

Autobiographical sketch from Nurse Frela Beck:

Part 1: Frela Dean Owl Beck, RN, BSN from Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1961

Member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

I was the youngest daughter of Gladys Dena (Berry) and Frel McDonald Owl. My parents met as teachers at the Pierre, SD Indian Boarding School. My father became the Principal Educational Field Agent and ultimately Indian Agent (Superintendent) on various Indian Reservations. So, I grew up on Indian Reservations, always wanted to be a nurse and realized it was a way to continue living and working among Indians -the only world I knew at the time. I was advised by the public health nurse to get into a program that offered a BSN as it was a "coming requirement"

Michigan State, in 1957, did not have its own clinical facilities, so we traveled to various facilities for our clinical rotations. I did my public health experience with the Detroit Visiting Nursing Association (culture shock)! We were discouraged from getting married during our college experience, so when family was assembling for my graduation in July 1961, I married George S. Beck and received my pin all on the same day.

I began working as a hospital staff nurse the next week and have been so appreciative of the education I received and the opportunities it presented over my lifetime. We have moved to relatively small communities because of George's work, and I have had experiences, usually part-time as our family grew, with staff nursing, home health, teaching, nursing home supervision and administration. The latter, administration in a community college, was by "accident" or perhaps "Divine Guidance". I was asked to help write an application for a Practical Nurse Program at Kirkland Community College, Roscommon, Michigan. That was not difficult because of very clear application guidelines; then there were meetings, tours and a starting date. Since I had my BS degree I became the director of the program – totally unplanned and unforeseen by me. After four very busy fulfilling years, and because of my parents' needs in their retirement, our family moved to Cherokee, NC. So, after almost 20 years, finally I was back among "my Indian people" – for whom I always envisioned serving. A position as the Follow-Through School Nurse was available and I enjoyed that for the 9 years left on that program, and then I journeyed around the Reservation (Qualla Boundary) visiting homes as a Community Health Nurse. (instead of on horseback with a black bag, as I had envisioned as a youngster, I had a four-wheel drive vehicle as my traveling companion.) After retiring, I continued working at the weekly Eye Clinic for 20 plus years. Nursing has been a wonderful career choice. Our Owl family has many nurses in it. We appreciate the many job opportunities it offers, and especially we enjoy people and look for ways to be of service to others.

Part 2: Me-a "Professional Nurse" My thoughts

I am a retired Registered Nurse with a B.S. (Bachelor of Science) Degree in Nursing. I graduated from Michigan State University in 1961, after 5 school years of college. At the time there were 3 ways of being an RN and I chose this route because I thought I would be a nurse on an Indian reservation somewhere in the US Public Health Service and it was going to require nurses to have a bachelor's degree. Our Dean of the Nursing Program was very selective as to the students who were admitted to "her" program and I apparently had the qualifications for which she was looking.

Background: my father was a U.S. government administrator ("Superintendent") on various Indian Reservations as I grew up. He and my mother were "sticklers" for following the rules and being examples or role models for those around us. He had made a giant leap into the "white" society and was privileged to have attended reputable schools. My parents emphasized being truthful, doing what you said you could do, respecting all people regardless of their status, and they especially drill into us the importance of having and maintaining a "good" reputation, respecting elders and being involved in the community as a volunteer. My Dad brought a pen home from the Office, he made certain it went back to the Office. If we used the telephone, we were to be polite, state our name and our business and get off the telephone so others could use it (party line).

I was sent off the Reservation in Idaho to a boarding school in Massachusetts when I was 15. My parents felt it was preparation for college, for life in general and I would learn at a young age to be responsible on several levels (personal care, studies, get along with others of different backgrounds, etc.). I was determined to not disappoint them, so I developed into a "good student" academically and generally matured quickly. The boarding school experience required all of the students to fulfill responsibilities (cleaning, preparing meals, etc.) and was a great "leveler"; it didn't matter if you came off a reservation, were a missionary's child from Africa or a high society, wealthy person – the same commitment was expected of you.

My family had a strong spiritual/faith element. We attended whatever church was available in the community and this was an is very important to me. I have always felt that our Creator God is watching over me, caring and loving. It has been mostly a comfortable relationship, but also has often kept me from making "mistakes/mis-steps" in my life's journey. It has also influenced my regard/caring/respect for others. I try to look for the best in people and bring out their best by encouraging/commending them. When necessary, I have been able to disagree, admonish or try to lead others in another direction by using tact, diplomacy, privacy and other helping another to "save face", which I learned largely from my Dad, who was a master at this.

Nursing has been a wonderful career. It has many different avenues in caring for people -young, elderly, healthy, physically/mentally ill. It requires truly caring, following instructions, being intuitive, knowing one's limitations, when to share/keep private information and most importantly teamwork.