David C. Sabiston, Jr, MD

Robert Anderson, MD, MBA

Dr David C. Sabiston, Jr, Professor and Chairman Emeritus of Duke University Medical Center's Department of Surgery (Fig 1), died on January 26, 2009, after a long illness. He was 84 years old. A native of North Carolina, Dr Sabiston received his BS degree from the University of North Carolina in 1944 and his MD degree from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in 1947. He completed his surgical residency under his greatly respected mentor, Dr Alfred Blalock, at Johns Hopkins Hospital. After his chief residency, he served 3 years at Walter Reed Medical Center in the US Army Medical Corps.

Dr Sabiston returned to Johns Hopkins in 1955 as an Assistant Professor of Surgery and an Investigator in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. In 1960, he received a Fulbright Scholarship to teach and conduct research at the Hospital for Sick Children of the University of London and the Nuffield Department of Surgery at Oxford University. Within 3 years of his return to Johns Hopkins, he became a Professor of Surgery.

In 1964, Dr Sabiston returned to his native North Carolina, where he became the Chairman of the Department of Surgery at the Duke University Medical Center. At Duke, he was awarded a distinguished James B. Duke Professorship and continued to pursue his passions of clinical surgery, research, and teaching for 33 years.

Dr Sabiston took his greatest pride in his residents and students and their accomplishments. Our education and professional development was his foremost thought, and it was expressed through his constant teaching in the operating rooms, patient wards, clinics, and classrooms. His love of teaching, his ability to engage young physicians with historical anecdotes, and his commitment to the best possible patient care earned him a number of teaching awards, which he treasured. He was the 4-time recipient of both the Golden Apple Award as Best Clinical Teacher by Duke Medical Students and the Thomas D. Kinney Award for Outstanding Teacher of the Year. He also received the Alpha Omega Alpha Distinguished Teacher Award presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Dr Sabiston's commitment to surgical education led him to accept more than 200 lectureships in the United States and abroad, to accept visiting professorships at more than 160 medical centers, and to be an honorary member of many sur-

gical societies around the world. He also edited a number of textbooks, including the *Textbook of Surgery* and *Surgery of the Chest*. He served very proudly for several decades as editor of the *Annals of Surgery* and was the author of more than 1000 peer-reviewed original scientific articles.

Dr Sabiston's strengths as a teacher, researcher, and surgeon were equally applauded by his peers. He served as president of the American College of Surgeons, the American Surgical Association, the American Surgical Association Foundation, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery, the Society of University Surgeons, the Southern Surgical Association, and the Society of Surgical Chairmen. He was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. He also received the Michael E. DeBakey Award for Outstanding Achievement, the American Heart Association Scientific Council's Distinguished Achievement Award, Distinguished Alumnus Awards from the University of North Carolina and the Johns Hopkins University, and an Honorary Alumnus Award from the Duke Medical Alumni Association.

Although his residents had enormous respect and admiration for the clinical and academic accomplishments of Dr Sabiston, what we most appreciated were his teaching

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skills and his ability to translate laboratory research into the clinical care of patients. He was involved in many areas, but two that stand out are his work in coronary artery physiology that led to his performance of the first coronary bypass surgery and his seminal contributions to the prevention of the deadly complications of pulmonary embolus. These two research accomplishments alone placed him at the top of American surgical innovation but represented a mere fraction of his overall effect.

Far beyond his academic effect on all of us was the thoughtfulness shown to us as individuals and friends by Dr and Mrs Sabiston. The Christmas parties and other social events at their beautiful home in Duke Forest made each of us and our families feel very special. The notes of congratulation for accomplishments and achievements were always something very special and cherished. He always sensed when we needed to be taken down a notch or buoyed up. He was an extraordinary person who could push you to the absolute limits of your ability but could also pull you up from the depths of despair and self-doubt.

In 1994, Dr Sabiston decided to retire as chairman after 30 years. All of us hoped that Dr Sabiston would slow the pace of his life a bit after stepping down as chairman, but that was not possible for him. He continued many of his former jobs as editor, author, advisor, and teacher. In addition, he took on new responsibilities at the Veterans Administration and

in Duke's developing program in global health care. Several years after stepping down as chairman, the unthinkable occurred, and illness struck. He continued to be devoted to the University and the Department of Surgery and served as an advisor.

The end of this journey came peacefully. Each of us will have our memories and stories to tell of the professor who was a legend in his own time. What shall always stay with each of us was his dedication to our education. The old adage "give me a fish and I eat for a day, teach me to fish and I eat for a lifetime" best summarizes our relationship to him. And so we say farewell and thanks to a friend and mentor who was so important to his own family and his extended family of students and colleagues. He will always be in our hearts and minds as we seek to reach the lofty goals he set for each of us.

He is survived by his loving wife of 54 years, Agnes Barden; 3 daughters, Anne Leggett and her husband, Reid, of Charlotte, North Carolina, Agnes Butler and her husband, Albert, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Sarah Sabiston, of Salt Lake City, Utah; 5 grandchildren; and his sister, Alma S. Peacock, of Wilmington, North Carolina.

A memorial service was held Thursday, January 29, 2009, in the Duke University Chapel. All of the students and residents who have trained with Dr Sabiston served as honorary pallbearers.