

Margaret Dolan Speech may 1964

Margaret Baggett Dolan Speech [May 1964]:

Margaret B. Dolan: Thank you Mrs. Warren, that was a most generous introduction. I don't know whether my husband agrees with what she had to say about keeping him happy. I try to keep him happy but sometimes I wonder. I'll have to find out later tonight what he really thinks of that.

Margaret B. Dolan: Dr. Jenkins, members of the faculty, members of the graduating class, parents, friends---It's a great pleasure to speak to a graduating class of professional nurses and this is a particular pleasure and a very historic occasion to speak to the first graduating class of East Carolina College. You are entering nursing at a time when I think your talents--your competencies are needed more than ever before and when you will also be faced with challenges and responsibilities that nurses before you have never faced. The future is rich with opportunity for service, for contribution to the health and welfare of all mankind and I'm sure that East Carolina College will be proud of you as you go forth to make your contribution to the health field.

Margaret B. Dolan: At first glance, it may seem strange to you on this particular occasion that I have chosen to speak on the subject of love. To me, however, it is the most natural thing in the world to do so. For this is a time when love should be uppermost in your hearts and minds. As we attain each peak of life, we should know love for to love is to be. Saint John of the cross said at the end of life that we will be judged by love. Not by achievements and successes, but by love. Not by what we did so much as with how much love we did it.

Margaret B. Dolan Today, you have reached a peak of life and I ask you to look back over the laborious months and try and remember when and where you gave love. For love is the prime ingredient of excellence in nursing. Eric Fromm has described the active quality of love as characterized by certain elements namely, care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. I've often told students that we often don't care for patients, we care care about them. We must anxiously care about patients and we can do so with full competence. For competence can be learned can be nurtured and developed in the classroom, by the bedside, and in the rich and exciting experiences of doing. This is the heart of nursing, nurturing and caring.

Margaret B. Dolan: I suspect that you have been thoroughly imbued with the concept of responsibility, but the word itself means more than taking charge or making judgments and decisions, being a leader and joining your professional organizations. For nursing, the work itself can mean to respond to another human being and to do so with eyes that are stripped of the colored glasses of prejudices of any sort. Rather, we should perceive with a deep and abiding respect all that is good in another individual. Not only all that is good, but all that is disagreeable and painful and sometimes disgusting. When we give up skimming the surface, when we look deeply at another person and see in him an individual so unique that he is irreplaceable, then we have become truly responsible. By even such a simple accomplishment as this, we can come to respect the individual. We respect people for what they are and therefore, in order to respect them we must know them.

Margaret B. Dolan: A nurse does not know her patient by his dressings, his medication, his traction, or his identification band. Alas, too often we hear nurses refer to the appendectomy in 214 or the burns in 561. We must know patients better than this. We must know them as a mother with four small children at home with no one to care for them, or a young high school girl with leukemia who has read enough magazines to know the ultimate outcome of her illness, or the active, prosperous businessman who has suddenly been faced with the paralysis of a stroke. The one who loves is the one who really knows and understands who gets through the periphery and through the external features. It seems almost pitiable that one hears nursing instructors cautioning students not to get involved with patients. The instant one meets another individual, he is immediately involved. Certainly, nurses are bound to become involved with patients.

Margaret B. Dolan: Patients come from all walks of life, are all types and all ages, and nurses serve patients in the most intimate ways. Involvement at the level of immediacy is either negative or positive. It must be recognized and admitted. The nursing instructor is obligated to help interpret and work through these reactions with students and even when the involvement is negative, it can be transformed through emphasis on care responsibility, respect, and knowledge. The components of love. Throughout your education you have been learning how to be involved with your patients in a way that is meaningful and helpful to them so that they may develop the strength and understanding to cope with that illness and to regain their health.

Margaret B. Dolan: You are probably already familiar with the transcendent prayer of May Stewart on this occasion, and when I'm asking you to refine, replenish, and review your own capacity to love others, most especially your patients. It seems fitting to look more closely at these words, which have so much meaning for all of us as nurses. Keep us oh God from pettiness; let us be large in thought, in word, in deed. I have previously stressed most particularly the nurse's relationship with patients and as I dwell upon the word pettiness, it somehow does not seem so imperative to relate this line to patients, but more to ones coworkers, the other members of the sociomedical team. The word team itself implies a working together. A group of people perhaps with diversified interests and yet one goal. The guards protect the quarterback; the quarterback carries the ball, who or what the quarterback is matters not when we are dealing with the life, all of it, of a human being. What matters is our charity toward our colleagues, our understanding of their drawbacks, our tolerance of their inadequacies.

