

The Sisters of Charity

The Sisters had great faith in their mission, and committed themselves to the provision of kind and compassionate care to the poor. They were also committed to the highest standards of medical and nursing excellence. Our nursing pin reminds us of the attributes of a St. Vincent's nurse which are Patience, Fortitude, and Perseverance.

As a graduate of St. Vincent's Hospital School of Nursing the basis of caring was imbedded in our genes as the color of our eyes. These traits can never be changed.

Moving on in our nursing career caring with passion and pride was never ending. In all of my nursing experiences from the acute care of pediatric oncology, critical care, home care, case management, out-patient clinics and transporting acutely ill patients, the caring trait always stood out. We give of ourselves wholly gaining knowledge, compassion, grey hair and bladder incontinence from holding back on our own needs.

As we all moved to our expert roles and achieved certifications, degrees, published and continued our nursing careers, we were driven by these traits. I was once asked by a housekeeper, "Did you play with dolls as a child?" I answered her "yes" with a puzzled look. Her response was to say that you care for your patients with such love and commitment to providing a perfect bed, meticulous care and focus on the basic

needs of the patient. She was unaware that a St Vincent's nurse was expected to have sheets that quarters could bounce off of and tight hospital corners....or the bed needed to be done again and again and again. Providing care to our patients meant every orifice was clean and shiny and our patients were out of bed or on a turning schedule. Providing excellent care meant being present with the patient at the bedside. This delivery of excellent care will always be a part of the fabric of a St Vincent's nurse.

Advocacy

The first lesson in patient advocacy was to be the spokesperson for your patient. Starting with questioning orders, recognizing potential areas of improvement, and keeping our patients free of harm no matter how hard we have to work. Our focus was always on letting the interns know who was in chargeThey quickly found out.

I learned to stand my ground through the screaming, shouting, and temper tantrums of physicians to the physical ducking of flying objects from surgeons. We St. Vincent nurses stood our ground and were well respected.

Moving to another facility was not easy as the culture of my new hospital was very different than St Vincent's. My goal was to infiltrate my values and mission as a nurse in those I worked with. Many disciplines noted my strong advocacy, caring and passionate characteristics which I thought every nurse

St. Vincent's Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae | 2013 1988 – Silver Jubilarians

should possess. My patients meant a lot to me and caring for them was my duty. A little bit of St Vincent's goes a long way as I now see that I have been successful at keeping the vision alive with 4 other St Vincent's R.N'S as Nurse Managers in my present hospital. We still talk the "St. Vincent's "talk and walk the "St. Vincent's "walk.

Often times I would find myself questioning a medication dosage or calculation and think of Sister Grace. "One mistake is too many." I then recalculated three more times to ensure that I was correct. I remember my classmates saying she would have 300ml of MOM and she will give 300 ml of MOM- we all cringed as Sr. Grace said she will be floating down the river with that dose – no we would never forget the 30ml dose again.

When I recollect on the training at SVH I see many of the tenets of being a Magnet Nursing institution. As mentioned above we are always striving to be advocates for our patients. Seeking the best out comes from the evidence based care that we delivered.

I remember many situations in the ICU where research was used to provide the most accurate and up to date care to the patients. Most recognizable were the continuously changing care of the many AIDS patients. I was taught to be empowered to seek out what was the best and to continue to strive to be the best. Yes we were taught to work harder and faster than anyone else and multi task all with a smile.

Once I left SVH this became more apparent when I was not surrounded by the many St Vincent's slaves that I was with for years. St Vincent's nurses never drew a line in the delivery of care – cleaning the patients, starting levophed, starting blood products-all a part of caring for the patient.

The nurses in the newer organization could not understand how I kept moving and taking admissions. They would soon learn what was in store for them. When questioned about this practice I responded with "put on your big girl pants and get in there".....This obviously didn't go over well and down to the CNO office I went..... They are slowly adapting to me but realize that the patient is at the heart of all the hustling that I insist get done....And I currently keep a supply of "big girl pants" in my office. I will be patient.

Training also taught me the concept of Fortitude. I had been on my rotation in the Emergency Room under the ever watchful eye of Sister Mary "T" she challenged us to take on the tumultuous atmosphere of the emergency room. We walked around tentatively and took in all of the extremely unique surroundings. One call from the desk changed it all. Marie Barnwell called me over to count respirations of this young asthmatic woman. I walked over and attempted to complete the task all the while knowing I was under the close and unwavering eye of Marie. With all of the courage in my body I squeak out 28 and wait for the look of approval from the icon of the E.R. Only to be

St. Vincent's Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae | 2013 1988 – Silver Jubilarians

let down by the response wrong!! With the different mentors that were encountered I learned to persevere. These challenges made me the nurse I am today.

Last, St Vincent's nursing school taught me to be proud. Every year we were honored to march in the St Patrick's Day Parade. With pride I carefully fold the paper napkin into a neat square and apply it to my head. Next the cap is placed on the cleanly swept back hair. I walk to Christopher Street and wait in hopes that one of the coveted capes would be available to wear. With pride I accept my cape and head to the parade.

Marching down 5th avenue and stopping at the Cathedral to flip my cape over my shoulder was the highlight of the march. I was a St Vincent's nurse.

Now the devil comes on my shoulder and I try to figure out how to maintain the honor of the uniform while balancing the beer that has been offered to me by the many uniformed marchers. Walking down the streets I slowly realize the many uses for the nursing caps.

First as a leak-proof containers and second as a pin collector from the many uniformed staffers that were looking for a smooch in exchange for a pin and the chance to date a nurse. Through all of this the cape never suffered any devastating events.

Living in the city allowed young students to benefit from the many experiences around them. There were always rides available from

the police for any nurses that may have needed a lift home and second we were always able to escape into the city to relieve the stress that would build from all of the studying and dreaded clinical rotations.

Currently I am in an organization with 5 other nurse managers that are the product of the School of Nursing. This was not a pre-arranged grouping. The actions of this group of nurses has solidified for me that all of the education and training prepared us to have strong leadership skills.

I have also realized that the qualities that have been described as Magnet were instilled at St Vincent's long before the label was given. Exemplary professional practice, transformational leadership, structural empowerment and new knowledge and innovation. We have and emanate all of these qualities. Empirical outcomes are what we are rewarded with.

Working together with patients and staff provides a strong sense of community. We are always "Watching out for each other" and "Having each other's back." These were all taught at St Vincent's and today are words and phrases used in "Team STEPPS" an evidence based communication and teamwork program.

St Vincent's we were far ahead of the curve.....but although our institution has closed its doors- St Vincent's lives on throughout hospitals all over the country as we all strive to provide the best care to our

St. Vincent's Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae | **2013**
1988 – Silver Jubilarians

patients and promote the importance of nursing presence at every bedside.

There are a few things that will never change... I will never be the same size I was in nursing school but most important I will always be a St Vincent's Nurse and I will always treasure the many nursing friendships that I have made.

-Margaret Casey Pfeiffer '88
And
Wynette Bruno O'Connell '88