

Feature Article

**SYLVIA BURKINSHAW: DEDICATED
SERVICE TO NURSING
Part 2**

Lynn Kirkwood RN(ret) PhD

Changes in hospital services in the 1960s brought about changes in nursing education. With the introduction of The Hospital Insurance Act of 1957 hospital boards became increasingly reluctant to shift scarce resources for patient services to nurses training. Nursing educators saw an opportunity to do away with the apprenticeship system and establish a 'truly' educative system for nurses training. In this shift Miss B relinquished full responsibility for training to the newly appointed director of nursing education, Hilda Lake². Sylvia was responsible for hiring more graduate nurses, ward staffing and retained control of the graduate nursing budget. An advisory committee was established to oversee curriculum, work load and residence life. Thus the director was still able to determine the salary to be paid each nurse. However nurses themselves were taking more interest in their salaries and on some occasions Miss B was forced to become more transparent.

One of Sylvia's greatest challenges she did not win, although she did benefit without compromising her principals. Sylvia understood fully that the rise of nurses unions would further diminish the role of director of nursing. Although she graciously managed the changes in her role, loss of control of patient care she could not accept.

Sylvia strongly opposed nurses unions and was ready to resign her position if they were instituted. She believed that if nurses were professional and upheld the strong principals of nursing care there was no need to join a union. She believed that if nurses joined a union nurses themselves would lose control of nursing practice her role as director would be further diminished. According to Sylvia, in a union setting "I couldn't hire and I couldn't fire, I lost authority to negotiate nurses salaries and determine the nursing budget". KGH nurses joined the nurses union, but fortunately, the KGH Board of Governors recognized Sylvia's worth.

A new position, Director of Medical Support Services (1970) was created. This new position fostered Sylvia's long interest in patient services.

She was responsible for coordinating and developing a broad range of services directly and indirectly related to patient care. One of the most significant outcomes of the new position was the instigation of the first ombudsman role at KGH. She was responsible for all complaints received by the hospital. She is very proud of the fact that she got back to the complainant within 24 hours telling them what she planned to do. She reported to the CEO and had 'absolute jurisdiction to handle the complaint' as she saw fit. Complaints about physicians were passed onto the medical director who reported the outcome to her. Just before her retirement, she became the fulltime Ombudsman and Assistant to the CEO.

Her retirement in 1984 in no way severed her connection with the hospital or with service to others. She is as active in retirement as she was her busiest in her professional life. She is

always there with her quiet commanding confidence to help friends in need. She received her latest award in June of 2006 – **The Davies Award for Philanthropic Leadership** from the Kingston (Ontario) Hospitals Joint Advancement Foundation. She is well deserving of this award, one of many she has received over the years.

She studied law at Queen's to further her interest in legal and ethical issues facing hospitals and patients. She was made an honorary member of the KGH Nurses Alumnae and remains actively involved in their activities. She spends weekends in March and April as part of the interviewing team for medical student applications. She feels it is a wonderful experience to listen to the goals and aspirations of these young people. She is an honorary member of the Salvation Army and has been a member of the Advisory Board since 1961. She has been a member of the seniors association since 1992 and recently received their **Volunteer of the Year Award** (2005). By far her greatest volunteer contribution has been with St. John Ambulance Association which began in 1940 when she was a student nurse. When she came to Kingston she began teaching first aid courses and home nursing. She received her 45 year pin in June of this year.

Sylvia survived the challenges and changes of the 1960s and indeed actively participated in making them happen in a smooth and orderly manner. She was able to combine the strengths of the old superintendent or director of nursing role at the same time as expanding its horizons to new possibilities which would ensure that nurses continued to play a significant role in the new hospital management system. That she weathered the transition and skillfully guided the changes through to successful conclusion is apparent in the esteem with which she is appreciated today. Although she did not choose nursing as a career – she said that she enjoyed everything that she had done and got a lot out of doing it. She mused, “I

hope I have put something back into it”. By the accolades she received and the community and hospital representation at the unveiling of her portrait leaves no question but that she did.

