

A Special Edition

NIGHTINGALE SONGS

A forum for nurses to share their silent moments of reflection on their nursing.

JUNE 1999

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

*Created for Homerton College and The Reflective Practice Conference
Cambridge, U.K.*

June, 1999

ISOLATION PRECAUTIONS

I

Some drive you deep
unto the coils of your self
not because of your being,
not because of your soul,
but because
of what you might give them
in return.

One of them was here.
Lady in white was here.
She had hopes for you.
She had wishes for you
and she gave you time.
But she was half in, half out,
isolation precautions,
The sign told all,
the reason for masks and gowns,
and how you were
to be separated from them.

II

She wore boots over her shoes
so she won't have to pass the
broken paths you've trod.
The mask covered her mouth
to silence her asking;
She already knows you.
The goggles over her eyes
to blur your suffering
for she understood your hurt.
The gowns were donned
to keep you from being too near
her immaculate body

There was no time, no hope,
no need for others to be close
The gloves covered her hands
so she did not have to touch
your sore,
after all your end was near.

III

I was here
but I wore the boots
so I can trace your footsteps,
to where you've been
so I too can partake of
your journeys past
and guide you to where
you're going.
I wore the mask
so I can remember
that soothing sounds come
not only from my tongue
but also from my body
which shouts the louder.
I wore the cap on my head
to remember that you are human
as much as I am human.
I wore gloves
to remember that what touches you
are not my hands,
what touches you
is my soul.

Tomas M. Madayag

**A HEALER'S PRAYER
OFFERED AT CHACO CANYON**

Dear God of the Universe, I am here for a reason.

Let me live it.

Let my hands find their work,
encompass it,
actualize it.

Let my voice give meaning to my thoughts
so I can share them with others
and they will listen.

Let me choose life in a way that I can fulfill
my mission
here and now.

Let me learn what I must learn,
understand what I must need to understand,
speak what must be spoken.

Let me heal where I can heal
with my hands
and with my words
and with my living.

Amen.

Carol L. S. Simonson,

STUNNED

Stunned
The reddened eyes of grief
The poised manner,
The stoic expressions
Your grief is too new,
The body is numb
The mind is stunned
Life goes on all around you,
Today you make many decisions
Tomorrow you may lose that protection of numbness
You will come to know the jagged edges of grief
Please reach out and allow others to help
May God be with you.

Lynda Glynn

**NURSING - THE SEASONS
OF MY LIFE**

Nursing is the spring of my life -
Each experience is fresh and new.
There's wonderment
Like flowers washed with morning dew.

Nursing is the summer of my life -
A time to perfect all I know.
There's confidence
A world where I can grow.

Nursing is the autumn of my life -
Ablaze with experience rich and glowing.
There's compassion
From richness of caring and knowing.

Nursing is the winter of my life -
A tapestry, a mosaic of all I am.
There's challenge
To find the spring again.

Charlotte Dison

IN TOUCH

I reached out for you
the only way I could -
unable to speak of what
was in my heart.
I hoped you would know
the feelings I had,
even though I hid them well.
I let you go
without ever being told
of my caring -
but could you feel it?
Did my love show?

Mary Gulbrandsen

STEPHANIE

Fragile as a china doll.
 Who are you?
 So innocent, so small.
 You are not as well as before;
 your blue eyes used to twinkle.
 You used to smile, asking for more.
 Who could blame you:
 For have you ever known someone who is
 there just for your own benefit?
 You are precious, and I have been told,
 "Don't get so emotionally involved."
 But I am new at this.
 Tears have been shed.
 Does it ever get easier?
 I wish I could give you
 a home, sweet bliss.
 But a nurse can't become a "rescuer,"
 because it only hinders your progress.
 What I want for you is a home,
 true care, love and happiness.
 A place to rest.

Kimberly G. Taylor

A STUDENT NURSE FIRST BATH

I remember walking down the hall hearing the
 hollering and screeching screams coming out of a
 patient's room -

Surely they won't give that patient to me - I
 wouldn't know what to do with him -

My classmates and I jokingly, nervously call -
 "that one's going to be mine" -

Surely they won't subject this patient to a fumbling
 unknowing novice nurse -

My instructor assigned us our patients to bathe -
 to practice on - Yes that was my patient -

Surely she'd give me further instructions how to
 care for this man - lying in a fetal position, yelling,
 bellowing out those strange sounds -

His eyes were crystal clear blue - a young adult
 with all his limbs in painful contractures - looking at
 me, sending me a message

As a child on her mother's apron strings, I pleaded
 for more time - more experience, but my instructor sent
 me back with reassurance -

Surely you don't want me in here - his eyes so
 frightened - so devastating - so alone - very alone -

As I spoke to him, and I touched and caressed his
 body with a warm wash cloth, our eyes met and I
 learned from him what nursing is.

