
JoAnn Neal Dowling, RN '62, BSN

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I was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, to Clarence and Azilee Neal, the second of three daughters. I attended West Charlotte Senior High School and graduated in May 1959. Following graduation, my parents realized that I had not applied to any colleges. They sat me down one afternoon after work and asked me about my intentions. Being the sensitive and thoughtful child that I was, I told them I planned to work for one year to save money for school. My reason was that my older sister Marianna had just completed her freshman year at Johnson C. Smith University and I didn't want to put the strain on them. My younger sister still had four years to go. They told me that was their concern, not mine. My mom said, "If you don't continue your education, once you stop, it will be difficult to go back." I had taken core business and science courses in high school and I was torn between choosing a career in clerical work or nursing.

My mom was a beautician with her own business but had really wanted to be a nurse. However, circumstances prevented her from realizing that dream. She often spoke of Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing being one of the best nursing schools for Blacks at the time. She had even went into action and called Ms. Williams to ask about the requirements to enter the school. Ms. Williams gave her the date for the next pre-entrance exam. After a few anxious weeks, I got the results that I had passed, and I was soon on my way to my incredible journey to becoming a professional registered nurse.

Upon entering Lincoln I experienced a culture shock. Lincoln served two purposes: one being for my formal education in nursing and other being as a charm school. I remember having to dress up in a black dress and wearing white gloves for an afternoon tea to formally meet my classmates and some of the faculty. We were taught proper etiquette, manners, and dress. The classes and clinical schedule were intense. I remember my classmates and I walking down Fayetteville Street at 7:00 a.m. on cold mornings to North Carolina College (now North Carolina Central University) for our chemistry class with Professor McMillian.

I didn't realize then how valuable the training would be to me later in my career. Lincoln gave me the comprehensive education and experience to successfully begin my nursing career—a fact I grew to appreciate more and more as time passed. After successfully passing the North Carolina State Board Examination in the fall of 1962, I was off to Baltimore, Maryland, for my first job at John Hopkins Hospital in a General Medical/Surgical Unit. I then moved to New York to live with relatives. My first job there was at a long-term-care hospital and I was assigned the head nurse position. After a year, I went to work at Mount Sinai Medical Center, a very large teaching hospital. I knew I had found my niche. While working on a surgical floor I would do private duty nursing at other hospitals all over the city. I had always wanted to work in another country, so I went to Bermuda and worked at the hospital there for five years. After returning to New York, I went back to school and earned a bachelor's degree in health-care administration.

The last thirty-five years of my career were the most accomplished and rewarding. Following my return from Bermuda I went back to Mount Sinai and started to work on the Dialysis and Kidney Transplant Unit. It was small and new and as it grew, I grew. I participated in new trends and procedures. I earned my nephrology nurse certification and moved up to leadership positions ranging from supervising to teaching new RNS, technicians, and nursing students. I also trained patients to do their dialysis at home.

Renal nursing included newborns to geriatrics, critical care to ambulatory care. I learned everyday and I was rewarded everyday.

When I retired and while receiving all the recognition certificates and plaques, I stood surrounded by my nursing colleagues, the medical staff, and yes, my beloved patients. It was then that I gave thanks to my parents for all of their sacrifices and to all the instructors and graduate nurses at Lincoln for the best education and training. This allowed me to have the most successful and rewarding nursing career ever. God bless the memories of Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing.

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