

Cadet Nurse Corps

Memories

In 1999, on the occasion of the closing of the school of nursing, a member of the Class of 1948 sent a copy of her memories of the Cadet Nurse Corps to the Alumni Liaison at Baystate Medical Center. In her accompanying letter, she thanked the alumni association for sending her a copy of "an era of caring" stating that "I have gone through it many times and have relived many happy memories". She also mentions that she had donated her winter uniform to the school and offered her summer uniform if there was a need for it. The following is a copy of her memories of her student days.

Memories of my Student Nurse Days
at the Springfield Hospital Training School for Nurses
Springfield, Massachusetts
in the Cadet Nurse Corps during and after World War II
February 6, 1945 to February 6, 1948

We were in our "Probie" uniforms that very first day of class with Miss Bates, one of our instructors during the probationers period. Miss Blackman, the Superintendent of Nurses, had come to speak to us. She was an inspiring lady and she gave us many bits of sage advice to help us especially in the first days and months.

One thing she said stayed with me all my working years and was basically this: "Remember that all of your patients are here for a physical illness whether medical or surgical, but never forget that everybody who is physically ill is a little bit mentally ill as well and must be treated with kindness and compassion." Miss Blackman had lost her fiancé on a battlefield during World War I, and she had devoted her life to the nursing profession. She was an inspiration to us all. She retired later that year.

There were 20 or 21 of us who started out as probationers that February 6, 1945, the first of three classes that war year. A few left during those first month, so 13 of us were capped in a ceremony in early June wearing our student uniforms for the first time. The probie uniforms were plain blue of mid-calf length with a detachable collar, long sleeves with detachable white cuffs and a white apron. Our student uniforms were blue and white striped of the same length as the probie uniforms, with the same stiffly starched detachable collar, long sleeves with wide starched detachable cuffs, and stiffly starched bib and apron. When working on the floors we removed the wide cuffs, pinned them to the under belt, rolled up the sleeves and put on a narrower pair of cuffs. When leaving the floor after duty, we rolled down the sleeves and put on the wider cuffs again. This was changed the second year when the uniform sleeves were shortened and we no longer had to make that change when arriving on duty. We Wore white hose and shoes which were rationed in those war years and not always easy to find. World War II ended that very first year of our training, VE day in May and VJ Day in August but we completed our 3 years in the Cadet Nurse Corps.

The rest of that first year we worked on the various med-surg floors, worked a shift of nights (one month), worked a short stint in the diet kitchen, and continued with classes. When on night duty we slept in the night nurses' quarters, which as I remember, were on the West wing of the nurses' home on the third floor where it was relatively quiet. We were expected to attend all classes scheduled during that time. One day we had gotten out of bed and were dressing for class when someone passed the word that the class had been cancelled. Gratefully we crawled back into bed and sleep. It was a shock when later we were "called on the carpet" as the class had not been cancelled. Fortunately our instructor had compassion as I don't remember any punishment.

Our first specialty began in January 1946 when < Name Withheld -- Privacy> and I were assigned to the operating room. It was a very thrilling few weeks with lots of experience scrubbing in on all kinds of surgical procedures. However some of the newer surgeries were not done as many of the specialists had not yet returned from the service.

In April half of our class started the affiliation at the Wesson Maternity Hospital, the original Wesson Maternity on High Street. There we worked in all departments, from caring for patients on all three floors, to working in the delivery room and the nursery where we were even assigned a few days making formulas. We worked all three shifts. Those first post-war years when the servicemen had returned home, married and started families, the Wesson Maternity was a very busy place. There were no more private rooms. All rooms had two or three beds and there were always 2 or 3 beds behind curtains in the corridors on the second and third floors.

Back again at the Springfield Hospital we worked on the various med-surg floors including the two private floors, Chapin III and Chapin V, the men's ward (all 2 or 4 bed units) West I, the women's ward (also 2 or 4 bed units) West II, Main II -- men's semi-private, West III -- all chronically ill patients, and Main V - women's semi-private. After completing classes in pediatric care, we were assigned to West IV, the pediatric unit. At some time during those months the name of the West wing was changed to Wright.

We all had one month's affiliation at Shriners' Hospital for Crippled Children in Springfield and mine happened to be in December 1946. That was very thorough training with excellent instruction. The Shriners did a lot for the children who were there at Christmas time and it was a joy to be part of it.

Our affiliation in Providence, Rhode Island began in January 1947 either at the Charles V. Chapin Hospital for Communicable Diseases or at Butler Hospital for mental illness. I was assigned to the Charles V. Chapin which training was very exact. CVC was a complex of buildings, 6 as I remember, each with 2 floors. We did not work in Building A which had venereal diseases on one floor and surgical patients on the other or Building E which had mental patients. Building D had tuberculosis patients and the practices to prevent cross-infection were even stricter there than on the other floors. We worked there only 2 or 3 days. The first day of class the doctor in charge spoke to us. He stated emphatically that the methods used at CVC to prevent cross-infection were tried and true and we were not to deviate in any way. "If there is a cross-infection we will find the nurse responsible and send her home." We followed the rules! -- but it was not difficult. It was great to meet and work with student nurses from other hospitals - from schools of nursing in Maine, Vermont, and others in Massachusetts.

The last affiliation before our senior cadet assignments was with the Visiting Nurses. We had comprehensive classes and went out with one of the regular RN's before going out on our own to do nursing care. We used the city's buses to get to our various destinations.

My 6 month senior cadet assignment beginning in August 1947 was divided between Main V (Women's med-surg semi-private and pediatrics on Wright IV. I had asked for the operating room but that position was assigned to another." However, I thoroughly enjoyed those 6 months. We were given added responsibility and even assumed head nurse's duties at times. As senior cadets we added a black band to our cap. Also as seniors we moved to rooms in the East wing of the nurses' home

where a few of the RN's working in the hospital also had rooms.

All too soon our 3 years of training was over. I was the only one of our 13 who had no time to make up and so wore my white uniform very proudly for the first time February 6, 1948.

I'll have to admit that I missed the bib and apron at first! The other 12 twelve followed one by one as their sick days were made up. We joined the other two classes of 1948 at a June graduation and later that summer all 13 of us took and passed the State Board Exams in Boston.

I had taken a few days off after completing training in February and started my first job early in March as the night float at the Wesson Maternity Hospital. In June I was asked to cover vacation time for the head nurses on the 3 floors for the relief shifts and some of the day shifts. That was a busy summer! In September I started in the delivery room. That was the most rewarding work! One of the three delivery rooms was set up for surgery as the occasional Caesarean section was done right there and I had that chance to scrub in on surgical procedures again. Miss (Name Withheld) ran an excellent unit and it was a congenial group of RNs with which to work. We also helped coach the students as they completed their affiliation there.

Three of our class joined the military, but only one stayed. <privacy-name withheld> made the Navy Nurse Corps her career, retiring as a Lieutenant from the Portsmouth NH Naval Shipyard having spent most of her time on the Pacific coast at various bases and at sea.

I have many wonderful memories of those years as a student nurse at the Springfield Hospital and feel very fortunate that through the Cadet Nurse Corps,, I was able to have that training.

Privacy: Name Withheld
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