Chris Pfeffer

TOGETHER, WE BEGIN

I entered your room, to meet you,
 hoping to enter your world
 to know you.

I am still new at this and certainly
 must look as unsure as I feel . . .
 but you do not seem to notice.

You are busy . . .
 noticing yourself
 and this situation
 you find yourself in.

You look up, and I see in your eyes
 a light of recognition.

You see me as someone who has
 come to help you understand
 and make sense of this "stroke"
 of this thing that happened
 to you.

So together we begin to get ready for the day.

As I comb your hair, you notice
 a button
 missing from your blouse,
 and you are embarrassed.

I am sorry I didn't notice before,
 so I adjust things
 so no one will see,
 and I realize this makes
 you feel better.

I check your "tubes," your "sites,"
 your vital signs and I
 wonder what you feel
 and I ask you,
 "What do you need?"

Your paralyzed face turns to me,
 and cracks a smile.

You accept me
 and I see that I
 will be okay with this,
 and that you are, too.

Diane Zried

CONSENT TO CARE

I was so enraptured by the beauty of this life
that I had forgotten the pain.
I was in such awe of this exquisiteness of
special tender moments
that I had forgotten the suffering.

The darkest sky made herself known to me
as I submitted myself to the inevitable.
How easily could these sterile spaces
and sullen soul intrude upon my being?
Too easily.
For they have not come to know me for who I am
but for who they desire me to be.
They probe and manipulate my body due to
consent from myself
but not from my soul.
I am to share with them what I know -
what I hold in my heart.
But they are impermeable
They smother me with care,
Yet leave me uncared for.
Perhaps tomorrow we will meet anew.

*C. J.***THE LAST THREE DAYS**

I didn't know
it would be
her last three days with him . . .

His wife is helping
with his care
at night, those last three days.

On the last night
I called her
she had already gone home . . .

"Mrs. Tow," I
gently said,
"It's Al - you'd better come."

Those last three days -
so glad I
gave them that time together.

*Karen Talarico***ANNE**

She stood transfixed
in disbelief
Her expression
filled with fear
Wide eyes surveyed
the tiny babe
As they filled up . . .
and then a tear
Spilled down her cheek.
As I opened the isolette
"You can touch her hand,"
I said.
Hesitantly, very hesitantly
Her finger touched lightly . . .
A tiny hand grasped tightly
She smiled though
The Tears
Her name is "Anne" she said.

*Carol Drozdowicz***LAST RIGHTS**

Tight faced, they found and cornered her at work.
As quick as hammers pounding down a wall
the words came hard and nailed that little quirk
of honesty so fast she held the rail.

"Who were you to say he was a dying
man, though he lay white, his lifethread thin.
How were you to know the speed his flying
heart would race away from bone and skin.

He was hopeless, yes, beneath that tent
of filmy gauze, but who were you to say
his fate was hinged in prayer - our magic spent.
Who knows, he might have lived another day."

"He held my hands and asked the truth," she said.
Then turned away to smooth the empty bed.

Tess Yelland-Marino

LOVE IS A SMALL SPOON

I look at a tiny frame 93 years of age, (and much less in pounds) curled up in the same position as in the womb, and I wonder, dear Lord . . . what goes through her mind?

She's unable to speak, and so weak she can hardly move.

She **DEPENDS**

on those of us around her
to meet her needs.

She gets something to drink when I offer it,
something to eat when I feed her.

She gets turned when I turn her
bathed when I wash her.

Ah, yes, she **DEPENDS**, Lord,
on those of us around her.

She's fortunate, this little lady, that those who tend to her needs really love her. I've been told she loves mashed potatoes and hates spinach . . . and told definitely to use a small spoon, please!

This frail frame, almost lost in the bedsheets, will only be with us for a short while . . . then she'll be back at the nursing home with those who know about small spoons and mashed potatoes.

But I still wonder what goes through her mind! Does she pray? Does she talk to you, Lord? She'll have to **DEPEND** on you, oh Lord, for You are around her more than anyone. I know she'll do fine . . . because You know all about mashed potatoes and small spoons, but more importantly,

You know how to nourish her and care for her, and give what she needs most!

All this reminds me dear Lord, of how I must **DEPEND** on **YOU!** for my likes and needs!

You feed me with your Eucharist and Your Scripture . . . (much better than mashed potatoes).

I thank you Lord,
for feeding me when You choose . . . and not giving me spinach too often.

I thank you Lord,
for allowing me just to be still . . . curled up under the sheets when I need to rest . . . and waiting for You to "move me."

I thank you most of all Lord,
for that loving touch . . . that knows the unique me so well, that knows how to feed me
with a small spoon!

