

NEW LETTER

Feature Article

YEAR OF THE VETERAN

The Minister of Veterans Affairs declared 2005 the *Year of the Veteran*. Throughout the year, Canadians celebrated, honoured, and remembered the contributions and sacrifice of our veterans. 2005 is especially meaningful because it marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Here is one nurse's story of that period.

Evelyn Fleming, Army Nurse 1918-2005

Evelyn Fleming stared at the cards displaying colourful, swirling designs with mounting dismay. Fighting panic, she tried again to identify the reds, greens, blues and other colours right in front of her face. It was no use. She realized for the first time in her life that she was colour blind and there was absolutely nothing she could do about it.

Waves of disappointment washed over her. It was February of 1944, and Ms Fleming, a registered nurse, wanted nothing more than to join the Canadian Army and do her bit for King and country, as millions of Canadians had been doing since 1939, either in the military or on the home front.

There was one very tiny, albeit illegal and irregular, chance left. The medical technician supervising the examination at

Ottawa's Lansdowne Park had been her schoolmate years ago. Seeing her extreme disappointment, he decided to take an enormous personal risk and help her. "How badly do you want to go?" he asked her. She said, 'I want to go.' She failed the test, but the school friend falsified [the result] because she really wanted to go and so she got into the army," said Brenda Kenney, one of Ms Fleming's daughters. Soon after, she took the oath of allegiance to King George VI and was formally sworn in to the Royal Canadian Medical Corps (RCAMC) as a second lieutenant.

After four months training in the hospitals at Kingston and Camp Debert, NS, Ms Fleming shipped out to Britain with her two best friends, Brenda Wilson and Hazel Perrin. The three nurses had become fast friends and decided to stick together no matter what. In fact, they were known far and wide as the "The Three Ottawas". A week after boarding their ship in Halifax, Ms Fleming and her friends landed in Britain reeling from five years of total war. Although the Luftwaffe's blitz had ended years earlier, British service men and women were still fighting and dying all over the world.

Assigned to No. 18 Canadian General Hospital, in Cherry Tree, Colchester, just after the Allies invaded Europe on June 6, 1944, Ms Fleming quickly adapted to the routine of an RCAMC hospital at war. Supervised by a formidable matron, she assisted at operations and treated patients in the wards. It was a hectic and busy time for her and the other nurses, doctors and

orderlies of No. 18, with wounded poring in every hour of the day and night in their hundreds, fresh from fighting in Normandy just over the English Channel. Units of the 1st Canadian Army were pushing inland from the beachhead making good progress but taking their share of casualties. “By the end of June, nearly 20,000 casualties from the British-Canadian sector had been evacuated to the United Kingdom, almost 3,000 of them Canadian,” wrote Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson in *Seventy Years of Service*, a history of the RCAMC.

Col. Nicholson described the routine of a typical Canadian hospital, in this case No. 4 CGH four days after D-Day: “A steady flow of patients to and from operating theatres continued all day and into the evening. Nursing sisters toiling in the wards for 18 hours on end lost all sense of self and often had to be reminded to eat. Except for a few difficult cases requiring assistance by a medical officer, sisters were starting all blood, plasma and saline infusions, taking blood pressure, and giving all serum and penicillin injections.”

Treating men who were badly disfigured from facial burns particularly affected Ms Fleming, Ms Kenney said. “They lost their noses and ears. She said if ever they could see, they couldn’t even wear glasses. She called them ‘my boys’ [and] became very attached to them.” In the evening, Ms Fleming escorted “her boys” to the local pub for a drink. She wrote letters for those who had lost their eyesight, and fed the men without hands. It was hard for her, but she was glad to help, Ms Kenney said. “A lot of them didn’t want to go home, wanted to die because they were so disfigured. Their mental anguish really affected her, [but] she was modest about what she did.”

Paradoxically, Ms Fleming and her two friends enjoyed a very active social life—years later, she told her daughter her dance card was never empty—at a time when people were determined to grab whatever pleasure they could. One night, Ms Fleming and her two side-kicks suffered a narrow escape when they returned home from a pub in a blackout. “It was really foggy, pitch black, they couldn’t see their hands in front of their faces and they were walking their bikes when they heard a rifle being cocked,” said Ms Kenney. She and her friends had walked into a nervous Home Guard patrol. “We were really lucky not to have been killed. It was the most frightening night of my time there,” Ms Fleming told her daughter years later.

After the Germans surrendered on May 7 1945, Ms Fleming was assigned to an army hospital in Bramshott, Hampshire. In March of 1946, she was transferred to another in occupied Germany. For the next two months, she saw at first hand a devastated Germany and attended a whirlwind round of going-home parties.

