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I just retired as the Associate Director of Education Services at Durham Regional Hospital and Duke University Medical Health System. I am also Chair of the North Carolina Nurses Association Commission on Nursing Education. I grew up in eastern North Carolina.

Nursing was an inevitable career for me. It was my father who solidified my decision to become a nurse. He was my first patient. Although my father wanted me to be a teacher because he considered it to be the female profession of choice during the fifties and sixties, his death, when I was only sixteen years old, convinced me that I wanted to become a nurse.

After my high school graduation in Kinston, North Carolina, I did not have the sudden urge to leave home as I continued to mourn the loss of my father. So in 1965 I became employed at Lenoir Medical Hospital in Kinston as an aide in the operating room. This was my second official job, in addition to my summer experiences of working on a tobacco farm and in the factory following graduation.

As an operating-room aide, my primary responsibilities were to prepare supplies and operating instruments for sterilization. At that time, operating gloves had to be washed, dried, powered and sterilized, and labeled. Very few supplies were considered disposable. It was a challenge to learn all the instruments, and the supplies, procedures, and specifics for each surgeon's operations. However, within a year I had been promoted to the position of operating room technician, a position that I had accepted with pride and that was based on achievements made as an operating room aide, observations from the operating room staff, and rare recommendations from the surgeons. I remember being given the dubious honor of working with the chief of the surgical staff who was fast and demanding on all of his operations. Not many staff relished the idea of working with him, but he was an excellent surgeon. Little did I know that he would have a role in my future as I aspired to be a nurse.

Having been an operating room technician for almost two years, I was encouraged by the nurses, physicians (including the chief of staff), and other technicians who supported my decision to continue my dream to become a nurse. So with much enthusiasm, I sent my application to Lenoir Memorial Hospital School of Nursing where I was denied entry during the segregated years of the sixties. Although disappointed, I was not discouraged. After a brief period of dismay, I was determined to continue my nursing pursuits. So, I sent two applications, rather than one this time, to Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing, a predominately Black nursing school in Durham, North Carolina, and Winston-Salem State Teachers College, also a Black institution (now Winston-Salem State University) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

The good news came when I was admitted to Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing, which closed in 1971. I was proud to be one of the fourteen graduates in the last class in 1971. In August 2003 the alumni celebrated in Durham, North Carolina, the 100th Anniversary of the School of Nursing.

Following my acceptance at Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing, I received my acceptance to Winston-Salem as well. I am proud of my choice to become a Lincoln nurse. I did not accomplish this dream alone. My Kinston extended family, foster parents, teachers, operating room nurses, physicians, and technicians gave me a heroic send off when I left for Durham to enter nursing school. Although I was not able to fulfill my nursing career in my hometown, it was my hometown's support, both Black and White, that packed a trunk of books, nursing paraphernalia, wrote letters of recommendation, and enhanced my courage to become a nurse. That is why I have chosen several personal mottos throughout my nursing profession and educational achievements. The mottos guided my transition from high school to nursing school—"behind us lies the barrier; before us comes the challenge"—and from nursing school to college/university—"Wisdom is the principal thing, in all thy getting, get understanding."

Today I am grateful for my undergraduate degree in commerce and health administration from North Carolina Central University, my graduate degree in nursing administration and education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and my post-graduate and pre-doctoral studies at the North Carolina State University. Currently, my daily motto is "thank you Lord," and this one has permeated my positions as an operating room nurse, a continuing education nurse educator, and an educational administrator.