

Nursing: A Profession & A Passion

First, I want to thank David Foley for his kind invitation to speak here today. The theme for this Nurses Week: a profession & a passion ~ is so wonderful! Because I am definitely passionate about our profession, and I will talk w/ you about others, some of our foresters in nursing, as well as some of our contemporary sisters & brothers ~ who also are (or were) clearly passionate about our profession.

As Rozella Schlotfeldt, the late Dean Emerita once said to me, "I am passionate about nursing! I'm not just passionate about what nursing *is*, but what nursing *can become*. I always say, 'what it can become, b/c it is not there yet!'"

I share her view ~ and I hope you do to. So we are here today to ~~honor~~ ^{celebrate} ourselves & each other, as members of this honorable profession, this demanding work, this discipline grounded in the evidence of science and the creativity of art. And we are passionate!

The late Wilma Scott Heide, a nurse & past president of NOW liked to coin words to embrace both women & men. One of her words was **Shero**es – and she encouraged us in nursing to tell *Everyday Shero/Hero* stories. We *are*, after all, amazing! But we often do our best aw-shucks shrugs as if to say "taint nothin". Well – 'tis!

Today I'm going to touch the possibles of current practice, connect us to our history, and introduce many of you for the 1st time to our Nursing Manifesto.

I am going to read you portions of a story ~ reflections of nursing practice ~ from Christopher Johns, one of our British colleagues. Imagine your nursing practice ~ on whatever unit

I invite you to p1

or clinic that may be ~ imagine your practice ~ even in the briefest of moments ~ practicing the *artful science* of nursing: that body of knowledge that is *specific* to nursing's interests & concerns.

[Read Chris John's pp 1-4.]

[Then go to *Manifesto* pp 1, 2.]

In 1983, a woman named Ruth Abrams said, "In uniting w/ our hx, we become simultaneously connected w/ our power, our possibilities, & w/ the uniqueness & importance of our vision. This new appreciation allows us to say of the more limited view that society has of women (& I would add, *of nurses*): *We will bow down to it no longer!*"

You know, we come from a long line of women of courage, of passion, of intellect, of determined persistence, of honest forthrightness, and hopeful expectation. It is on that sure foundation that we co-create our future. Indeed, we in nursing owe our survival, and are indebted for our strengths, to the ranks of disobedient women ~ our foresisters in nursing ~ who were educators & reformers, expert clinicians & rebels, protestors & visionaries. Some of these women made acclaimed contributions against great odds imposed by living, and by practicing our profession, in an oppressive society.

By way of placing us "in a dialogue with brave & imaginative women who came before us" – to use Adrienne Rich's words, I am going to give examples of 2 "magnificent & visionary women who shaped health care & nursing" (a wonderful phrase of Irene Palmer's). I draw on the work of M. Elizabeth Carnegie (a graduate of Howard '39 & Hampton '44) and Ms. Seacole's own book, *the Wonderful Adventures*

of Mrs. Seacole, in describing Mary Grant Seacole, and ^{then} of M. Patricia Donahue in describing Lavinia Lloyd Dock.

First, Mary Grant Seacole. . . .

Patricia Donahue in ~~her~~ book, *Nursing the Finest Art*, reminds us that nurses in the previous ~~two~~ ¹⁰⁰ centuries were involved in women's rights as well as human rights – and "the most colorful & zealous suffragist" among them was Lavinia Lloyd Dock. **As a nurse**, she worked at the Henry Street Settlement, ~~with Lillian Wald~~. As a nurse, she published numerous articles in AJN & was one of the foremost nursing historians. And, as a nurse, she was actively engaged in social protest, picketing, parading for women's rights, & protesting against the war, all of which were not regarded as appropriate – that is, they were neither "nurse like", nor "lady like". Joanne Ashley called her a radical feminist. ☺ Donahue cites Isabel Stewart in describing her meeting with, and ongoing impression of, Lavinia Dock:

I was sure I'd know her when I met her, b/c she'd be tall & angular & intellectual looking. Who should turn up but this small, short, sort of roly-poly little person w/ curly hair. She'd just been at a suffrage meeting & had "Votes for Women" across her hat & "Votes for Women" across her chest. . . . This suffrage thing – it was the whole thing for her; she wanted not only to work for it but really to suffer for it. She went over to Britain to work w/ Mrs. Pankhurst, & she wanted above all things to go to jail. Oh, she got there, all right. . . that was during the war, at the beginning of the 1st World War. She was a member of the advanced wing of the Suffrage Party, & they were having a meeting in Washington at the time that Wilson was beginning to think of the possibility of war. They discussed it, & a friend of mine who was there at the time tells me that Lavinia got up & seized the flag which was there & said, "Youth to the Colors!" & on she marched, out of the door, & they followed her, & she went right to the White House, & they picketed the White House!

She is about this high, you know. . . .Anyway, they all went into the cooler for the night. I think it just pleased her no end. – (Stewart 1961, p275.)

P4

2 women of courage. . . women who were determined to change the very world of the people whom they served.

Coming – again – forward to our contemporary herstory:
I return us to the yr 2000 & the authors of the Manifesto who say,

We believe in a world in which

- Nurses practice healing w/ transformative results.
- Nurses support, mentor, & nurture one another through participation in learning, researching, & practicing.
- Nurses act from our most fundamental values.
- Nurses control our own work lives.
- Nurses are strong & creative in the face of adversity.
- Nurses are powerful as healers & as participants in caring & healing processes.

We live in that liminal space ~ the betwixt & between ~ where anything, anything is possible. We have the passion for our profession. We have the transformative power.

[Read *Low Road*.]

How can you continue to realize our transformative power?

- Connect to the nursemanifest website . . . and live there! ☺
- Sign up for healing touch ^{or TT} workshops- and practice it w/ your patients!
- Read up on Dawn Freshwater's & Chris John's reflective practice – and practice it!

As I wind up, I want to say TY! TY for choosing this honorable profession! And let us, in Adrienne Rich's words, reach into the community of nurses, remember ~~to~~ envision our co-creators, our challengers, those who will urge us to

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take our work further, more seriously than we had dared, & on whose work we can build.

Let us tend & stoke the sacred fire of our work. Let us, in the words of South African poet, Dennis Brutus, be a people of *stubborn hopefulness*. And let us, in celebration & w/ our full passion, challenge & inspire one another.

Go forth, now, w/ your hearts & spirits ~ your very beings ~ drenched in light – to be a light of transformation, and strength, and commitment, and power, and knowledge, and passion, and wisdom – in other words – of *nursing* to one another - & to all to whom you provide the artful science of nursing.