

DOROTHY ELLEN ALLAN



Director of Nursing, Yarmouth Regional Hospital and Director of Nursing Education, Yarmouth School of Nursing (previously Yarmouth Training School for Nurses) and a pioneer in public school based health education in Nova Scotia. She was awarded a Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Registered Nurses Association of Nova Scotia (RNANS) in 1978 and also the recipient of a College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia Centennial Award in 2009 for her contribution to nursing and now recognized again in 2013 for the 65th Anniversary of the Dalhousie University School of Nursing.

How was all this accomplished? Let it be told now as highlights from an interview with Dorothy in July, 1983, conducted by Barbara Keddy.

Dorothy was born in 1913 in Ashmore, Digby County, NS, to Mr & Mrs Cogens. Dorothy's mother was a school teacher and her father a fisherman. Dorothy's early education was in a two roomed schoolhouse where she obtained her provincial grade 11. This was as much as one could go at that time.

Dorothy always stated that she wanted to be a nurse so after high school she entered the Yarmouth Training School for Nurses, fifty miles from her home but seemed much further to her at the time. The requirements for entrance was a grade 10 certificate, a short resume of yourself stating why you wanted to be a nurse, and a doctor's certificate. She had to pay for her chest X-rays, black shoes, stockings, all the text books and the uniform material, which was sent to her mother with a pattern. This was during the depression so very difficult times and every cent was counted. 25 cents was a lot of money. Her mother made her uniforms. The material was navy chambray, white cuffs and later on a white hard collar. The skirt had to be 11 inches from the floor and the apron had to be 2 inches below the uniform dress.

The hospital was a general hospital with 50 beds and the residence was on Vancouver Street. Dorothy arrived September 4, 1931 by train, trunk and all and was met by a senior student. The 'Home Mother' had a great deal of authority and used it whenever she could. The rules of residence life were very strict and one made sure that you knew the rules or suffer the consequences. The rules were difficult to take, for instance, one could not leave your room after 8 pm during the 6 month of Probation and after that it was 10 am and sometimes still daylight. There was no rebelling, you did what you were told or be sent home.



Dorothy's class had eight students, four graduated: one was 'let go', one failed the exams and another was 'let go' (a term used then) because her attitude did not suit that of a nurse.

The hierarchy among students was subtle. The junior's feared the seniors; the third year students and one did not associate with a third year student. You were expected to stand when they approached, let them go on an elevator first, for instance. As Probies, one duty that was hated was calling the senior nurses to get up and sometimes one had to go back several times and if the senior was late on duty they always blamed the Probie for a late call and the Probie would be punished with no discussion. Another chore while on 'Duty Week' -- at 8 o'clock, take the mail to the post office which was a ½ mile walk, rain, sun or snow and be back on the wards to help feed the patients. It was back at 5 o'clock to collect the mail. Being four in the class the Duty Week came too often for anyone's liking and often this assignment went past the Probie stage.

The students had one afternoon a week off and that started at 1 pm , if you were lucky and three hours off on Sundays any time throughout the day.. The work day was 7 am to 7 pm each day. Summer holidays were two weeks. During 'Training' an allowance was given, \$6.00 after Probie finished, then \$7 and then \$8 for the last year. Money was taken off your allowance if you broke anything from a thermometer to a plate. One had to count and sign for any equipment taken and recount and resign when returned.

In charge of the nurses was the DON, Supervisors-Nights, OR, Lab and drugs, Head nurse who was often a senior nurse. The Head Nurse had all the authority, she could reprimand, do evaluations and advise time to be taken away from you for very minor things. *"We were truly terrified of the Director of Nursing who often made rounds and would stand over you while you worked. One day while I was making a bed and the bottom sheet was a bit loose and she grabbed the sheets, threw them on the floor and made me re-do the bed with a tight sheet. She timed me making the bed and this amount of time was taken off my two hour 'time off duty'. I never made a lose bed again"*.

The first day of *training* started with breakfast at 7 am and in the classroom by 8 am, uniform and all to meet the Director of Nursing. After the meeting Dorothy was sent to a ward not knowing one thing. A senior nurse took their names and told them what time they would be off duty and then she left.

"My first assignment was to answer a bell. The male patient asked for a bottle. The only bottle I heard of was a hot water bottle, so I went to the utility room, filled the hot water bottle and took it to him, without a cover. I knew nothing about a cover. He took it and said, 'Thank you'". Soon the bell went again and on answering it he asked for a urinal. I didn't know what that was so I asked another nurse. She gave me this utensil covered with a cloth and said this is what he wants. I still didn't know what I had given him or what he was going to do with it. Ending my first day as a promising nurse".

