

The Memories Come to Life

Text written by Louise (Regehr) Wiens, Leamington, Ontario, November 2015

Finally.....it's my turn to talk!

You know, my mom told me many times over the years that when I was a toddler in Germany I was sitting on a window ledge watching some kids play outside when the window pane suddenly came down and I fell, with my tongue somehow getting caught in the window. It was lacerated and required stitches, and my parents feared that I would never ever be able to speak, especially when it became apparent that my speech was delayed. "This child will never talk" my mother told my father. Needless to say, I am happy to report that their fears were unfounded!

I would like to thank everyone here for coming out and celebrating with me tonight. Taking time out of your busy summer schedules. As I often remind my co-workers, patient centered care is not just about the nurses. Not at all. It involves numerous support staff from a variety of departments, many of whom are unseen and not on the front lines. This is what makes for a great crew at LDMH, and what makes it a great place to work.

My earliest memory of LDMH takes me back to when I was in Grade 2 as a pt. in room 251-1. I had my tonsils out with Dr. Froese and was in for several days, because, as he told my mother, "the blonde ones..... they tend to bleed more." Sounds silly now, doesn't it?

Growing up we did not have any nurses in the family yet I was surrounded by them in our neighbourhood, including Ethel Ferguson, Betty Jones, and of course Rita Zubaty, the mother of one of my best friends. My aunt on Maynard Street began to board an assortment of LDMH staff in the 1960's, including an x-ray tech from Kirkland Lake, a dietician from Montreal, a Public Health nurse from France, and Mary #1 and Mary #2 from India. Mary and Mary had a hard time acclimatizing to our winters and my aunt would bundle them up and drive them in for their shifts. Her house always had a strong aroma of curry mixed with the smell of Mennonite baking, and we still keep in touch with the one Mary to this day. The "huus-pee-tal," my mother and aunt used to call it.

I never had any aspirations to become a nurse. None. My childhood friend Debbie Gilmour was consumed by a fictional series of books about a nurse entitled "Sue Barton." There was "Sue Barton Student Nurse," "Sue Barton Staff Nurse," "Sue Barton Visiting Nurse," to name a few. You get the drift. Debbie drove me nuts! I could hardly take it. Yet off to college I went to become an RN.

As a student nurse at LDMH in the 1970's, living 10 minutes away, I would ride my 10 speed Targa bike and park it in a rack at the south east entrance. In the same locker rooms which we use today, I changed into my yellow dress, white support hose and polished white clinic shoes, and of course my cap, adorned with a yellow velvet ribbon, not black. The building had about 160 in pt. beds and it was a great place to train, and as students we always enjoyed our sessions here. I continue to hear the same positive feedback from the students we have today.

Upon graduation I worked briefly in a local dental office and in several long term care homes, where I very quickly became attached to the pts. One of my pts, Fred Lewis, was a WW 1 vet, and I was fascinated as I sat with him staring at his tattooed arms and listening to his story. "Seems like yesterday, "he would tell me, with a far off look in his eyes. When Fred died, his family bought me this bracelet.

The longer I worked in LTC, the more funerals I was attending, and I knew that I needed to switch gears. So my future sister-in-law and I moved to Edmonton where we worked together on a busy medical floor where we certainly got our feet wet. She was the "real" nurse. I was the "social" nurse. Returning to Leamington I was hired at LDMH by June Coleman in HR, where she ran her dept. with not much more than a steno pad, a telephone and a filing cabinet. In Edmonton we had been taught to enter the room, wear a big name tag and introduce ourselves to our pts. Coming back to Leamington, I began the same practice but my co-workers quickly told me "'oh no, we don't do that here. You don't want anyone here to know who you are. This is a small town." Thankfully that practice has changed. I need not have worried. Turns out that I knew, and continue to know, at any given time, a large number of our pts. or their acquaintances.

The building was hot with no air, our short polyester dresses were sticky, and the starched white cap drove me nuts, as in Alberta they were already a thing of the past. On Sundays after a busy day shift I would peel off my uniform to go to my parents for supper. As I walked through the front door my mother would lament "it's Sunday, you should be wearing a dress."

We played with the mercury of broken glass thermometers, and did crafts on the midnight shift at a table we hauled out into the centre of the hall so that we could observe both wings. Crochet, macramé, and knitting to name a few. Staff went on vacation and sent postcards to the floor from around the world. The cafeteria was filled with billows of smoke and the doctors even smoked at the desk. Pts. smoked in bed, and if they were on bed rest (with a # hip) we were instructed to sit and monitor them as they puffed away. (Story of pt. in I08-1. Then her nephew). We shaved legs, cut nails, washed and curled hair in bed. (The hair trough. Jeanne). We gave Demerol injections every 4 hours ATC to depressed female pts. wearing sunglasses, admitted with migraines and secluded in a room with darkened windows.