2. Katherine Connell Crothers, *With Tender Loving Care: Story of the School of Nursing of Kingston General Hospital* (Kingston: K.G.H. Nurses Alumnae, 1973), 94.

Note:

Interviews with Sylvia Burkinshaw were conducted in Kingston, Ontario between February and September of 2006.

It is difficult to know how to address nursing leaders of Sylvia's generation. As a Superintendent or Director of Nursing she would certainly have been addressed as 'Miss Burkinshaw', however, as the Chief Nursing Officer role it is more likely to be as 'Sylvia'. I have chosen the more contemporary form of address to highlight her achievement as a change agent.

I appreciate the assistance of Tamara Nelson, Archivist at Kingston General Hospital for providing the 'Bibliography of Sylvia Burkinshaw' Collection 503, and 5999-69, arranged by Paul Wan, Kingston: KGH Archives.

Correction: In part 1, Jean Masten was incorrectly identified as Marsden.

Membership Renewal 2007

Have you sent in your renewal for 2007? Please remember to do so; we rely on this funding to continue the work of the Allemang centre.

Share this newsletter with a friend and encourage them to join as well. Increased membership can help provide the funds to engage in more projects and retrieval of nursing history artifacts and documents. Donations are also appreciated.

Book Review

Boot Camp '59 R.V.H.: Three Years of Survival Training.

Ruth Emmett Hughes

Ruth donated a copy of her memoirs to the Allemang Centre

In June 2000 Hughes assembled letters, diaries and pictures from her training years and wrote an account of those years. She entered the Royal Victoria Hospital School of Nursing, Barrie, Ontario in 1956 and graduated in 1959. That school was established in 1897. In the introduction she says: “The three years made us survivors and whether we liked it or not it did shape our lives. It taught us just to get on with things... We all came into training young and vulnerable. Follow the journey through as the honeymoon ended and the harsh realities of nursing came face to face with us”. Anyone who trained in nursing in the 40’s and 50s will be familiar with the events she experienced over the three years

Hughes describes each year, chapter by chapter. She notes: “My distorted sense of humour is not unique to me. It surfaces as a release from dealing with life and death. It is a catalyst for laughter.” Her exploits will be familiar to many as you read and relive your training days. Her recreation was skating and dancing, there were many opportunities since Camp Borden was nearby.

The final chapter describes a 40-year reunion and a followup that Ruth did with each of her classmates as to where life had led them and is a fascinating read of life stories. Ruth’s daughter (a

nurse) asked her if the training was really worth it upon hearing some of the tales of oppression endured. Hughes reply: “Yes, because of the bond that was established as classmates and the friendship then and now”. As one reads this memoir many memories of your own past come flooding back.

News Items

Mussalem Honoured for Heraldic Work

Helen K. Mussalem, former executive director of the CNA, has added another distinction to the sale of honours she holds. Governor General Michaëlle Jean recently appointed her Herald Extraordinary, an honour held within the Canadian Heraldic Authority. The Authority creates coats of arms, flags and badges for Canadian citizens, corporate bodies and units of the Canadian Forces. “I think it’s tremendous,” says Mussalem of the distinction. “It’s a wonderful recognition from my country.” Mussalem was recognized for encouraging several municipalities—many in British Columbia—to acquire their own coat of arms. She also inspired the Victorian Order of Nurses (of which she was president from 1989 to 1991) and other organizations to obtain their coats of arms. She was given the title Capilano Herald Extraordinary, a reference to BC’s Capilano River. Her personal coat of arms, with the motto “Freely ye have received, freely give,” can be seen on the Public Register of Arms, Flags and Badges of Canada section of the Governor General’s website. www.gg.ca/heraldry/pub-reg/index_e.asp (Excerpted from Canadian Nurse, February 2007, p.5).

