

Maizee B. Langille (nee Mingo)

Taken from the Barbara Keddy Oral History Collection, (Rank and File Nurses in the 1920s and 1930s) Nova Scotia Archives.

On June 3rd, 1982 I met with Maizee Langille at her home in Truro, Nova Scotia. She was 83 years old, born in Keeble, Colchester County on January 28th, 1899. Her father was a farmer and her mother a schoolteacher. She left school in Grade 10 because her mother had died and she had to help her father look after three sisters younger than herself. She had to help with the cows and cooking, keeping things in order at home. Maizee Langille married at age 36 and had one living daughter. She was a widow, living alone.

Choosing nurses' training out west:

It seemed like I was going all the time to help someone where there was babies , you had to go whether you were a nurse or not. To do the cooking in the kitchen or anything else you could do to help, in many cases. So, a friend of mine who was teaching in Keeble where I was born, she taught one year there, and she said "Why don't you go in training, Maizee?" She said "I'm going". So she went into the V.G. at Halifax and that started me off. I went to my sister. When I did go to visit my sister, I mentioned it to her and she said "Yes, why don't you try? Good idea". So I wrote to her sister-in-law and I got on from there.

I was 22 when I went in training, but at the end of the month of January, I was 23.

My Dad was concerned about my health and he took me to Dr. Dan Murray, who is the grandfather of the singer Anne Murray, in Tatamagouche and Dad sneaked back to him the second time and chatted with Dr. Dan Murray and said "How about going west?" I looked at him and said "How could I go out west?" I looked at him, I said "I haven't got any money, how could I go out west?" "Don't worry about that, I'll see to that", Dad said. So he borrowed the money and sent me west on the Harvest Excursion, my brother was going (too). We went to Portage La Prairie the first year, 1920, and as I said I didn't care for the hospital in Portage La Prairie, it didn't look big enough to me. I thought I would get better training in a larger hospital, so I came home that fall and went back again the next Fall and went to my brother-in-law's sister and she helped me get in training in Regina. Two hundred twenty five beds when I went in training and then they enlarged it after I left. It is a huge institution now, like the V.G. in Halifax, I guess. I didn't come home again. I went out in 1921 and I didn't come home again until 1926. It didn't concern me at all. I was getting away. It was an adventure. I gained like everything out there, put on pounds. I was one hundred and almost forty when I went in training.

Nurses in training: staff and classmates:

I think there were around one hundred all told on the staff but that includes the Superintendent and all the graduates, one in charge of the operating room, one in charge of obstetrics department and so on. The druggist, we had a druggist lady, and the dietician. It included all the staff, but there were about eighty or ninety nurses in training.

I made friends in my own class and they invited me and my brother-in-law's sister. I went down to her home when I first vacationed and the second one, the second year, I was invited. I made friends of my classmates. There were fifty-two of us at first when we all got in and just thirty-nine of us graduated. They dropped out one by one.

One, my dear friend, left and got married. So I asked her later on, when I happened to go back to Regina, I said "Why did you leave?" "I couldn't take it", she said. "I worried in case that one would be gone in the morning". "well," I said "could you do anything about that. God is the ruler over all and if he's going to die, he's going to die, you can't prevent that". So, she couldn't take it; she left and was married. Another one was fired, of course. And another one was lonesome and she was only from Alberta and she was lonesome. I said "Good night! I'm from Nova Scotia, I'm not lonesome", I said, "I'm having a good time".

First day in training:

I was all alone in the gauze room and Miss Young was teaching me how to make dressings. I was the first one, so I was the senior of the class. I had to sit up in the front row, the first chair, in the classroom. She had to wait, our instructress, had to wait until a certain number got in before she started the classes.

She took me in and showed me the gauze room. Someone got me up to the gauze room and Miss Young showed me how to make dressings. The next day I had another one with me, maybe. So, I was quite a few days in the gauze room, on the top floor I think that was. It was just an adventure. We learned to make small dressings and the abdominal pads and the perineal pads and sponges. She was quite stern, but we liked her and we had to obey her. The matron...she watched over us and if we made any mistakes we got a scolding, of course. Which happened all the time.

The dress code:

We wore high boots, laced, how did we ever get them on? Black. Blue (uniform) with a white apron, at first, then when we were accepted after the three month probation period, we got bibs. We had a cap at first, but no bibs until we were accepted after the three months. I had to buy the material and my sister, in Nova Scotia, or she ordered the material, and made four uniforms, plain blue, a medium color blue, and mailed them to me. I made my own aprons. I could do that much, but I couldn't make a uniform, I didn't have time.