Margaret B. Dolan: Acceptance is but a stepping-stone to love, and yet it is the stepping-stone of strength and endurance. Another line of the prayer: let us be done with faultfinding and leave off self-seeking. We know well the ease with which we find fault. It is not difficult to criticize, to tell someone how something should have been done. Sometimes this makes us look better to others, and yet most people do the best that they know how and unless we build another by a criticism we need not criticize at all. Even those who limp go not backward. The student who stumbles should be helped not chastised.

Margaret B. Dolan: May we put away all pretense and meet each other face to face without self-pity and without prejudice. Prejudice is learned not bred. The child does not discriminate until he is taught. You will not only be nurses in the future, but in all likelihood you will also be parents, and upon you strikingly lies the burden of keeping the eyes and ears of your children free of the blinding, deafening roar of equivocation and bigotry. To do this with unqualified success you must first free yourself from subterfuge, as so often the dying patient does in his innermost humility. It is not enough to take that long look at another individual. It is more imperative not to lower ones eyes. May we never be hasty in judgment and always generous. Always generous, how humanly possible is it to be always generous unless one is a saint? I have a friend, a psychiatric nurse who tells me of a patient, lonely and forlorn who receives maybe one box of candy a year and who with child-like wonder and delight, will pass it among all of the other patients, often going without himself. It is not his unique illness which produces this generosity. It is his need to share his possession and by so doing to share his loneliness and his forlornness. You give, but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. Let us take time for all things, make us to grow calm, serene, and gentle. Time will ever be the specter of nursing, or so we make it.

Margaret B. Dolan: I once asked a friend of mine who was on enforced bed rest for several weeks "is there anyone special, I mean in the routine day to who's coming you look forward?" The answer was very prompt. The maid. She comes in everyday, relaxed and cheerful. She's interested in me, not my compound fracture of the femur. She tells me about her husband who has tuberculosis and her daughter whose an A student and I'm suddenly all mixed up in her family. It takes my mind off the pain caused by the traction. Oh yes, and she always clucks her tongue gently, ever so gently at the nurses, and move my things to where I can reach them. When she has a day off I really miss her.

Margaret B. Dolan: Calmness and serenity come with love. When we make time we can be gentle. Teach us to put into action our better impulses straightforward and unafraid. The nursing profession needs people who have the courage to do research, to bring new knowledge to the field, and it is sad indeed that many of the better impulses of nurses are passed over simply because their originators are afraid, are afraid to voice new innovations much less to put them into action. Research is another form of giving. For it is ???, shared for the benefit of all, and thus, it gives us the same kind of satisfaction as the patient who gives away his box of candy. Grant that we may realize it is the little things that create differences, that in the big things of life we are at one. Little things do create differences. The chance remark that hurts pride, the careless evaluation that smashes our dream, the argument over time off when it really doesn't matter, the undone chart that we leave for someone else, the blame we put on the other shift. But take a catastrophe, a flood, an explosion, the cave-in of a mine, in these things we are as one. Why is it that tragedy brings out in us this unity, this unspoken bond of togetherness, this unselfishness, which spreads among us like the sudden sound of music? The hurt pride, the careless evaluation, the arguments, and the unfinished tasks are big things, and in these we should be as one. Be not the antagonist nor the antagonized, but stand apart as one.

Margaret B. Dolan: Finally, and may we strive to touch and to know the great common human heart of us all and oh lord God, let us forget not to be kind. Here of course is the nucleus of the message. In our struggle to attain an attitude of compassionate love, not only in nursing but in all the dark alleys and in the bright highways of our lives. To love is difficult, so difficult in fact that it is often not talked about in deep and meaningful terms. Its contemplation is sometimes frightening, sometimes discomfoting. It is not easy to give of oneself and yet it happens everyday all around us, perhaps unrecognized in its lack of drama. This week I had a letter from a young friend, a student in nursing school. I could never take her words as flippant, for flippant she is not. In fact, in all of her long and difficult and unhappy 21 years of life she has had no reasonable excuse to be flippant. I would like to quote from her letter, "I had an excellent day at work today, I did a little of everything and we were busy, but everyone seemed to work together. I hope to have the same type of day tomorrow. Oh, we got Mr. C back in again today, the same thing. I think I read in the chart that he does have cancer. I just love him, and Mrs. W with the burns is doing beautifully and I love her also. By the way, I worked with Mrs. M and will again tomorrow. I love to work with her because we work well together." End quote. No doubt she will have the same type of day tomorrow and for many tomorrows there after. For she has that inestimable quality, a freedom of self, which allows love to flow in and out in a never-ending cascade of healing. Thank you.