

Doris Artis, RN, PHN oral history 2010

Interview with Doris Artis (26:25-37:03)

WM: My name's Will Mallory. It's October 28th, 2010 and we're at the North Carolina Public Health Association Conference in Wilmington, NC.

What is your name?

DA: Doris Artis.

WM: And when were you born?

DA: July 19th, 1942.

WM: And where are you from? Where did you grow up?

DA: I grew up in Goldsboro, North Carolina.

WM: Where do you currently live?

DA: Goldsboro, NC.

WM: Why did you decide to become a nurse?

DA: I was working at a mental hospital as a medication technician. They passed a law that you had to have a license for medication. I did not want to change my job so I decided I would take a try at being a nurse. So I enrolled at Wayne Community College and went for a year. As an LPN and doing my clinicals, I really enjoyed what I was doing because they involved doing more than just pouring chemicals. I was a psychiatric nurse at that time. I worked for thirty-three years as a psych nurse then I retired. Then I was talking to some friends and relatives and I decided to take a try at being a public health nurse. I first started in maternity nursing and now I'm working in family planning.

WM: How long have you been working in community health?

DA: I've been working in community health since, I think it was, 1990.

WM: What attracted you most to nursing in general? And then to community health?

DA: Because I like helping people. And in community health you meet all types of people. That was basically it. Plus all kinds of sicknesses, you know it's not just mental illness. It's everything.

WM: And you said you went to Wayne Community College? When did you go to school there?

DA: I graduated in 1982. I started in 1981. It only took me a year.

WM: Did you have any exposure to community health through that curriculum?

DA: Yes I did. I did my field work, my clinicals I should say, I did at Wayne County Health Department where I work now. I was at Brit Haven rest home.

WM: So what's your current position?

DA: I'm an LPN and I work in family planning.

WM: Tell me your most memorable story about community health nursing, or any nursing experience that you've had.

DA: Well mine is sort of a common story. Well no, I'll back up. That's not my most memorable story. My most memorable one was when I was sitting in my office and a young lady, a child, she looked to be about maybe six years old, came in my office and she handed me a note. On the note was a telephone number and a name. I asked her, she said that this lady wanted me to call her. I asked her where the lady was and she said "she's in the hall". So I went in the hall but there was no lady there. The little girl ran off. I didn't know what to do. I went to my director of nursing and asked her. I told her what happened and I said "with the confidentiality, I don't know what the call will be about, I don't know the name. I don't know what I should do". She said "well let's call the number". So we called the number and the lady said "I've been observing you for some time and I would like to talk to you because you seem like a nice lady and I'm having lots of problems". I didn't know what to do. My director of nursing told me to talk with the young lady and see what she was talking about. I did talk with her and she was having some family problems. I told her that I did not work in that field, that she probably need to, we have a place in town called East Point that deals with problems like she was having, I directed her to that facility. But she told me, she said "I've been observing you and it seems like you deal with your patients in a way that I would like for somebody to deal with me". I talked to her and assured her that there would be somebody at this facility that probably could help her. But my point is sometimes it's the way you carry yourself when you're in public health, because you don't ever know who's watching you. I just thought that was, I had never observed this person watching me.

WM: Had you seen them before?

DA: Never in my life. I didn't even see her then. The little girl came and gave me the letter, you know, the piece of paper. I had someone, I was taking notes on someone when she came in. So it took me a few minutes to get out in the hall. When I got out in the hall the little girl had gone. So that's why it frightened me, you know. That's why I went to my director, I didn't know what else to do. But I never saw the lady, I just talked to her on the telephone.

WM: How did that experience effect the way you cared for patients in the future? You must have always kind of had that in the back of your mind.

DA: I guess I never have really thought about what I was doing or how I was acting. I just thought it was a compliment that somebody had observed that I was acting in a way that could help them, you know. I did follow up with calling her on the telephone and she did get an

appointment. So I hope she got some help.

WM: Were there any other stories you wanted to talk about?

DA: Not really, that one just always is in the back of my mind because it was scary at first but then when I really talked to her and found out it was legit that she was having problems. She said she had been having problems for about six or seven months and didn't know nobody she could talk to. I guess working at a mental hospital also, that kind of helped the way I acted. Anyway, in community health you just meet all types of people and all kinds of people. And you never know who's watching you. So you need to always do the right thing. I don't have any more experiences that I can think of. I'm retired but I do work part-time there. I've been working there since the 80s. I'm sorry, since the 90s.

WM: Well if you had to do it all over again, would you do anything different and would you still become a community health nurse?

DA: Yes I would.

WM: Why or why not?

DA: Because I enjoy doing what I'm doing. Because I'm retired and if I didn't enjoy it I wouldn't be there.

WM: If you had a message for prospective nurses today, or maybe even student nurses, what would you tell them? Would you have any advice for them?

DA: Well, always be kind to people. Don't look down on people. And no matter what, try to always be helpful. Always be helpful, don't look down on people, and remember you're there to help people. Make sure they understand before they leave your office what's going on with them and the proper procedures that they need to take to take care of their problems.

WM: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

DA: No.

WM: Well thank you very much.