I am truly grateful . . . Bless my 93 year old patient, Lord. Bless me . . .

Patricia Carroll Oetting

BOUND TO TRUST

I put up fences - called them "limit setting"

He, as he was bound to do,
pushed hard against the fence

I, as I was bound to do,
tripped him up in the falling fence

A shove so powerful that

I faced the shame of my protective limits

He went on

I went on

We stayed in touch

One day I said Do you remember? I am sorry

He said I do remember. Thank you.

Savina Schoenhofer

DIVERSITY

Different customs, different times

People come from varying climes.

What's important in their lives?

Sons and daughters, husbands and wives.

Ways of worship, foods they eat

Rest and hygiene are needs to meet,

How do I communicate?

A smile, a nod, a touch will state.

Though not the same as you or me,

We all share in our need to be.

Barbara Sorbello

NURSING

Formless, floating, a cloud of
misty possibility
within and without,
You, me, us . . . all of us . . .
But you and me
connected, connecting
floating together, apart,
creating together the fiber of our
being.
You tell me in so many ways
who you are and how you are.
We are
in a moment and forever
changed from the moment.

I am a staff nurse.
You are wheeled in the door of the
intensive care unit
covered with white sheet . . .
fear in your eyes . . .
body not responding to your
desires, needs, hopes.
Will it ever?
We work so quickly to get you
into the giant iron house that will
allow you to breathe.
I am so busy, so afraid I will do
the wrong thing.
I don't belong here.
I want to flee,
be anywhere but here.

Formless.
A void.
Waiting for the form.
Trying to force it to be . . .
and nothing
but my fear.

Your eyes - panic, pleading,
needing, questioning -
Stepping out of self and moving
into the cloud,
pulled by your pleading eyes,
creating the form of healing,
caring with you for a moment of
days
into weeks.

A husband, a mother,
part of the mist
brought into the light of our
creating stolen moments
illegal passing through the door
into the healing space.

And one day, by allowing to be,
the body, the whole, the healing
space . . .
You move a toe, and smile, and
speech returns,
and you are wheeled triumphant
from the clanking world of
technology and beeping and never-
ending fluorescent lights.
And I hold your hand and share
your joy as you settle into a new
bed in a new place.
And gradually we break apart,
lose touch.

And months later,
A lifetime of time
and of moments.
I am back into the daily,
the beeping, rustling, bustling,
hurrying,
heart banging world.

And you walk in the door.
I don't know you,
upright, strong, reliant,
come to share the joy of your
becoming,
of our creation.

We embrace,
say the usual things we say,
we all say,
and move out into the pulse beat of
our lives.

Carolyn Brown

FLYING

Falcon, I was unfettered
free to soar or
with flick of wrist
dip down
to hover just above
the earth's green trees.
I had to laugh
at such excess
epiphanies tumbling
one upon the other.
I had forgotten in my joy
what I remembered
as I lurched
ungainly earthward.

What is this ghastly place?
Why did you drag me here?
Why have you bound me
made of me a living corpse
sentient yet immobilized
a spellbound player
in a hellish dream?
You bastards!
Won't you understand me?
HEAR ME!

Look at these battered struts
my obstinate legs and arms
that once responded
automatically
before I even had the idea
lodged firmly in my mind.
Falcon, I thought I was
master strapped inside
a wondrous snarling beast!
I am strapped again
but to a different breed of beast.
Not master now . . .
I'm held down, earthbound.
Still my will endures
I even laugh at times
and I would tell you if I could
already I am flying
soon, very soon,
I will soar.

Sanford Russell

MAN/NURSE

To be a man
and a nurse;
A contradiction
and compliment
Opposite almost,
the hard and the soft;
The yin and the yang;
in touch with the deep.
Called to a new place to live;
In gentleness and quiet,
in fear;
Anticipation and excitement,
an adventure;
And yet a sound inside
calls from the dark.
To be a nurse
and a man;
In giving, openness
and receiving;
All that it means
to be whole:
I listen to the sound within,
and hear the winds
of my healing.

Tim Porter-O'Grady

STILL LIFE

Her hand twitched and as her palm brushed my finger, it grasped it in a ghostly pause before falling back toward her body.

I had death in my folded arms today. Not metaphorical death, or imagined, or brushed with. The real thing. A newborn girl who tripped on her lifeline sometime today.

The unit needed help and I am generally a helpful person, so I went without knowing what the story was. A quick delivery of a gray-haired young woman. So where's the problem that they need me of all things, a baby nurse? They needed someone to hold the baby in case the mother couldn't. It wasn't until they passed the little one to me that I knew why. "Here."

The mother fell asleep immediately after moving to her room. No one spoke. Amazing grace. She said she was so tired, she just had to . . . and she was asleep. Wise body of hers to protect her so, I thought.