Instructors:

Ethel Thompson was our instructress and she corrected our books, our notebooks, she corrected and went over our notes that we took in class that she gave us and probably the doctor's lectures as well, I think, maybe. Different doctors. One lectured to us on drugs, the other obstetrics, and so on.

One of the interns, he was a tease, two brothers, Dr. George Curry and Dr. Morley Curry, I'm told they are both dead now, but Dr. George was a terrible tease. And Dr. Morley was so full of business, you didn't even see him, he was so busy running around. Just so, you know, concerned about his work. But Dr. George, he'd stop and crack a joke with you and liked to tease.

Initiation:

What was it called..."the initiation". I don't know what they did to me, but that class ahead of us, you know, did terrible things. What was it they put in somebody's hair? Mustard. Well, you know they were going to be around that evening and we were more or less degrading as to what they might do. I can't remember half the things and I don't know now what they did to me, maybe I escaped, I was pretty lucky I escaped a lot of that.

First death:

The baby I found dead in the children's ward. I had seven bottle babies, there were fifteen children in the children's ward, and I had seven bottle babies. So, I was busy, that child came in the evening, when I got on duty at 7:30, I got on duty at seven and this child came in at 7:0. There were two women who came in to bring the child in, I suspect that one was the grandmother and the other was the mother of the child, probably. I was never told, and I didn't ask. And so, I put the child to bed and the house doctor

came in, the intern came in, the doctor that sent the child in didn't come in to see the child at all. That was the way they did it. The intern looked at the patient first and if there was nothing serious the doctor wouldn't see them until the morning. So Dr., I have forgotten his name he came in and looked at the child and he said give it its formula, orange juice and castor oil in the morning and so on. I had taken the child's temperature, didn't have much, and gave it its admitting bath, and put it to bed. So it was supposed to be fed four times during the night; nine, twelve, three and six. Well, I had a suspicion that it was trying to be done away with. It probably was an illegitimate child. When I bathed it, it had two bruises on its body and that I had to put down on the chart, one was on the lower back, the spine, and one on the leg, quite large bruises. So, I just suspected that they were trying to do away with the child and I think it was six months old or something like that, still on the bottle, anyway. So, at 12 o'clock it didn't seem sick, it had no temperature to speak of, it just seemed weak and limp sort of, so at 12 o'clock I couldn't get it awake, and I thought well, that's fine a good sleep perhaps is what the child needs, so I didn't report anything. And I went around changing all the diapers of these infant children, the babies, and when I came to change this one's diaper, at 5:30 in the morning, and I had the bottles all warming in the kitchen, ready for the six o'clock feedings, and I went in to check its temperature, change its diaper and it was dead. So I certainly flew around then. I went out to my classmate who was on night duty on the same floor and had charge of the soldier's ward and some private rooms along the hall on the first floor- "A flat", we called it, and she came in "It's dead, Mingle", she said. "And what are you going to do now?" she said. I said "I will have to call the night superintendent", so I did. And of course, she had to have the intern come in to see the child and take him to the morgue. That's all I know. I never saw them again.

On duty/off duty:

Resting or going downtown to buy a new pair of shoes or perhaps going to a show for a change. To get away from the smell of ether. I went in to buy a new pair of shoes one day at the shoe store and he said "you must be a nurse". And, I said "Why?" "I smell ether".

Seven to seven and two hours off each day unless you were allowed on Sunday or Saturday, they arranged a 4 p.m. I forget, 2 to 5, that would be three hours, on Saturday or Sunday however, they worked it in and a half day off each week.

Every year we had three weeks with pay, I think. Fourteen dollars a month after you were accepted as a probationer. You had to make up sick time. I was in the isolation hospital ten weeks. Scarlet fever. There was an epidemic. One of the maids in our diet kitchen at the nurses' home spread it all over the place. One of the interns, the one who diagnosed my case of scarlet fever, he came over and was in the next room to me in the isolation hospital. When I got better from the scarlet fever she said "now, you losing so many days, you can put on your uniform and a gown over it and you can take care of the scarlet fever patients, that's all. So I did that and one day she said to me, have you ever had chickenpox or seen chickenpox?" I said "no, I haven't". "There's a good case here" she said, "in this other room and you'll never see a better one. Put on your gown and come in and look at the child", which I did, and a few days later, I had chickenpox.

