

1962 - Journey through Nursing School

Memories of a Journey through Nursing School

by Lynn Soppeland Assimacopoulos, Class of March 1962

In 1957, I wanted to become a journalist; however I was advised that women could not really 'make it' in journalism and I would be more wise to choose a different profession. Not knowing what to choose, I just randomly opened the college course catalogue to a page. The word **Nursing** appeared to jump out at me and so in a fleeting moment my educational fate was decided. My intended destiny was that I would follow a path into the world of nursing.

I remember walking into the room of my very first patient who was suffering from alcoholic DTs and shoved a bedside table at me. I ran scared out of the room yelling for help. We had to throw a blanket over him so that he could be given an injection to calm him down. Suddenly I was not sure I wanted to become a nurse but I was not going to give up just yet!

Nursing students had to reside in **Powell Hall** where we slept, studied, attended classes, went on clinical rotations and rarely got out in the real world. However, we had times of fun such as putting on the Powell Hall carnival with fellow nursing students and the interns. For mischief we would "borrow" Mrs. Chase from the nursing lab and hide her in one of our classmate's dorm room bed before she came home late at night. The scream could be heard far and wide! In the Powell Hall tunnel we were often summoned by "George the Morgue man" to come inside the morgue and see the autopsy room and other interesting human medical items. On weekends I gave dance lessons in the Powell Hall mushrooms to earn extra spending money.

The **medicine rotation** was kind of tedious, but we dealt with all kinds of interesting diseases that added up to a wealth of experience, since the University Hospital seemed to get a lot of unusual and difficult medical cases. It was rumored that when other hospitals could not figure out patient's cases they would send them to our University Hospital.

Neurology rotations had us staffing the evening shift and serving as the student nurse in charge. Also that floor allowed us to work extra days and holidays for pay. We often found ourselves placing handwritten tape signs stating "*Please return me to the Neuro floor*" on some of the patients who would wander off the floor.

The **operating room** was tense most of the time with the pioneer surgeons such as Dr.s Wangenstein, Varco, and Lillehei operating long hours on complicated cases. I will never forget when as a nursing student observing Dr. C. Walton Lillehei do open heart surgery, he held out his hand for me to remove his gloves and I ripped a hole in them right in the middle of his palm. He did not utter a word, but I think he had a big smirk behind his mask. And I was trembling!

OB served as more of a happy rotation for both families and students. Having my OB rotation at Miller Hospital in St. Paul allowed me to observe and assist in nearly 30 deliveries. (And I almost cried at every one. I still tear up at seeing babies being born.) There was a time when so many mothers were in labor we had to have them lay in the doctor's bunk beds in the on-call room.

As far as **GYN** the only thing I remember was that one of the not-so-liked duties consisted of serving as the D & E (douche and enema) nurse in the early morning on the GYN floor of hospital.

Psychiatry was a little overwhelming since there were three different wards and we spent some time on each one. The most near-reality ward made us think that the patients were much like ourselves and it was hard to detect that they had some mental health problems. The moderate care ward suggested that there was such a thing as being "troubled" but not beyond help. However, the severe or "locked" ward I think scared most of us! Here is where we really saw the poignant, heartbreaking and distressing cases that needed the most help. Care here was sometimes dancing with the psych patients who were in regressive therapy patients. It was not easy to get them to follow the dance steps or even help them with their daily care. Dealing with some of the patient's hallucinations, such as a little dog that seemed to follow me around, (or so the patient told me) made even me nervous.

Public Health gave us a lot of insight as to what people in the community had to deal with regarding family health care and diseases. I distinctly remember several times getting lost in some warehouse district in St. Paul and having to ask directions.

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An overabundance or plethora of **reading and writing** was required of us nursing students.

After graduation I swore never to read another issue of the American Journal of Nursing or write another nursing report for at least 20 years! Little did I know that later I would end up actually writing some articles for nursing journals and using some of my nursing experiences in my self-published book, *I Thought There Was a Road There.....* (available on **Amazon**.)

Oh yes, we complained about working too many hours on the floors and there were too many reports, too many exams and too many hours of labs that we thought would never come to an end. But as has been said, "All good things must come to an end." and it did. What we nursing students received at that end were gifts of a lifetime. Did we realize that we had gleaned an enormous amount of experience and had the privilege of caring for people of all ages, of many cultures and backgrounds, from all walks of life? Probably not at first. However I will venture to say that all of us were blessed with a wonderful education, extraordinary memories and a powerful beginning to our nursing career. I will never regret any part of my nursing education because it taught me so much and provided in depth experiences that turned our patients into our teachers. Many times over the last 46 years I have remembered some patient that I had taken care of while in nursing school; I may not remember their name but I can still see a mental picture of them. And I wish I was able to thank them.

Since graduating I have worked as an RN in many different fields of nursing, the Red Cross, Home Health, Intensive Care, Staff Development and Nurse/Writer Project Consultant in Long Term Care. I have learned so much from all this and there has not been a day when I did not want to go to work as a professional nurse.

So I stand humbled by all those patients that contributed to my path in becoming a nurse caregiver and grateful to all those nursing instructors who were willing to teach us and mold us students into the professional nurses we would and should be. Two comments from our nursing instructors that have always meant a lot to me are:

"Persons behave to the best of their ability at the time."

and

"There is more than one way to do the right thing."

I don't ever want to forget these!

My published articles regarding nursing:

- PR and Nursing Go Hand In Hand, Nursing Success, Feb. 1985
- Back To Basics, Nursing 85, July
- Why Nursing Care Does Not End at the Hospital Door, Nursing Success, Jan. 1986
- Mr. B and Me, Geriatric Nursing, Nov-Dec, 1986
- Realizing Empathy in Loss, Journal of Psychosocial Nursing, Nov. 87
- Nursing - The Humanity Connection, Holistic Nursing Practice, Jan. 1993
- All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in ICU, Nursing Forum, vol. 3, 1995