I held the baby in a pin-drop quiet room, alone, while waiting for her family. The little girl gestured to me (yes, I know it's involuntary movement), and I knew she was still in there - barely - I could feel her, hear her. I can't, I can't - this just . . .

When the spirit fails, persons frequently turn to counting. In this room, the baby and I, there were 1.7 women, one big and one very small, 1.6 . . . , 1.5 . . . She weighed as much as other babies her size, ten fingers and ten toes, one mother, . . . 1.4.

Her color at first was the same as other babies of similar age and size and nature. Pink - very pink at first, was the cord that tight to do all this? Truly, the tie that binds. She was still in there, I knew it. I didn't know how or why, only that she still was. . . 1.3.

The mother called out to me in the next room. She was calm and sleepy, rubbing her eyes. She had a dream, she said, just now. The baby was still hungry after nursing for what seemed like months, she said.

"Is she here?"

I laid the little girl in her arms, and the mother said,

"Yes, she's here still. I can feel her."

She smiled warmly at me, and then forgetting me thoroughly, she asked the baby,

"Are you still hungry - do need a little bit more?"

She lifted her gown aside and put the baby on her right breast. One small infant arm nestled on the left. There was a brief movement behind one baby eyelid.

It was the perfect Madonna and Child. I've never witnessed better. I left the room, waiting. . . 1.2, . . . 1.1, . . .

"I think she's done now. You can hold her," the baby's mother called out, . . . 1.0.

Where does the baby go when she's not in the body anymore? Did she get enough?

The most profound nursing at the breast/soul.

T. M. Vezeau

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TOGETHER FOR A MOMENT IN TIME

Sitting there serenely like a statue
 it was as if she had always been there motionless in time.
 A cold room, strange sad, and sweet faces
 one melting into another - all seemed separate, yet all
 became one.
 I touched her - she pulled away.

We spoke of simple things.
 Of our names and our claim to the place of our presence.
 It was rocky - I wanted
 she wanted not.
 Or so I thought.

The rhythm of the day led into song
 and we rose to the occasion.
 Suddenly, filled with emotion and glistening eyes she
 embraced me.
 We were along together for a moment in time.
 Her call, so elusive to me before, resonated in my being.
 She was free to me and I was free from myself to be.

She spoke of loneliness and emptiness
 Of darkness and solitude
 And anger.
 Every day was the same - the same place, same table
 same chairs.
 The sameness seemed to envelope her.
 Her essence seemed to be lost deep within her.
 But our talk and touch moved it up and out. I knew her and
 she knew me.

And over the days that we talked, touched, played, and sat
 in silence; we entered a unique place together. We felt
 anger, isolation, sadness, warmth, and hope together.

It was with ambivalence that I said goodbye.
 As much as I wanted to leave, I wanted to stay.
 As I left the room though, I turned to see that she once
 again appeared like a statue sitting motionless in time.

Carol Bruce

Editorial

The need to care and be cared for runs tap-root deep through the heart and soul of nursing. Living out the meaning of caring moment by moment, nurses sing woundedness in silent melodies of the heart, and with stories of pain and joy.

In the telling and retelling of nurses stories, we are brought to remembrance, and we laugh and we cry. We have been there. We know. And we join together in caring unison, affirmed by our knowing. The language of caring is the native tongue of nursing, wherever we are, and however caring is expressed.

This Special Edition of *Nightingale Songs* honors nursing faculty and students of Homerton College, Cambridge and participants of the Reflective Practice Conference of the Royal College of Nursing being held at Robinson College, Cambridge, June 1999. In keeping with the title of this conference "Recovering Nursing's Caring Potential: The Essence of Reflection," selections for this Special Edition have been chosen because of their illumination of Nursing Situations as lived experiences of caring between the nurse and the one nursed. As always, each entry in *Nightingale Songs* is an instance of nurses sharing their silent moments of reflection in their nursing; each selection has been taken from previously published editions of *Nightingale Songs*.

In this wondrous era of electronic communications, global discourse of nursing endeavors has suddenly become almost instantaneous. At Florida Atlantic University, the "home" of *Nightingale Songs*, we are now able to publish every edition of this poignant forum for nurses' reflections on the Internet. The original melody shared over the years has become a chorus of remembrance. At the address noted below, we encourage you to freely download issues for your use and to copy and share their uncopyrighted contents. We also invite you to contribute your poems and reflections on nursing, and to share your comments with us by e-mail. It is a privilege to be able to share your profound stories of nurse caring.

Marguerite J. Purnell, RN; MS.
 Guest Editor

"We invite your continuing responses to this forum, and encourage your contribution to these pages."

Marilyn E. Parker, PhD., RN
 Editor

NIGHTINGALE SONGS

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