, I love it. Did he travel often for conferences and stuff? And were you coordinating all of that?

Susan Clayton:

Yes, we coordinated it, but... He traveled some. "He didn't travel enough," is what we used to say. "He didn't travel enough." He didn't travel a whole lot.

Taylor Patterson:

And we've heard he jumped right back into grand rounds and everything, right off a flight?

Susan Clayton:

Oh, yeah. The grand rounds were something when he said, "Susan, could you..." I mean, he wouldn't tell me why, but I could read it on the piece of paper, the list of everybody who was there, that he was dozing during, or so-and-so wasn't there. You had to be at grand rounds.

Taylor Patterson:

Okay. I see. I bet.

Susan Clayton:

So probably instead of listening, he was probably looking around, taking names, but anyway.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, I love it. Oh, wow. So you were there Monday through Friday. Was it like kind of a nine to five schedule, or what was the timeframe?

Susan Clayton:

It was 8:00 to 5:00, 5:30. And then on Saturdays. Oh, I worked probably three Saturdays out of the month in the mornings till around 12:00, yes.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh my goodness. And did you ever have to like bring your girls into the office or anything, or were there ever children around, or anything?

Susan Clayton:

No, I was very thankful that their grandparent lived close by. But I'd be home in the afternoon, and we'd play a little bit, but then I'm like, "Oh, mama's got to take a nap." Because I mean, really. I'd had to go to the library.

Taylor Patterson:

Yeah. Did you have like a cart to bring these books back, or-

Susan Clayton:

Not at the time. We didn't have a cart.

Taylor Patterson:

Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

We didn't have a cart, no. And it's just so funny now, with Google and stuff, I thought, "If they only knew!"

Taylor Patterson:

I love that, like carting it all back. Oh, wow.

Susan Clayton:

Yes, yes. Yes.

Taylor Patterson:

Well, that's a cool, special experience, and it's so nice to be able to get some sort of color and insight into what the office itself was like.

Susan Clayton:

Right. Like I said, I just wanted to be able to do that. Because it was tough, it was tough at times. A lot of the time. And it was tougher for some of the other ones, but like I said, the support group we had in there was amazing, and we just got each other through. And we just like, "Okay, this will pass. This will pass."

Taylor Patterson:

Because it always did, right? It was like the next day...

Susan Clayton:

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I hope I've been able to help some, Taylor.

Taylor Patterson:

You have been so, so wonderful. We absolutely just completely appreciate it, and I will send you the release form so that they can archive the interview and everything like that, and I can send you the transcript once I get that all edited. And maybe we'll email if we have any follow up questions? And please do, if you think of anything at all, any other stories or anything like that, absolutely shoot me an email, because we can add it as a written sort of addendum. It's just so nice to talk to somebody who had a lot of actual face-to-face kind of contact with him.

Susan Clayton:

I definitely will, because I keep thinking there were a couple of more I was going to share with you, and I will. They called me early this morning at the last minute to sub today. So, I will. I definitely will.

Taylor Patterson:

Thank you so much, Susan. That would be amazing. I'll email you in a few days and just follow up to check and see if we can pick your brain about any other stories, or something like that. You've just been really wonderful. We so appreciate it.

Susan Clayton:

Thank you so much, honey. Bye-bye.