Who was in charge?:

The seniors, usually the senior (student) nurses were in charge. (There was one in charge of the TB ward (graduate nurse). We weren't allowed in there only on night duty to give medication if it was needed. And there weren't many in there anyway, some of them would die before they would get them, they were just in there waiting to go to the sanatorium. There was a graduate

nurse there, so on day duty we didn't have to go in there. And there was one in charge of the operating room, one in charge of the obstetric ward, and the assistant superintendent and the dietitian, that's all I can remember. The senior (student) nurse under her would take charge while she was off on her hours.

We had to do everything:

Theory is no good all the time, I mean, they have to have been told that a two year course is no good. We had no nurses' aides. We were the aides. We cleaned the bed pans and the utility rooms, the service rooms, whatever, ourselves, as probies, and out superintendent said one day, when she came in, she went to the utility room, the floor where I was working, she went in to look at the bedpans, "any nurse that can't keep a bed pan clean can't keep a dinner plate clean", she said. And out she went. We had to do everything. It was cleaning and I liked to be clean. It had to be done; you didn't want to see a dirty bedpan yourself, so you cleaned it.

As probationers we cleaned the windows along the wards with 'Bon Ami', and we were taught to keep the blinds all at a certain level and to keep the dresser drawers shut so nothing would stick out of the drawer, things like that, we had to be very tidy.

We had to serve our time in the, not the main diet kitchen, but in the diet kitchen where the dietician was. And she taught us how to do trays for diabetics and rheumatics, we had a rheumatic tray in those days, but I don't hear tell of it now anymore.

(We used) Salts, Yes, salts and castor oil, and mustard sinapisms (?) (as medicines).

After graduation:

I was home a few months. I thought I'd have a change and visit my relatives and friends, and my Dad said "there's a new hospital being opened in Truro, I thought you might be interested. So I got myself into Truro and got my name on the list for the new hospital in Truro when it opened from Prince St. To Willis St, the new hospital that was first built out there. And I worked from the fall of 1926, November, to January, 1931.

I was in charge of the Women's Public Ward in the Private Wards on the first floor. Then she moved me to the Public Ward and then upstairs to the private rooms and the obstetric cases, babies and children' ward. Sixty-five dollars a month and your bed and board and your uniforms washed. Your other washing you had to do yourself.

I was all over the place. I had to take anyone's place who went off sick or went a way for a week-end. I was on staff there until 1931 but after that in 1931, I left. I was tea-totally run down when I left in January, 1931. And in February I took care of my sister, a maternity case in February, and I was so run down that I thought I am not going to a doctor who I was just....because I know them all too well. I am going to a doctor who I was just introduced to in New Glasgow. He put me in the old Aberdeen Hospital in New Glasgow and said I was tea-totally burnt out, starved for vitamins and overloaded with starches. He got me straightened out just grand.

Well, I was the type that just couldn't take it, a worry-wart if you wish.

But, I am the nervous type, just going on like a keen horse.

Just in my own area, when I left the hospital out here I did many obstetrical cases in my community. I did quite a few. Neighbors, friends, my sisters, my two sister kept me pretty busy. One had eight children, but I wasn't with her at every birth.

Pay scale:

In Nova Scotia, it was \$4.00, 7 to 7, night or day. And \$5.00, I suppose. In Saskatchewan we got \$6.00 for mental, alcoholics and contagious diseases so it was probably the same in Nova Scotia. I never did register here so I don't know.

Unemployment and the Depression:

I went to Boston that year and spent a winter there with my niece, she was in the Lahey Clinic and taking care of her. And that meant a whole winter up there and then my friend who I had worked with out here at the hospital, her husband had been transferred to Montreal, so she wrote to me and said "come up here, you can get work in Montreal. So I went, that was the Depression, it did affect me but I took any work that I could get. One case I couldn't take because the lady spoke German only. Her daughter called me, and so it was 24 hour duty, the daughter probably was working and the woman didn't understand one word of English, so the daughter said this wouldn't work out, "mother might want something in the night and you would have to waken me to find out what mother wanted". I said "fine, that's okay", and I left. She phoned a hospital, a friend of hers who was in charge of the hospital in Montreal, and she said: "sorry, we're filled up and I have no vacancy at all for any nurse". So, I did work at the Montreal Children's, part-time when I could get on the staff, when someone else was off sick or on vacation.

There were nurses walking the floor, streets.

Two year diploma program:

I don't think it's enough. They don't get the bedside nursing and they realize it. One of the nurses who took care of me when I was in the Tatamagouche Hospital, she had just graduated from the Victoria General in Halifax, and she said it's not enough herself, she knew it, because she didn't, she had to ask the other nurses when she came on the staff at Tatamagouche Hospital what to do. How to do this and that. Not enough practice.