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From the book "Voices" by Dr. Evelyn Wicker

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I, Nellie Olivia Ellis, the first of seven children born to Clyde and Olivia Ellis, were raised in Weldon, North Carolina. I attended public school, graduating as salutatorian from Ralph J. Bunche High School. At the early age of five, I had aspirations to become a nurse, and from then on math and science courses were at the top of my list as I prepared for a nursing career.

The family did not have a lot of money, so my parents suggested that I wait a year, get a job, and afterward enroll in a four-year nursing program. Having worked summers at Johns Hopkins Hospital and earning a fair salary, I felt this experience would lead to continued work without my having to enter school. My parents then decided they could afford entry into a three-year nursing program. We obtained from the state of North Carolina a list of all the nursing schools in the state. Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing (LHSN) was a viable choice in terms of location and cost. The application was sent, with no reply. My mom spoke to our local pharmacist, Dr. David Cooke, and he made a call to his son, Dr. David Cooke Jr., who just happened to be a practicing physician at Lincoln Hospital. On the Friday before the entrance exam was to be administered, word came that I was to report for the exam. I passed it and was off to Lincoln.

The time I spent at Lincoln was full of interesting experiences. My class of 1964 was offered the opportunity to do an affiliation at the Duke University Hospital pediatric department, and later we traveled to Lexington, Kentucky, for our psychiatric affiliation at Lexington State Hospital. While there, I received a communication from the Student Nurses Association inviting me to visit the Charlotte Memorial Hospital. This turned out to be a blessing as I was offered my first job. Following graduation I traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina, to assume the position of staff nurse in their newly built intensive care unit.

After working for two years and getting married, my next stop was Cocoa, Florida, where I worked for the Brevard County Blood Bank in Rockledge. I was sent to their headquarters in Orlando for training. This was easy as the graduate nurses at Lincoln had already taught me the technique of phlebotomy. My job was to obtain blood from the many donors. In the lab I processed the blood and supplied it to the local hospitals, as well as to the Kentucky Space Center. Three years later my husband and I traveled up to the coast of Washington, D.C. A brief stint in private duty nursing as a contract nurse led to my entry into field of occupational health nursing. This experience led to an offer for full-time employment with the federal government at the U.S. Department of State. This position provided me with many experiences, from extensive overseas travel with the Secretary of State to accompanying patients to their home countries such as Jordan and Sudan. I met many important people and dignitaries, including the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir, and Joint Chief of Staff and later Secretary of State Colin Powell, as well as the legendary Pearl Bailey and Liza Minnelli and the basketball great Kareem Abdul Jabbar. This position provided me with the opportunity to obtain a bachelor of science degree in health sciences administration from Central Michigan University.

I was an honor to have been selected to work at the U.S. Department of State and to have been the first African American civil service nurse in the Medical Bureau. I retired from the position of health-care services nursing administrator after thirty-six years of government service. I spend my retirement singing in the choir at the Walker Memorial Baptist Church and serving on the boards for the Foreign Affairs Recreation Association at the State Department Federal Credit Union.