On Sat. nights the male pts. regularly gathered in the lounge to watch Hockey Night in Canada, smoking, cheering, eating chips and pop, then making a nosedive into their beds at 2230 and ringing their call bell for their HS backrub before the shift changed. The nursing schedule was posted in public view in the hallway on first floor where Lena's office is today, and if I was not reachable at home when calls were made, they regularly called my mother or my mother-in-law. Before I was married, Linda Macchio and I would go to her apt after the evening shift to have chips and pop and watch the "Dating Game" and "Love Connecton" with Chuck Wollery, as we complained about our state of singleness. That ended when Linda met a handsome accountant, a pt. in Room I08. She broke ALL the rules as they exchanged phone numbers, and the rest, of course is history. IV's came in big glass bottles, there were no IV pumps, and we counted the gtts per minutes. Doctors ordered liquid meds in minims and drams, especially for the kids. There were no pt. lifts, we slugged the laundry into chutes, and the whirlpool tubs saw lots of action. We had a kitchen stove to heat saline for soaks. We took care of lots of babies and toddlers on paed's (now 2 south). Mary Lou taught me how to fold the flannel diapers and feed and burp the babies. There was lots of gastro. This was the only isolation we really had, because C-Diff, MRSA, VRE and all their cousins were not yet that prevalent. We regularly hauled buckets of ice to fill the croup tents. Gloves were rationed and only used for really dirty jobs. At 2000 switchboard closed, and you could not get an outside operator from the floors after that time.

Needless to say, the night Precy took the narc keys with her to the newly opened bingo hall, we were up a creek. Promptly at 2000, all the visitors left and my cap came off. The elevator opened and Dr. Lawrence, our beloved surgeon came for his evening rounds. We talked about fishing and his place up north and his kids. He regularly wrote out scripts for me so that I could buy boxes of syringes to send to my cousin for his kids in Russia, where aids was becoming rampant and reused needles were the norm. The lounge on 2 South was furnished by his family in memory of his daughter Mary Ann who died in a fiery car accident. Pts. sat in O2 tents, and we charted in different colours for the 3 shifts. We did all of our own doctor's orders, plus give meds each shift for 15-20 pts. POA was unheard of as was a Public Guardian. There was a large hot laundry room in the basement by x-ray. I vividly remember my first med error. No harm done, thankfully.

I have attended 2 weddings in the LDMH chapel, one of which the nurses and I hastily helped throw together on a snowy winter's Sunday. The snow storms of 1976 and 2015 stand out in my mind as staff rallied the resources to keep the pts. safe. We regularly stood and offered our chair at the desk to the doctors as they made their morning rounds. There were several dozen of them, so needless to say, you rarely saw a nurse sitting at the desk. Twice, pts. have recounted after death experiences to me. One, a man, where he recounted feeling transported upwards, and the other, an elderly woman, who had quite the opposite experience.

In the evenings Dr. Brewer, who with Dr. Jarescni, did all of the internal medicine work-ups for our 160 pts, would come to the floor and I would give him some juice and a sandwich as he talked about his nieces and nephews. I asked him once if he ever wished he had gotten married. "You know," he replied. "I was so busy in school, (McGill) but I would go out socially, and then I was so busy working, that before I knew it the years had flown by. So now here I am." He continued "it seems like yesterday" with a far off look in his eyes.

Dr. Jarescni would come to the floor for his rounds and quiz the young nurses on the proper pronunciation of surnames, analyzing each syllable. Living in such a diverse community there was of course never a shortage of unusual names. Before the heightened awareness of cultural sensitivity he would even quiz us on the ethnicity, and I for one could easily identify almost all of them. His love of the English language fueled mine. I recall standing at the bedside of Mr. Stafford Kratz as Dr. J. said to me "well, you DO know who this is, don't you?" I wrinkled my nose and named "Kratz" side road in Kingsville, as Dr.J. went on to inform me that my pt. was a well known ornithologist, (the study of birds). I was happy to send many of my baby clothes and toys to Cuba with Dr.Jarescni, and I have always enjoyed bringing in recycled clothes and toys for our migrant workers over the years as well. Our stores dept. has many times given me boxes of equipment which I have been able to send along to third world countries with various local groups.

