

## A Life Fulfilled

As I near the end of my working life, I reflect on why I chose to be a nurse and why I remain. It was because of my old great Aunt, whom I loved and admired despite her being the family maiden aunt who was also a "by the book" Baby Health Nurse and was as such not always appreciated. She devoted her life to her work and to raising my Dad, who were unable to care for him for a variety of reasons that are not part of this story. She was tough but loved me and my two siblings in a no-nonsense way!

Following her role model my first attempts at nursing were as a five year old, when Dad had all his teeth extracted and later when he had kidney stones. I distinctly remember giving hot and cold compresses to Dad and making pretend cups of tea for him as he lay in bed recovering. I also remember taking over a phone call as a six year old, when Mum could not cope with the news that Grandpa had died at work at Snows in Sydney, of a massive heart attack. Somehow although it was sad, I could deal with it better than Mum at that time. It was up to me as a teenager, to call the doctor when my maternal Grandmother, who lived with us since Grandpa died, complained of severe pain in her left arm. We were home alone at the time. She was admitted to the private hospital, where I worked in the holidays so I was able to visit her often until she passed away.

This part of my personality manifested into a strong desire to be a nurse and it was with great pride that my Dad drove me to the Royal North Shore Hospital, accompanied by a teary Mum, for my introduction into nursing. Mum was not impressed! Nobody prepared me for the change of food - I put on loads of weight with enforced morning and afternoon teas and I distinctly remember my fondness of Queen Pudding. I also loved my new family, we went through so much together that we were bound to be close. In

those days it was part of the ritual to learn how to smoke in Preliminary Training and most of us turned green before we learned how to do the drawback. There were also many evenings of shared toast and peanut butter snacks as we debriefed over our daily grind. I did love that nursing experience.

However I relished the learning both in formal classroom lessons and I knew I was meant to be a nurse. I loved the shift work and the reflective learning we had as we progressed through our hospital training. Today I watch the new graduates in their first year and it is easy to appreciate their knowledge yet the absolute best new grads are those who have nursing work experience throughout their training. The best nurses ever, in my opinion, are those who have been Endorsed Nurses first then done their Registered Nursing University course.

I do wish I had that opportunity.

I married early and had children, moved to the country and left nursing as I supported my husband in his work until the children were grown. While they were young I was able to keep my nursing desire fulfilled by caring for my babies , who had asthma and the usual problems of infancy. Then when they were grown life was no longer fulfilling and I missed my calling with a deep longing. It was no longer possible for me to deny my needs and my marriage suffered.

I worked very hard first as an assistant in nursing and then I did my refresher course and started working in a nursing home. I gained a university degree in Health Education and worked for a NGO for four years as an educator. It was great and yet I missed the clinical side of nursing with a passion.

So after four years of non clinical, another refresher course and I have worked happily ever since as a registered nurse with no regrets. It is wonderful to have remarried and my second husband has supported my nursing hours for years. Now we are older and he is retired and needing my company more than before. Yet nursing gives me the chance to work casually to suit our family life and health needs. It saddens me that so many young nurses are lost to the profession after a short time - just as I did. A wasted decade in some ways.

Nursing, despite its problems of staffing shortages and at times overwhelming workloads and paperwork, gives one flexibility and a million cases to recall and make you smile.

I recall with a smile many jokes on the run with colleagues, smiles hard won from frightened children as a simple story could still the tears; the times I have sung the 23rd psalm with relatives as there loved one passed over and the privilege of caring for the dying to allow them the dignity they deserve. It is a joy to help people get back to health and not lose their independence. Most importantly nursing has taught me not to judge people but get behind the behavior and to appreciate life and health.

I realise I do not want to fully retire as yet. While I still get pleasure from my work and I am able to responsibly carry out my job I want to keep working with maybe a little better balance built in. Yes it is a fulfilling life even if frustrating at times and I am so glad I chose to stick it out!