University Health Network Nursing Channel

Nurses and members of the public can now go online to see inspirational stories about the nursing profession at UHN’s nursing channel. Launched last fall the website offers TV-like programs that showcase the professional experiences of nurses who work at the UHN

network of hospitals. New programs are developed and launched each month. One such program is “Celebrating Our History: The Toronto General School for Nurses”. (www.nursingchannel.ca). (Excerpted from Canadian Nurse, February 2007, p.5).

Museum of Health Care Kingston

The Museum has announced that an elevator will be installed in the Ann Baillie Building. The elevator will improve the functional relationships between the three floors of the Museum. It will provide access to all areas of the Museum; and permit movement of all artifacts, particularly the large artifacts. Lack of an elevator has been a constraint for the Museum, as the physically challenged have not been always able to attend programs or visit.

An award of \$100,00 has been received from the Department of Canadian Heritage. The final cost is \$250,00 to be met with museum funds and assistance from the Kingston General Hospital. Donations are welcome. (Excerpted from The BAILLIEWICK 10(1), January 2007).

Ontario Creates Nurse Practitioner Clinic

The Ontario government is improving access to health services in Northeastern Ontario by investing over \$1 million to establish a nurse practitioner primary health clinic. The clinic, which will have up to six nurse practitioners, will have three sites—Sudbury, Chapleau and Dowling. Working in collaboration with family doctors and other health professionals, the NPs will provide comprehensive care to about 5000 families in the region who do not have a family doctor. (Excerpted from Nursing Leadership, 19(4):10).

Federal Funds for Nursing Portal

Health Canada will provide federal

funding of \$8.1 million over six years to launch the portal NurseOne. A tool of importance for the recruitment and retention of nurses in First Nation and Inuit communities. NurseOne is a bilingual portal that has been in development by CNA since 2002 and contains a wealth of information for the Canadian public and all nurses across Canada. It will provide information on all aspects of healthcare—from public health alerts, to consultations with experts and health specialists, to best practices. (Excerpted from Nursing Leadership, 19(4):8).

Obituaries

Ethel Taylor (nee Nicholls)

Died suddenly on Friday, January 12, 2007 while enjoying a favourite pastime, playing cards with friends. Ethel had a joy for life that was inspirational. She will be remembered for her high energy, infectious spirit and caring ways. Ethel saw the best in everyone and every situation and will be missed deeply. In her 90th year, she still never wasted a moment and was always planning a new adventure. From her childhood farm in Wawanesa, MN her compassionate soul led her into Nursing. She started her career as an RN at a remote logging camp on Vancouver Island, then went on to become a Nursing Sister during WW11. From there she continued her career in Toronto as an Operating Room Supervisor, finishing as a nurse with the North York Board of Education. (Excerpted from The Toronto Star, January 14, 2007).

Erie “Binnie” Lorraine Smith (nee Barnes)

Died peacefully after a determined battle with cancer at St. Mary’s General Hospital, Kitchener on Saturday, February 10, 2007. She was in her 89th year. Erie was known to many as Binnie, a name given to her as a Nursing Sister in the Canadian Army when she was stationed in Basingstoke, England during the WW11. In living memory of Erie, a tree will be planted through the Trees for Learning Program by the funeral home. (Excerpted from the Toronto Star, February 12,

2007).

Dorothy Doan died June 10, 2007 in Strathroy, ON. At 16 while still attending high school Dorothy answered an ad in the London Free Press and interviewed to become a nurse in training. Through her dedication, Dorothy became a pioneer—a female leader in an era when female leadership was not always appreciated. She graduated as a registered nurse from Strathroy General Hospital in 1935. When war was declared in 1939, she enlisted and reported for duty in 1942. She received several weeks training in England, before travelling to Cape town, South Africa. The journey was a dangerous one; their vessel travelled in a convoy of ships moving only at night and negotiating their way through enemy-infested waters. Later in the war she was transferred to Cairo, where she worked in an operating room for 13 months. Gruelling work, but opportunities to visit bazaars, tour the pyramids and even try a camel ride. After the war she was hired as Assistant Superintendent at Strathroy. She completed a nursing administration course at U of T and became Superintendent, at a time when women in leadership roles were few. She was a Fellow of the American College of Hospital Administrators, and lifetime member of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. In 1992, she was awarded the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada Medal. (Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, December 26, 2006).