After obtaining a certificate in public health nursing at the University of Toronto in 1948, Ms Fleming enlisted in the peacetime army on January 13, 1950. Posted to the big supply depot in Montreal’s Longue Pointe, Evelyn Morin—as she was known then—met her future husband, Lieutenant Stephen Fleming of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. A year later, on April 4, 1951, they were married in Fort Lewis, Wash. Mr. Fleming was on his way to the Korean War and he was in a hurry to marry his sweetheart. After a 10-day honeymoon, he shipped out, and she returned to Montreal. They didn’t see each other for a year.

(Buzz Bourdon, *Globe and Mail*, November

8, 2005).

Membership Renewal

It will soon be time to renew your **MEMBERSHIP** for 2006. Please remember to do so. We rely on member fees to continue the work of the Centre and further the goals. **DONATIONS** of any amount are also appreciated. A charitable donation receipt will be issued. Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague and encourage them to join as well.

Check our web site: www.allemang.on.ca

Allemang Centre for the History of Nursing Annual Meeting

The annual meeting was held on Saturday, November 26, 2005 at the Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, 155 College Street. President Kathleen MacMillan presided. The Sudbury History of Nursing Group, led by Joyce MacQueen, described their project to obtain the oral histories from Sudbury retired nurses. Other members of the group presenting included Morna Rupert, Lynda Edman, and Dr. Margaret Borley. All of whom braved the elements of the day to reach the Toronto presentation. The Sudbury Group was organized by Joyce in 1997 and became affiliated with the Allemang Centre. The project involved three phases and received financial support from the local community and the Centre.

Fifty interviews have been completed and 30 transcribed. They are now moving into the final phase of editing, printing and compiling the interviews. Listening to some of the findings produced some interesting discussion about our own personal experiences in "training".

President's Report 2004-5

The death of Margaret Allemang in April this year marked a turning point in the history of the organization. We shall long remember Margaret's inspiration and dedication to the history of nursing. As a director of the Centre since its inception, she maintained a strong interest in all activities and decisions. A large part of our archival holdings were initially collected by her and her concern about their future impelled her to make a significant contribution to the Centre in many instrumental ways. The directors are actively seeking a home for the collection which will be in keeping with her express wishes.

This spring the cataloguing of our collection, funded by a Trillium grant, was completed. Materials remain in storage at Bridgepoint Health but are now in archival quality boxes and folders.

In October 2004, for the first time, we presented a history of nursing essay prize. The winner was nurse Lisa Bitoni, who received a prize of \$300. Subsequently, the directors voted to increase this year's prize to \$500. The Centre continued its policy of sponsoring students to the CAHN conference and this June paid the registration and banquet fees for four Ontario nursing students to attend the conference in Ottawa. We are grateful to the special donations that made this possible.

Special thanks are due to Dorothy Wylie as editor of the newsletter. Four, well-received newsletters have been sent out during the year. We would also like to recognize the ongoing efforts of the Sudbury Group, led by Joyce MacQueen, in the oral history project. Our membership has remained steady at 84.

We extend our thanks to Gloria Kay who is

stepping down from the Board of Directors after four years.

*Alleman Centre History of Nursing
Writing Prize 2005*

Jennifer Sellecchia is the recipient of the 2005 award of \$500. Her essay is entitled “**Officers and Gentlewomen: The Canadian Nursing Sisters of World War 11**”. Jennifer attends York University in the Faculty of Education, she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree and is now enrolled in the teaching pre-service program at York. The essay topic assigned was medical history. Since her sister is a nurse, she chose to write about nursing history and many of her references were obtained through the Alleman Centre. Jennifer was excited by her findings “I couldn’t believe what I was reading”. Her goal is to teach high school history, and we wish her well with future endeavours. A shortened version of her paper will appear in the next newsletter.

Book Reviews

Bates, Christina, Dodd, Dianne and Rousseau, Nicole. Eds. ***On All Frontiers: Four Centuries of Canadian Nursing***. Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 2005, 248 pages.

This book provides an interesting perspective on the history of nursing over four centuries. It celebrates all of the various parameters of nursing across the centuries, not only recognizing leaders, but also all the many other facets of care that nurses have engaged in. Early beginnings came with the arrival of lay nurses in New France in the early 1600’s and eventually the establishment of religious communities to care for the sick.

