

Dr. John Mannick

Interviewer: Emily Stewart

July 30, 2019

Stewart [00:00:00] Alright. This is Emily Stewart and I'm interviewing Dr. John Mannick [on July 31, 2019], who was the chief of surgery at Peter Bent... Sorry, Peter Bent Brigham Hospital around the same time that Dr. Sabiston served as chief of surgery at Duke. Is that correct?

Mannick [00:00:14] Oh that's roughly correct. Yeah.

Stewart [00:00:16] OK.

Mannick [00:00:17] Except the hospital is now called the Brigham and Women's Hospital and has had since 1980. OK.

Stewart [00:00:26] But it was Peter Bent Brigham when you were there, right?

Mannick [00:00:30] No, I was the first chief within the new hospital actually.

Stewart [00:00:33] Oh OK. Thanks for clarifying that.

Mannick [00:00:38] But that's all right. This has to do with Dr. Sabiston not me.

Stewart [00:00:41] Yeah. Yeah. So... Well we want to start off by talking about you a little bit. So where you grew up, what got you interested in medicine, and where you first went to medical school. If you just want to give us a brief background about yourself.

Mannick [00:00:57] Well I grew up in the state of Washington in a small town called Yakima. And I was lucky enough to have a scholarship to Harvard as an undergraduate. I went there and then I went to Harvard Medical School and I had my surgical training at Mass General. And then I had jobs in Richmond, Virginia. Then back in Boston and then I was made the Chief of Surgery at the Brigham when my predecessor, Dr. Francis Moore, retired. That's my story. OK.

Stewart [00:01:30] Yeah.

Mannick [00:01:31] Well I also did some research with a doctor called E. Donald Thomas on the, on immunity and rejection and tolerance and things like that. And fortunately for me he won the Nobel Prize in 1990.

Stewart [00:01:50] Oh wow. Oh wow.

Mannick [00:01:52] Wasn't I lucky?

Stewart [00:01:53] Yeah. Yeah that's awesome.

Mannick [00:01:58] Yep.

Stewart [00:01:59] So do you remember your first interaction with Dr. Sabiston?

Mannick [00:02:05] I can't tell you what the first was, but since we were both academic surgeons and that is a fairly small world. I remember seeing him and talking to him when I was a junior faculty member in Richmond, Virginia and and of course I've met him multiple times at multiple meetings since then.

Stewart [00:02:32] So, do you have any stories you want to share about Dr. Sabiston and yourself.

Mannick [00:02:43] Well I would say that Dr. Sabiston is the, let's say has, the least number of conceivable stories to tell about him of anybody I know. He was always an absolute straight arrow. And so we haven't got any little personal weaknesses to discuss. I don't think, unless I missed them all.

Stewart [00:03:07] No, that's totally fine. Would you talk a little bit about the relationship between Duke and Brigham at the time?

Mannick [00:03:17] Well, I would say there was no relationship that I can think of except for the fact that you know obviously we thought at the Brigham that our biggest competitor in terms of Surgical Research was Duke. And we thought that was totally because of Dr. Sabiston's influence on the department down there.

Stewart [00:03:43] So, I also have a note here to ask you about Ted Pappas.

Mannick [00:03:51] Ted Pappas was a resident of ours who Dr. Sabiston hired which I thought was clever of him because I was trying to hire him too, but he went with Dr. Sabiston. I thought he's great and has remained so. I gather he heads the V.A. surgical service there or did for a while, is that right?

Stewart [00:04:12] Yeah. Yeah. That's right. Yeah that was a smart move for Dr. Sabiston, I would say.

Mannick [00:04:21] Yeah, he won. But you know, we we all win some and lose some. But Ted was somebody that I had sort of groomed to be a star in G.I. surgery and its research and research related to that. And I was sad to lose him to Dr. Sabiston, but I managed to get somebody away from another surgical department to take his place at the Brigham. So, we came out even.

Stewart [00:04:54] Yeah. Yeah. You won in a sense too. Well, that's funny. So, how do you think Dr. Sabiston influenced the field of surgery during his career?