Later there were three affiliations: the Tb hospital in Saint John, NB; three months in the Lying-in-Hospital at Providence and three months at the Chapan hospital in Rhode Island for infectious diseases. "The Chapan hospital was a let-down, the food was little and

terrible, the staff were unhappy and there were many 'sad experiences'. The depression really hit hard in the States and while Dorothy was studying here the banks all closed and one could not get any money, even from home. A movie cost 6 cents as did a vaudeville show where Dorothy saw the Mills Brothers and said an unforgettable experience. Returning to the Yarmouth hospital as a senior nurse and to proper food was so welcoming.

"At the Chapan hospital they had 'roll call' each morning. We had to line up alphabetically; you said your first initial and your last name. So it would start off each morning – "D. Cogans, A. Hore" – We could hardly keep a straight face and on one dared laugh."

"As a student nurse, if we were not looking after patients, we made dressings, cotton balls, supplies and cleaned everywhere. Aseptic technique was drilled into us and 'good' nursing care for the patient's return to health depended on this as there were no antibiotics, I/V's in those days. There were terrible wounds to deal with from fishermen and hunters. The dressings were kept wet 24/7 with a Dakin's Solution. Then dealing with diseases – diphtheria was really bad and the patients were mostly young and were kept in what was called 'the Laryngeal Room'. You may have 6 or more patients under your care and all you did was go from one to the other suctioning the mucus away from their tracheotomy tube. A ship came into Yarmouth Harbour with 9 typhoid patients who were also isolated. I was also assigned to this ward and before going had to take the Typhoid shot which made me very ill but I had to keep working. The treatment here was cold baths and then clod packs in the armpits and groin and these were change every few minutes.

There was also an outbreak of TB while I was in Training. One classmate died and another fortunately recovered and later completed her training. It started from the cook in the main kitchen who was found out to be an active Tb.

Graduation finally arrived and the program was held in the local theater. The speaker was an elderly doctor who did not prepare a message but read a chapter for the book *Seri Gemp*. There was no dance; no celebration because money was short as the effects of the Depression was still around.

My first jobs were to 'special patients' in the Yarmouth area and I soon married. When my husband developed TB during the war years I worked at the Yarmouth School of Nursing for several years. There was a shortage of nurses everywhere so I negotiated with the superintendent of the 'San' in Kentville that I would come to work if he would have my husband admitted without the 6 month wait. This was 1948. My time at the San was as a general duty nurse for four years and then 2 or 3 years in the operating room. The OR nurses were responsible for giving the pneumothorax treatments so I did this for some time. I then became Night Supervisor. At this time injection of 'Strep' was given to patients and I became the 'strep nurse' and did injections all day. My husband improved and was discharged so I became a 'home mom' again.

A school nurse was required at the Mill so I applied and got the job. There was a full time nurse and a school nurse. I then worked as a school nurse for 15 years in five different

schools in the Yarmouth area with the Department of Public Health, promoting health practices, such as hand washing, home visits and providing a private office in each school for student assessment, counseling, teaching etc. .I also assisted with immunization clinics, Tb screening, dental clinics.

I then decided that supervision was my real interest and decided to take the Nursing Service Administration course offered at Dalhousie University. It was the first year that it was offered. I obtained the diploma in 1961.

October, 1961 after being accepted as a supervisor in the new Yarmouth Regional hospital, I received a call from the Administrator and he told me that I would be the Director of Nursing, I was not pleased at first but the work went on. I saw this experience as giving me a new outlook on what nursing was and the importance of effective administration in improving the working lives of nurses. The first thing that I did was to meet with all the Head Nurses and Supervisors and soon discovered that they required formal help so I sent them all to a special course offered in Saint John, NB. When they returned we then had a common understanding of what needed to be accomplished. I was DON for 17 years. I established the first Policy and Procedure Manuals, established the 'role of the head nurse' but to name a few accomplishments. During this time I was also the Director of Nursing Education and fortunately after some time the position was divided into two positions.

Each area that I worked from the San onward seemed a highlight in my career. I retired in 1978, not quite ready but my husband was ill and needed me. I have no regrets. I define nursing – nursing is CARING FOR PATIENTS ---IT'S CARING !!.

Prepared by Gloria Stephens, President of Nursing History NS