

Pamela James, RN, PHN oral history 2010

Interview with Pamela James (17:04-26:24)

WM: My name is Will Mallory. It's October 28th, 2010. We're at the North Carolina Public Health Association Conference in Wilmington, NC. I'm here with Pamela James.

PJ: Good morning.

WM: Mrs. James, when were you born?

PJ: I was born November 16, 1955.

WM: and where did you grow up?

PJ: Fayetteville in Cumberland County.

WM: Why did you decide to become a nurse?

PJ: It was one of those careers that you went into when you were in the 70s. Women mostly either did nursing or teaching. I was more of someone who liked to do something in science and I liked things in science,. So that's partly why I went into nursing, because I was interested in that.

WM: Where and when did you go to nursing school?

PJ: East Carolina University both for bachelor's and I completed my master's in 1982.

WM: Tell me some about your nursing education.

PJ: Oh it was great. We had a great time. Some of the things I remember most about that were getting up so early in the morning because there were so many of us in our class they had to bus us to Rocky Mount from Greenville. We got bussed to Kinston. I did my public health rotation in what we called Little Washington. One of my partners and I had a terrific route out of town that we got to see clients. We would take their blood pressure, we had a set of twins that we had to measure. We just had a really good time in public health, really enjoyed it.

WM: So when you say they bussed you out from the university, was that for your clinicals?

PJ: Right. A group of us would meet, it was mostly those of us who lived in the dorm that got bussed. Because if you had a car they let you stay in Greenville. We would get on the bus as 5:00 in the morning and we'd ride all the way to Rocky Mt. They'd let us eat breakfast and we'd start clinicals. That was the case. Now Kinston we got bussed in the evenings because they had a day group and an evening group, there were two groups there were so many of us. I did my maternal child at Kinston.

WM: Have you been interested in any other fields, or have you just been interested in public health?

PJ: No I started out at Duke. I worked on a (unintelligible) and it was some of the early years on

the ortho floor, where they would reattach digits and limbs. It was pretty low-tech actually. They just put a little dot on your finger where the wire attached to a machine and somebody had to just sit there with their finger bandaged and make sure the temperature didn't drop. But I started out in med surge and then went back to graduate school and did some intensive care, a step-down unit. When I got my master's degree I went into education and taught nursing students at the university Associate Nursing program in Fayetteville for twenty-five years.

WM: What did you teach there?

PJ: Oh gosh, some of everything. Med surge, I did nursery. I really enjoyed babies, loved babies. In the last five years I did mental health, a lot of mental health. I enjoyed that too, that's another really good field that needs a lot of good people.

WM: In addition to the nursing education, were you involved in any community health during that time?

PJ: I had students at the health department. We did some rotations in school health as well as in some of the clinics. So I did have a group there at one point during the 25 years I did that, and remembered "hey I like public health".

WM: Are you currently in a public health role?

PJ: yes I'm the school health supervisor in Cumberland County.

WM: and how long have you done that?

PJ: Sine April I've been in school health. I retired in 2007. The very next week I went to school health. I had four schools for almost two years and then I got promoted to team leader. Back in April I applied for and got the nurse supervisor position.

WM: What attracted you to school health?

PJ: I love kids and I had always wanted to do it. I liked the kids in public health when I was in public health in nursing school. I always gravitated towards children anyway, even though I didn't want to do pediatrics per se I love children. Then I had my own child who's now almost fourteen, and I said "what can I do to combine these things?" the public health, the mental health, but be still somewhat independent and have a really good schedule, and still enjoy what I'm doing. School health just fits the bill.

WM: Where do you work in school health?

PJ: Right now I'm out of my office at the health department. We're based out of the health department.

WM: Is that here in Wilmington?

PJ: No that's Cumberland County in Fayetteville. When I worked as a school health nurse though I had highschool and three elementary schools. One of my elementary schools was rather

large, it was nearly 600 children. I really enjoyed the little ones. I loved my kindergarteners.

WM: Tell me about your first job in community health. Was it this school role?

PJ: I think you could consider it to be my first community health role, officially. My school health nurse role.

WM: Tell me about your most memorable story about community health nursing. Or any nursing.

PJ: Well last year we gave a lot of flu shots, the H1N1 initiative that we went through in the schools. We gave probably 17,000 flu shots last year. And there are only twenty-one school nurses. So we were busy all year doing that. But the children of course, some of them, especially the elementary kids, would come in and they would be either really brave or really scared. And we had one little boy who came in, there were probably five or six of us sitting at tables with all our equipment waiting for one to come sit with us. He came in and he put his hand on his head and he said "are all of you all certified real nurses"? We so enjoyed all the stories with the kids. We had another one, a kindergartner this time, in the hall who gave me a hug. That was another thing, they're always giving hugs. So she gave me a hug, she stepped back and put her hands on her hips and she said "I could just put you in a bun and eat you up". So I just love the children. They're just priceless. I love work with kids.

WM: What's been your most memorable experience in nursing education?

JS: Some of the funny things students do that we would talk about. Like "I can't believe that they did such and such and so and so". We had, I probably can't tell some of them, but we had one student make a mistake. The instructor was telling her where to put a shot. She put her hand out and said "put the shot right here" because she had it on the person's leg or whatever. She did, but when she did she put the needle through the instructor's piece of skin right here. It went right through her skin and right into her. She came back telling all of us about that story. Some of the mistakes are priceless and funny. None of them were to the point where anybody would have been harmed. Some of the funny mistakes were those kinds.

WM: If you had to do it all again would you do it all again would you do it the same way or would you change it?

JS: I wouldn't change a thing. Nursing has been very, very good to me. If you ever know anything about Saturday Night Live, there was a character on there who would say (in accent) "base-a-ball has-a been a-very-very good to me". So I'd have to say nursing has been very, very good to me. Nursing's a great career. You can only go up and you can do anything you want.

WM: If you had a message to students now or people who are thinking about nursing, not necessarily nursing students, what would you say to them?

PJ: I would say come on, we need you. Not only do we need you now in any field that you want to pick, whether it's in hospital, public health, or home health, you can pick whatever age you want to work with, and you need to keep going with your degree because there's no term limit for a degree in nursing. You need to keep on. And we need nursing educators too. So come on, we need you.

WM: Okay. Was there anything else you'd like to share?

PJ: Just thanks to everybody. Just thanks to everybody for supporting nursing, and if they would continue to support. Nurses are some of the most respected professionals and we'd like to keep it that way.

WM: Well thank you very much.

PJ: Thank you.