I have taken care of a world renowned wildlife photographer who was on assignment at Pt. Pelee when he fell ill, a British professor, the cousin of whom served in the Royal Navy and was best man at the wedding of Prince Charles to Diana. And recently a retired farmer from the county who had received the Order of Canada. I recall exactly where I was standing at the bedside of an elderly German Russian man from Yugoslavia, when I saw the wrinkled tattooed numbers on his forearm which had been inflicted upon him by Hitler and the Nazis. I have also seen the degrading numbers on the forearm of a pt. who suffered under the brutality of the Khamir Rouge in Vietnam. I have forgiven the pt. who yelled at me that she hated ALL the Germans because of what we (I) did to the Italians during WW2. I still think of the Caucasian pt. who called me a Nazi Gestapo nurse as I quietly entered his room in the night with my flashlight. I could hardly finish my work that night. My mother used to say "isn't it easier working in the night?" I would laugh and tell her that no-one really ever sleeps.

When computers and Google entered the world I was relieved as my husband suddenly stopped regularly calling me at work to ask how long to cook the noodles or the broccoli. Although I do have some basic computer skills, I quickly gravitated to the next best thing, as you have already heard, the bladder scanner! On night shifts, without a ward clerk, I have for several years, had a mutual understanding with most of the junior staff. "Don't worry," they told me, "we will do that computer entry for you. You do the important stuff. Like taking care of the pts."

As I stand here I can honestly say "yes, it does seem like yesterday." The times, they are a changin'. Recently, talking about nursing caps, Arica was in shock as she said "YOU worked in THAT era?" Recently on midnight shift, asking for assistance to reposition a little old lady, I went and recruited Steve, our LDMH Titan. As he towered over her bed the pt. looked up at me in with eyes big as saucers and said "Ooooh...you bring beeg von," as we all laughed.

I have enjoyed working with the junior staff over the past several years, although at times they have gotten on my nerves, as I am sure that I have on theirs. "Just tell us what to do" Marissa recently said to me. "Life can be hard and it's good to laugh" I regularly remind my co-workers. For a while now I have been hearing from our pts. "Wow, there sure are a lot of young nurses here." My response that very first time, remains the same. "Yes, and we ALL bring something different to the table." Working weekends and holidays, nurses develop unique relationships with their co-workers, a camaraderie of sorts. We often marry, have children and then raise them at the same time, which makes for lasting friendships.

I will now have time to learn how to text so that I can keep up with Magda and Natalia on the latest events happening in Poland now that they have joined the European Union. I plan to learn how to pump gas and I plan to track down Linda Driedger, a local nurse with whom I have been confused with for decades, even as recently as several months ago. I will have to spend more time at Walmart if I want to hear my beloved Low German dialect.

I have enjoyed working with the hospitalist team. The quiet confidence of Dr. Gow, whose father Steve grew up in our neighbourhood and played street hockey with my brother and the guys. The enthusiasm of Dr. Laba, whose father Bob hung out there too, as my friends and I helped the guys fold Windsor Star newspapers for their daily after school delivery. Dr. Moncur's parents, I did not know, but, with the power of modern media, I did track down his mother. Yes, I really did. And she told me that when Ross began to read, at a very, very, very early age, he was memorizing the CPS, the pharmaceutical compendium of 4,000 pages, and when he got to the M's he discovered there was a Bp med named "monocur." The story goes on that he had a revelation, and instantly knew his calling.

Last year I was showering an elderly man when he asked me "so when did you retire?"

Last month Lisa and I both got quizzed on many grandkids we had. But the best line was several months ago, when the wife of a pt., who knew our family, asked "so is your husband still alive??"

I will miss viroxing my pens, stethoscope, flashlight and scissors. I will miss the midnight buffets, and no, Lucy and Karen, I was lying when I said that I would raffle off my waffle maker. I might come in once in a while to clean up the dirty dishes in the staff room and do a clean sweep of the fridge. I am going to take Gina, our NP, shopping, and show her that there are other options in the colour wheel besides black. Take pink for instance. I will miss returning pts. forgotten belongings to their homes or LTC homes. I will no longer have to be the Secret

Police of infection control as my co-workers prepare to dispose of soiled linens beneath their feet before they hit the linen basket.

