

## A Nursing Perspective:

### Thirty-Seven Years Later

National Nurse's Week is May and marks Florence Nightingale's birthday which was on May 12<sup>th</sup>. This May is also when I turn sixty-eight, thirty-seven years after I graduated from Nursing School at Vanier College Nursing School in Montreal, Quebec. My undergraduate degree was in Health Administration and Journalism. I took three years off to work as a dental hygienist only to acknowledge my fascination with the medical field. I applied for and was accepted into a three-year RN degree and enjoyed every moment of the program, which seemed to go too quickly.

As the eldest in my graduating class, I was asked to be the Class Valedictorian at graduation. While hesitant at first, it turns out that that moment was a huge turning point in my life. As a shy girl in her early twenties, I realized I had an innate comfort with public speaking. My family listening in the audience sat in awe of my message and charisma.

Looking back, I realize the experience highlighted my power as a leader. The experience gave me confidence and the belief that with intention we can accomplish whatever we want to accomplish. Less than one year after graduation, I was offered a position as Director of Nursing of a Chronic Care Hospital. I held the position until I was summoned to bed rest with my first daughter.

After my children grew up, I returned for more schooling, receiving my MFA in Writing and more recently my PhD in Psychology. Yes. I am an education junkie, but during all my schooling I have always harbored the love for writing and leadership. Now I empower people with my words, both as a speaker and writer.

I recently shared my Valedictorian Speech with my niece, Ali Marquisee, a recent nursing school graduate. We agreed that not much has changed, but that my words of wisdom still linger. What else can a sexagenarian baby boomer writer ask for?

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Here's the speech:

We are glad that you could come to share this special day with us. And those of you who have come from out of town, we especially thank you for putting the time aside to share this day.

I would like to begin my introductory remarks by reading a poem I read recently:

The slightest word of comfort

To help us on our way,

The slightest smile from someone  
To brighten up our day;  
The slightest act of kindness  
To lessen care and such—  
These all cost so very little,  
But they mean so very much.

It's wonderful when someone  
Needs from you a helping hand,  
And thanks you with a grateful heart  
because you understand;  
It's wonderful when folk are glad  
because they know you're near,  
That in the world because of you,  
the star of hope shines clear.

-Francis Gay

Today, the role of a nurse is becoming a more and more responsible one. The role of a nurse will always be thought of as putting the hope back in a sick person's life. She is slowly going to be a major diagnostician and care planner in the patient's care. It is often that the doctor asks the nurse what the best treatment may be, as she has the most contact with the patient and is most sensitive to his or her needs.

Our three-year nursing program has prepared us for this day of increasing responsibility. It is finally the day we can do our nursing procedures without being hovered over by our nursing professors, and the day that we wouldn't have to stay up until 2:00 am writing exhausting descriptions of the nursing process. Today is the day that we finally take the responsibility for our own actions: when we can no longer say, "That's what my instructor told me to do," but, rather, the line becomes, "That's what I feel should be done."

As I look around me at my fellow students, I see how we have all grown. I see how we have all developed skills of communication, teaching, observation, and assessment. We have grown to understand the importance of the love for humanity, and, consequently, the importance of empathy in the nursing profession. We have learned that the nurse must be able to adapt to

change. She must be receptive to new learning skills to improve her patient care. Learning will not stop now that our formal training comes to a close. The nurse must realize that no question is a stupid question. Throughout our training, we were given increasing amounts of responsibility. In our third and final year, we were given the chance to be in charge of a busy hospital ward with our fellow students. By the end of our training, we assessed the patient, made the diagnosis, and followed through on the appropriate nursing intervention based on our knowledge.

I am going to miss being a nursing student, and especially will miss my fellow colleagues who have grown with me. We have been through a lot together. I am sure that many will remember with me, the day it took ten minutes to correctly make a hospital bed or the time when having a patient with an intravenous was the most mysterious thing. Or when we gave our first IM injection into an orange, or when we had to write our charting notes on a separate piece of paper and show the instructor before writing in the patient's chart. Or what about all those communications records between patient and student: when we had to dash out of the room to quickly write down what the patient said so we could complete our assignment. In the years to come, we may not always find it easy. But there is one thing we must always keep in mind: that is, we must always be conscious of our importance in the healing process. And last but not least, we must be proud to be nurses.

I would like to finish by reading a poem:

Life is like a garden  
in many little ways;  
Contentment cannot flourish  
if gloom is all you raise.  
Plant the seed of kindness  
wherever you may go,  
and fertilized by common sense,  
friendship's bound to grow.

~ Anonymous

Thank you again, and please join us in the front of the auditorium for refreshments.

BIO: Diana Raab, PhD is a writer and research psychologist living in Santa Barbara, California. She's the author of 10 books and many articles and poems. She frequently writes and lectures on writing for healing and transformation.