Dr. Hazel Miriam Ross of Wolfville, NS died February 14, 2007. She was born March 39, 1929 in Roxville, Digby. Miriam received her Diploma in Nursing from the Victoria General

Hospital, Halifax in 1951. Intent on being a medical missionary she secured BA (magna cum Laude) from Gordon College in Boston in 1955. She subsequently studied at the Allan Memorial Institute of Psychiatry in Montreal, the Boston University School of Nursing (MSc), and Bellshill Maternity Hospital in Lanarkshire, Scotland, where she was certified as a midwife.

She served with the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board in the Republic of Zaire as a staff nurse in rural hospitals. Later as Director of the School of Nursing at the Institut Medical Evangelique in Kimpese, Zaire. In 1978 she earned her MA in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Washington, Seattle, followed by her PhD in the same discipline. For a number of years she was Assistant Professor in the School of Nursing, University of Ottawa. Miriam received the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Acadia University in 1984. In 1985 she made Wolfville her home and became the Hannah Maria Norris Associate Professor of Christian Missions and Social Issues of Acadia Divinity College, where she lectured until 2000. She gave freely of her time and served on boards of many organizations, including The Victorian Order of Nurses. Her faithfulness to her Lord was evident in the way she lived her life, with longtime service on the boards of Deacons and Finance, and as President of the Women's Missionary Society. (Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, February 17, 2007).

Upcoming Conferences

2007 CAHN/ACHN Conference at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon May 31 to June 2.

The conference will be held jointly with the

Canadian Society for the History of Medicine (CSHM). The CSHM meets once a year in conjunction with the Congress of the Social Sciences and the Humanities. The theme of the congress is **“Bridging Communities: Making public knowledge, making knowledge public”**.

The AMS-CAHN-Hannah Lecturer will be Maureen Lux, Assistant Professor of History, Brock University, the author of *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine and Aboriginal People in the Canadian West 1880-1930*.

The title of her lecture is **“Segregated and Isolated: Institutional Care for Aboriginal People in Post-World War 11 in Canada”**.

www.cahn-achn.ca

2008 CAHN/ACHN Conference

The annual CAHN/ACHN 2008 conference will be an international conference to be held **Thursday June 5 through Saturday June 7, 2008**. It will be hosted by the Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto and held in the Health Sciences Building at 155 College Street. Cosponsors are the Faculty, Women’s Studies at York University, the Ryerson School of Nursing and Allemang Centre .

Editor Newsletter

Dorothy Wylie. Please contact her regarding any news items, short articles, announcements, ideas you may have for the Newsletter.

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History of Nursing Writing Prize

The Allemang Centre is offering a prize of \$500 for the best essay in the history of nursing written by a student in the year September 2006 through August 2007.

Criteria for submissions:

1. The paper may deal with any topic in the history of nursing in any period and in any country.
2. Papers should be a minimum of 8 pages, and a maximum of 25 pages in length including footnotes.
3. Both undergraduate and graduate students may submit.
4. The student must be enrolled in a university or community college in Ontario. Students **from any faculty, including nursing, social science, humanities and science**, are invited to apply.

The deadline for submission is August 31 2007. The prize will be awarded in the fall of 2007 at the AGM..

Papers may be submitted either by e-mail or in hard copy. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word include academic affiliation, address, telephone and fax numbers. Students submitting in hard copy should send three copies. The **first** copy should have the name, academic affiliation, address, telephone, fax and e-mail. The remaining two copies should have no identification.

Please send papers to: Dorothy Wylie
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