I still laugh when I think of the daughter of Mr. W, a pt. at SPH. We had often crossed paths there as I visited my parents for several yrs. When Mr. W. was admitted to hospital, I greeted her in the halls as she gasped and said "oh my, so you volunteer here too??" She was shocked to hear that I actually had time to work. I have never thought of myself as being the sharpest tool in the box, nor do I feel that I am the dullest. I have also had my share of unhappy campers and have had to call the manager to diffuse volatile situations. Comes with the territory.

I am proud to have been a member of the Ontario Nurses Associations since its inception in the early 80's. Having parents who toiled in inhumane circumstances, for no pay, under Stalin, in Siberia for 10 years, I have always appreciated my job, my freedom, and the benefits of living in a democracy. Moving to Canada my dad became a union guy and was happy to get a paycheck. He taught us the value of hard work, honesty and dedication.

I would like to thank many of those here who have come to know my daughter over the years, especially during her high school volunteering time. Many have supported and encouraged her in her chosen career of nursing. In the Wiens family she will be the 17th nurse. Many of you have given me some great advice, which I have surprisingly taken, on how to, and not to, raise a teenage girl in this day and age. Thanks Mike...

Health care in Canada continues to face many challenges, but as I regularly say to pts, "The system is not perfect, but it is still a good system." I will miss saying "thank you" to the pt. upon leaving the room. I will miss hearing Karen call her pts. "sir" and ma'am."

I will miss walking quietly down the halls during midnight rounds, especially on damp and rainy, or cold and snowy nights, and checking my pts. Finding them asleep still gives me that warm and fuzzy feeling that mothers have when they know that all of their kids are tucked safe and sound into their beds for the night. As Gina recently said

"It's all about connecting with the pt." And we know that does not always mean verbally.

I would like to thank my parents, who of course are not here, for venturing out and taking a risk by bringing their young family to Canada. "If someone can't make a go of it here they can't make a go of it anywhere" my dad used to say.

I would like to thank many here who have supported my writing over the past few years, especially Roberta Jarescni, my biggest fan.

Most of all, I would like to thank many here who helped put this evening together. Having "no say" in it concerned me at times, but I had peace knowing that everything was under control. Amber, Karen, Colette, Lisa, Faye and Joanne. Thank you so very much.

Nursing of course involves ongoing education, so I have already signed up for some courses. Lisa Mac. will share her fail proof tips on how to apply red lipstick 10 times a day without ever going over the lines. Faye will teach how to wake up every morning refreshed, with each hair perfectly trimmed and sprayed in place. Karen will give me a crash course on internet lingo and abbreviations, such as _____. Colette has been asked to host a local

cable TV show on preparing Middle Eastern foods such as humus, kibba and taboulah. Her acceptance will, of course, depend on the future of our OB dept. If she does accept the TV offer, she will of course, as the host of a food show, be required to wear a tight, low cut t-shirt to show her ample cleavage. As will Lisa. Amber is teaching a course on organizing your home desk top computer files, as well as the entire computer room, with all the "must have's" from Staples. At the same time she will show you how to take adorable pictures of your kids running around barefoot in the grass for Instagram.

But the course that I am the most excited about is one taught by Joanne Jacobs. I am pleased that I have been accepted, since it is already oversubscribed. I even have my manual already. It is a 10 week, 10 step program called "The True Power of Assertiveness. How to tell people What You Really Think!"...

Thanks to the many who have given generously towards the donations for the school in Serpneve, Ukraine, where my mother and her siblings attended so many years ago. Built by the Germans, it is still standing. It has had some renovations, but there still seems to be lots of work to be done. I will specify that the funds specifically go to renovate the dilapidated gym. An American has donated \$6,000 I am told, so the monies collected should go a long ways, I am told. This is a great opportunity to sow into the lives of these kids. A small medical clinic has also recently opened in the town, I am told.

I would like to thank my husband, for his patience over the years. He is sort of... well... type A... and I am...well... sort of.. all over the place. To my daughter Rachel who will be a great nurse in 3 years. Our son Adam, an engineer in Alberta who couldn't be here tonight.

Although my parents often spoke Russian in the home I never really picked up on it but I have been practicing hard and have taught myself a few words for when I will be in the Ukraine this August. I did hear on the CBC last week that Prime Minister Harper has deployed _____ troops into the Ukraine, and this did give me some comfort, but I am happy that I now know a few words of Russian myself.

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_____"

Translated this means "help! Does anyone even know that I am over here?? Call my husband. He was right after all...I never should have come. Is the nearest airport even open??"

Finally, and most important of all, I am thankful for my faith in God, and in his son Jesus Christ, for daily renewing my joy and giving me hope for the future.

Goodnight, and may God bless you all! Thank you.