In English Canada midwives and untrained lay nurses provided care in childbirth and illness. The establishment of training schools in hospitals in the late 1800s generated the “trained nurse”, skilled in housekeeping as well as caring for the sick. The valiant nurses who participated in World Wars I and II are recognized for their devotion and caring under extremely difficult circumstances. The struggle for adequate education and “professionalization” is portrayed along with the move to unionization and meaningful remuneration for nursing. A great deal of nursing history is packed into these pages and provides a true celebration of nursing. Pictures and anecdotes of specific nurses add to the richness of the content.

This collective history of nursing represents a compilation of nursing documents, photographs and artifacts brought together from CNA archives and other sources scattered throughout the country. Elements of nursing history are now also displayed in Ottawa at the Museum of Civilization, The Canadian War Museum, and the Library and Archives of Canada. A visit to these sites and reading “On All Frontiers” provides an enriched perspective on Canadian nursing history and an appreciation of the many struggles throughout the ages.

*Wilson-Simmie, Katherine. **Lights Out!: The Memoir of Nursing Sister Kate Wilson, Canadian Army Medical Corps 1915-1917***. Second ed. Ottawa, ON: CEF Books, 2004, 199 pages.

This is the second edition of the memoirs of Kate Wilson, originally published in 1981. There is little written about the valiant nursing sisters who served in WW1 and the richness of her experiences are outlined here in her own words. Her strength, determination and good humour

predominate in the most difficult situations. The book's value is increased by the number of photographs of the nursing sisters and the war events, which were provided by her daughter.

This being the Year of the Veteran, reading the book brings home the trials and hardships experienced by the over 2000 Canadian Nursing Sisters who served overseas. 39 Nursing Sisters died during the war; from disease, in action, and when a hospital ship the Llandovery Castle was sunk by a German U-boat in June 1918.

Kate Wilson was born in Chatsworth, ON October 15, 1887 of United Empire Loyalist stock and had a strict Scottish Presbyterian upbringing. She entered nursing at the Owen Sound Memorial hospital in 1910, graduating in 1913. In 1915 she was one of 72 nursing sisters sent overseas. This is her story of the war years. She died at Wiarton ON, September 5, 1984.

Katherine Wilson-Simmie was interviewed for the Allemang WW1 collection on October 18, 1977 in her home at Wiarton. Her transcript is 42 pages. Further details of her life are available from Judy Young. e-mail: judithy@primus.ca
News Items

RNAO

RNAO announced Mary Ferguson Pare is President-Elect 2005. Pare is Vice-President, Professional Affairs and Chief Nursing Executive at University Health Network, Toronto. She is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto and cross-appointed to the Schools of Nursing at the University of British Columbia and University of

Victoria.

(Excerpt from Canadian Journal of Nursing Leadership, 18 (3), page 17).

FACULTY OF NURSING, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The Faculty of Nursing, U of T has moved from their long time home on St. George Street to 155 College Street (at McCaul). The new home will be a state of the art centre for nursing education, providing much needed learning space. It includes a multi media centre, nursing research commons, learning resource centre and student lounge. A significant change is the addition of a Clinical Simulation Learning Centre (SIMS Lab) to enhance clinical education.

(Excerpt from Vital Connections, Summer 2005, and page 3).

Obituaries

Cheeseman, Jean (nee Wallace) RN.

Jean passed away October 2, 2005 at Brantford General Hospital. Born in Pembroke in 1914, she will always be remembered and admired for her courageous spirit, her positive attitude about life, and her kindness toward others. Jean graduated from Kingston General Hospital in 1939 and served in the Royal Canadian Medical Corps as a Lt. Nursing Sister in England and northwest Europe in World War 11. A tree will be planted in memory of Jean at the Beckett-Glaves Memorial Forest, Brantford, ON.

Reimer, Marlene (nee MacArthur).

Marlene had three loves: her family, her profession and spending time in the great outdoors. She was passionate about the values of nursing, and had a major impact on the profession through her teaching and research. Highlights of her academic career

included convocating with her daughters (Jennifer, Bachelor's; Betty, Master's; Marlene, PhD) and meeting Yasser Arafat while teaching in the Gaza Strip. She served on many national and international committees. She was Professor Emeritus, University of Calgary and had just started a new position as Dean of the Faculty of Nursing, University of Manitoba. The funeral was held in Calgary November 7 and a memorial service in Winnipeg, November 9, 2005.

Dates to Remember

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF NURSING/
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR L'HISTOIRE DU NURSING
CAHN/ACHN 19th annual meeting
Vancouver, BC June 8-10, 2006.**

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 2005 through August 2006.

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 31 August 2006. The prize will be awarded in at the

annual general meeting in 2006.

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 the vice-president of Allemang Centre:

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Editor Newsletter

We welcome contributions to the newsletter, news items, short articles related to nursing history, announcements, etc. that you would like to have reported.

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