Mannick [00:05:07] Well, I regard him as sort of a symbol of the modern academic surgeon, namely somebody who does basic research as well as takes care of patients and operates. In other words, part of a three pronged duty for the academic surgeon in the present world and I think Dr. Sabiston was probably the most successful in building up surgical research that was respectable and science based and so on that of anybody I know. I was trying to keep up with him the whole time and maybe he was trying to keep up with me some of the time so [laughs]. But I do think that my respect for him was that he symbolized the scientific based academic surgeon and the scientific based academic surgical department.

Stewart [00:06:03] Yeah I've heard that a lot, the scientific base. How do you think... What is your take on his impact on training surgeons too?

Mannick [00:06:18] Well, I think he had an enormous impact because he was turning out future professors.

Stewart [00:06:29] Yeah. So you've already kind of said, would you describe your relationship as a professional relationship? You didn't have a personal relationship with him?

Mannick [00:06:38] Well, I think we were friends. I mean, you know, friendly colleagues. He wasn't a close personal friend of mine. We didn't seek one another out for a drink or anything, but we certainly got along well at the various meetings we attended. And, you know, would occasionally have dinner together. We weren't close friends, but we were certainly friendly compatriots, I think you would say.

Stewart [00:07:04] Yeah. So did you mostly see him at academic conferences and such?

Mannick [00:07:09] Yeah. Well, of course, during the course of events he invited me to be a visiting professor at Duke and I had invited him to be a visiting professor at Harvard. So, you know, we did things like that too. And of course, I would see him at meetings and Aggie with him, of course, and I always had my wife, Virginia with me. So, we had the usual, I think, friendly relationship of academic surgeons who were running departments.

Stewart [00:07:41] Right. That makes sense. What were some of the societies that you both were in, if you could remember?

Mannick [00:07:47] [Laughs] Well, I suppose we would start with the American College of Surgeons. Then we certainly used to attend the Society of University Surgeons, where the the young surgical investigators are clustered and also run that organization. And we were also together at the American Surgical Association, which is the professors club and, you know, and we both ended up president of that, for example and so forth.

Stewart [00:08:23] Oh OK. Yeah that's a lot of academic conferences and surgical conferences together.

Mannick [00:08:32] Exactly. Now...

Stewart [00:08:33] Did you interact...

Mannick [00:08:35] Oh and we were both on the American Board of Surgery. So, we saw one another in that capacity as well. I guess, if I remember correctly.

Stewart [00:08:44] Yeah yeah. Did you interact with him much after he transitioned out of being Chief of Surgery at Duke?

Mannick [00:08:54] Well, I think he and I probably stopped, you know, as frequent contact when I retired at the Brigham and he retired at Duke. So.

Stewart [00:09:04] Okay.

Mannick [00:09:05] Yeah.

Stewart [00:09:05] When did you...

Mannick [00:09:06] I would say I didn't I didn't see too much of him other than to say hello in the street, so to speak.

Stewart [00:09:11] Yeah. When did you retire from the Brigham?

Mannick [00:09:15] I retired as chief of surgery and in 1994.

Stewart [00:09:20] OK. Awesome. Well I always... I already kind of asked it, but I always like to ask the question too... Is there anything that you think we should know about him on record?

Mannick [00:09:41] I would say there's there's not a single thing that besmirches his record. He's [laughs] the most perfect individual I ever saw at this job. So, you know, there are no bad stories to tell about him that I know of.

Stewart [00:09:58] Right. What made him so perfect do you think?

Mannick [00:10:01] I think just an intense personal drive and a pleasant personality.

Stewart [00:10:10] Yeah.

Mannick [00:10:11] I don't know anybody who wants to say anything bad about Dave Sabiston. I can't think of anybody.

Stewart [00:10:18] So, you mentioned Aggie a little bit too. Did you or your wife have a relationship with her?

