



# Arlene Dagsys Trailblazer

Aah, come on *Arlene*  
Oh, I swear (what he means)  
At this moment, you mean everything  
*Dexy's Midnight Runners, 1982*

If you are a graduate from orthodontics at the Faculty of Dentistry, University of Toronto then you know Arlene Dagsys. If you didn't graduate from Toronto, then you know Arlene Dagsys. If, for some reason, you don't know Arlene Dagsys, then trust me, she knows you. She is that type of person. She knows how to connect. And she is amazing at it.

I first met Arlene as an orthodontic resident, travelling with Lorne, Kevin and Susette, my partners in crime, across the street to the unknown wilds of the Hospital for Sick Children. We had no idea what to expect, but we were happy, just enjoying the freedom of being released for the afternoon. We found the orthodontic clinic. And then we found Arlene. Or, rather, she found us.

"Hi guys!" she said from beneath her mask, smiling with her eyes from ear to ear. "Uhhh...Hello", we collectively muttered, not really sure how to respond. "It's going to be a great afternoon. I can't wait to show you how we tidy up smiles here at Sick Kids. Why don't you head down to the cafeteria, grab a coffee and a snack, and then hustle on back up here. There's a 20 (dollar bill) up at reception for you. See you in 30 (minutes)." And with that, we liked Arlene. It was unanimous.

Later that day, Arlene opened our eyes to the incredible work done by the Hospital for Sick Children's craniofacial team. In the few hours that we spent with her, she was able to solidify the somewhat murky understanding we had regarding the complex relationship between orthodontics and surgery integral to patients with craniofacial anomalies. Except for Lorne. He already understood it. And he explained it to us again, a few minutes before we took our Fellowship exams.

Arlene Dagsys hails from the City of Toronto, from the days before owning a house meant that the bank owned you. She attended Northview Heights Secondary School prior to her one-year stint in undergraduate sciences at U of T. A short 365 days later, Arlene began her dental degree at 124 Edward, graduating in 1974 with honours. While many orthodontists graduate with honours, Arlene's feat was particularly noteworthy, with her spending not an insignificant amount of time hanging with her buddies at the infamous Village House Tavern, dining on pickled eggs, pepperoni, vinegar chips and Tab<sup>®</sup>. Why Tab<sup>®</sup>? What's a poor girl to do, being solidly underage until well into third year!



As Arlene approached graduation, the powers-that-be knew she was one to watch. The prosthodontists and the paedontists both wanted her. So instead of fighting over her, they pulled a King Solomon and convinced her to enter a one-year combined residency in Pediatric Dentistry and Maxillofacial Prosthodontics at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Arlene made the most of her rookie year. As a resident, she was stationed for a period of time at Landsdowne House out of Sioux Lookout, Ontario. This rotation was no ordinary sleepy dental getaway. During her scant three and a half weeks up North, Arlene found herself snowed in with a judge, a crown attorney and some poor sod who thought it was a good idea to knife his partner, helped deliver two babies (one of which was a beautiful shade of blue), sutured up both the winner and the loser of more than one bar fight

and inserted her fair share of IV's into multiple new anesthesia patients. But it wasn't all work; the nurses were wonderful bakers of pies of all sorts and young Arlene, only too happy to oblige, gained a dress size.

Upon her return from the hinterland, Arlene credits Bruce Ross, David Engel and the late Jack Dale as those who inspired her to complete a Diploma in Orthodontics, which she did in 1977. Arlene's class was made up of many well-known alumni including Mike Taylor, Gary Keyes, Roy Smith and the late John Fasken.

Upon graduation, Arlene entered private practice with the late Bill Sinclair where she associated for more than ten years. By 1989, Arlene decided to start a practice of her own. She found the ideal corner location in the Toronto Beaches, across the street from a local public school, the site of a former candy shop (sweet!). This 700 square foot, three-storey location continues to operate full-time today, the only location Arlene and her team have ever called home.

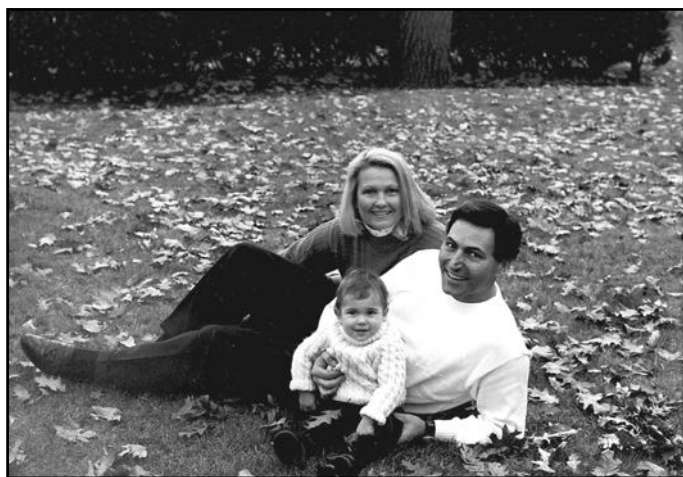
In addition to private practice, Arlene remains an assistant professor at the Faculty of Dentistry, University of Toronto. Some of her more memorable assignments include undergraduate clinic with Garry Solomon, the infamous boot-camp of a technique course with the late Manly Badner, and many years in the graduate clinic as an instructor in the orthodontic-surgical program. Today, Arlene continues to teach senior orthodontic residents about the treatment of craniofacial patients through a structured rotation at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.



To many U of T orthodontic alumni, Arlene's story may sound familiar; academic success at a young age, the eye-opening experience of the first days of practice and the valued support of those who were instrumental in shaping one's choice of career. But here is where Arlene's story diverges sharply; while she was not the

first female orthodontist to graduate, she was the first female leader in many Canadian dental and orthodontic organizations, light-years before the prime minister made female leadership trendy with his elegantly rhetoric "because it's 2015" response to questions.

When Arlene joined an organization, her intention was to lead. She is the past president of the Canadian Association of Orthodontists, Ontario Association of Orthodontists, the Ontario Association of Dental Specialists, the Association of Women Dentists of Ontario, the Toronto East Dental Society and the Tau Tau Chapter of the Omicron Kappa Upsilon Honour Dental Society. In addition, she has served on multiple boards, committees and organizations, acting as member, secretary and board chair. The majority of Arlene's service took place during the mid to late 1990's when the 'old boys club' couldn't have been more old, more boy, or more club. Arlene was no false figurehead. It speaks volumes that those involved with organized orthodontics in Canada recognized, promoted and respected talent irrespective of gender at a time when such practices were rare. There have been a number of superb female leaders in orthodontics since Arlene and hopefully there will be many more to come. Her impact on the field, at the national, the provincial and the local level is arguably and markedly profound. In addition to her many academic and service awards, Arlene's contributions to organized dentistry have been recognized through the presentation of the CAO Award of Merit in 2007 the OAO Award of Merit in 2015 and the Ontario Dental Association Service Award also in 2015.



In talking with Arlene, one can tell it continues to be an awesome career. Today, almost 20 years after our jaunt across the road, Arlene is still at it; she's a major part of the Hospital for Sick Children's craniofacial team, she still has her practice in the Beach and she still attends CAO, OAO and Alumni meetings on a regular basis. But these days, married to Florian and mom to son David, there's more time to spend up at the cottage waterskiing, wakeboarding and doing the things that families like do. She's done it all and her success radiates with her every smile.



Arlene Dagys: Orthodontist. Teacher. Trailblazer.