Home front in the usa

nursing training

1944

# nursing school – Jo struempler

My nursing days began in 1944. I was 17 years-old and had just graduated from high school. The war was raging and the nurse shortage was critical. The government offered a nursing program for young women that lasted from 1943 – 1947. I passed the entrance exam and was fortunate to be accepted into the military Cadet Nurse Training Program.

The Cadet Nurse training was a three-year program. Our education was free if we signed a contract with the government to serve overseas as nurses after graduation. All of us were poor and this program provided us with the opportunity to receive our nursing degrees. My life time profession of nursing began when I enrolled in this curriculum and left home for the first time. My mother was a widow and I wanted to go home. I finally determined that one doesn’t die from being home sick. On my days off, I would take the train 50 miles and go home to see my mother. I always returned the same day in time for the evening curfew.

We were trained by Franciscan Nuns. There were 26 students in my freshman class and we lived in dormitories at the hospital nursing facility. We were always up at 5 a.m., went to the Chapel for prayer, then breakfast and were on duty at 7 a.m. In addition to our duty responsibilities, we also attended classes that had varying daily schedules. There was a large recreation hall at the hospital where we would play pool, ping pong and listen to music during our free time. No perfume was allowed. Even today, I rarely wear perfume. The Nuns insisted that we be in our rooms every night by 8 p.m. The exception was Sunday night when our curfew was extended to 11 p.m.

The Sisters kept a tight control on us. They were strict, but kind and sympatric to our needs. Our fun time was every Sunday night. There was an Air Corps base in our area and all of our young hormones were running high. We all went to the public dance at the Glovera Hall. We ‘danced our legs off’ with all of the GI’s from the airbase. If you didn’t know how to dance, someone would teach you. One marriage resulted from our Sunday night dancing outings. We did not drink alcohol. It was not available and none of us were of legal drinking age. We were always back at the hospital by the 11 p.m. curfew. The Sisters would be up and waiting for us at the door.

The epaulet on our Cadet Nurse uniforms was red. The official military color designation was Rocket Red, named after a famous lipstick of the same color used during WWII.

Only 15 of us remained in the Cadet Nurse training program after one year. In June 1947, we took our state exams and passed. 15 of us graduated as Registered Nurses. We celebrated, mainly because the War had ended and we did not have to serve overseas. Serving overseas was a major concern for us.

Some closing reflections. All of us married and there was only one divorce out of 15 graduates. Until four years ago, all 15 of us and our husbands met annually for 60 years. We would meet in a central location for two days and renew our friendships. My class mates helped me grow and mature. We always remained life-long friends. Today, there are four of us that are living.