Mannick [00:10:25] Well only, you know, as we would with people we would see frequently at various meetings. We are not close friends but we certainly got along.

Stewart [00:10:36] Yeah that's awesome. Well, those are kind of all the prepared questions I had for you. You seem to think very highly of him...

Mannick [00:10:47] Well, he represented, I think, a really good symbol of the transition of Surgical Research from you know another version of a common operation or things like that to, you know, scientific investigation of problems that patients, surgical patients have. And he certainly symbolized, I think, that transition in American medicine perhaps also symbolized by Dr. Francis Moore, who preceded me at the Brigham, who certainly had a worldwide reputation as being a surgeon scientist. But Dr. Sabiston certainly filled that bill for his department and much of the country.

Stewart [00:11:39] Yeah and like you've already said too, his impact on training surgeons seems part of that.

Mannick [00:11:45] Yeah.

Stewart [00:11:47] Yeah. Well is there anything else you want to talk about about him today? Anything that you think that, like I said any story you think of any.

Mannick [00:12:02] Well, you know I'm sure he had some close friends who caught him in a weak moment. But I mean, I certainly never saw him do anything other than do his job, be nice to people, and get a lot of credit for what he did.

Stewart [00:12:16] Right. Right. Yeah. That's great. Even if they're like good you know it doesn't... I'm not asking for bad stuff here, just any anything that you would want to share would be great.

Mannick [00:12:32] No, I really I don't have anything. I mean, [laughs] the, you know, the perfect straight arrow was David Sabiston.

Stewart [00:12:42] Yeah. I like that.

Mannick [00:12:44] Yeah.

Stewart [00:12:44] That's great. Well, if that is all for you that's all...

Mannick [00:12:53] Well, I did hear one story that I've always treasured about him. I don't know whether it's true or not. Is that, as you know, he wasn't a great believer in personal athletics or exercise. The story is that one of the staff members at Duke was a inveterate exercise buff who worked out all the time and he finally unexpectedly died and Sabiston, with the rest of the faculty, was going by the coffin at the funeral and somebody said to Dave, "Well, doesn't so-and-so look good." And this is the corpse they're speaking of. And Dave replied, "Well, he should he exercised every day."

Stewart [00:13:43] That is funny.

Mannick [00:13:47] And that may be true. It sounds like him to tell you the truth.

Stewart [00:13:53] Was he always... Would you describe him as always been kind of saying what was on his mind?

Mannick [00:14:00] No. No. I think he was very careful in what he said. That's why he avoided offending people. But I think that was one he couldn't resist.

Stewart [00:14:11] I've heard some residents talk about his very rigid rules. Did you hear anything about that in the training program?

Mannick [00:14:21] I think he ran the tightest ship in the entire United States. I have no doubt about it. The results were good, weren't they?

Stewart [00:14:31] Yeah. Yeah. Would you view your leadership style as different than his?

Mannick [00:14:36] Yeah. I think I was a little looser.

Stewart [00:14:39] OK.

Mannick [00:14:41] But, I mean, I tried not to be an utter idiot either so [laughs].

Stewart [00:14:46] Well, that's good. Would you say that a lot of the doctors that came out as surgeons that came out of your program were at the same level as the ones that Duke.... Like where they competing for the same jobs so to speak?

Mannick [00:15:09] Probably. I think, you know, I don't know. I'm probably being unfair to a lot of other chiefs of surgery. But in terms of academic productivity, that means papers written, programs that people were speaking on, and so forth. I thought we were doing pretty well and the biggest competitor was always Duke.

Stewart [00:15:30] Mhm. That's interesting. You guys were, kind of, rivals.

Mannick [00:15:36] Well I thought we were. I don't know whether he thought we were.

Stewart [00:15:40] Was it a friendly rivalry?

Mannick [00:15:44] Yeah.

Stewart [00:15:45] Well I want to thank you for your time today. Those are kind of all the questions I had...

Mannick [00:15:54] Well, I think those should be sufficient to be. You know, there is nothing one could ever say except he certainly did a wonderful job.