

Madison General Hospital School of Nursing Alumni Oral History Project Reflection
Sophie Clark

This project was exciting to me from the moment I heard about it. As a future healthcare professional, I was very interested in the opportunity to learn about the nursing training, medical experiences and career paths of the nurses involved in the study. As a history major, I was interested to hear the perspectives on world events, changing gender roles, experiences in Madison and insights into societal changes. I knew that this project would be the perfect marriage of my two loves and passions: medicine and history. Entering into this project, I knew very little about oral history and the process. Through the work I did on this project, I have gained a deep interest and respect for oral history and telling the stories of individuals in order to see the history of a school, era or career path.

Since the time I joined the project in Fall of 2019, I have had the opportunity to listen to and read each interview, index and transcript multiple times. I have seen many of these interviews from first correspondence to completion. Because of my involvement in every interview, some more than others of course, I feel a unique connection to the nurses involved in this project, as well as a very clear holistic view of the project. I feel as if I know these individuals after hearing so much of their lives. The nurses portrayed a very humanized and uniquely individualized history. Despite the similarities in their education and, in many cases, their early life, the variety of the study participants' career outcomes is striking. No two nurses went down the same path, from Diane Ciucci's experience in the Intensive Care Unit, to Mitzi Duxbury's experience in law school, to Gerry Lisi's career as a coroner.

The organic way that medical specialization occurs is very interesting to me, and highly applicable to my own future, as an aspiring physician. Some nurses, such as Ann Budde, realized they had a knack for psychiatric care. Others enjoyed pediatrics. John McCormick went into geriatric psychology nursing, while others, like Judy Eckblad, went into teaching. These career trajectories were all supported by Madison General Hospital School of Nursing and these nurses were able to choose paths that worked for their interests and passions. It is so interesting, especially from my vantage point as a student, to see how much careers change.

One of my favorite questions to hear them answer was about the unusual practices or methods that would not be used today. They talk about monumentally different medical experiences such as having patients in the iron lung, or using water therapy to treat psychiatric patients, or even about nursing before the modern technology we know today. These nursing students not only saw different training than is practiced today, but many of them continued to work until relatively recently. They have seen new technology, medical techniques and practices come into their careers and many of them have even played a part in teaching nursing students recently. So, they can really provide interesting examples of the ways that not only nursing, but nursing education has changed.

For some, nursing school was one option in a short list of acceptable career paths. Many of the nurses noted that they were really expected to be a teacher, a secretary or a nurse. For

some, nursing made the most sense due to scholarship opportunities. Several of the nurses were in the Cadet Nurse Corps connected with World War II in the 1940s which was a full scholarship. For others, the decision to attend nursing school came after time at the University. Eunice Jewell had briefly studied Chemistry before coming to Madison General. Tom Berthold started school to become a physical therapist but decided to become a nurse instead. And some had a natural inclination that nursing was what they wanted to do all their lives such as Mitzi Duxbury who explains she knew she wanted to be a nurse from the age of three or four years old. I think this really displays the diversity of individual experiences that nursing pulls from.

The interviews also provided a fascinating window into the world and the changes being experienced by society. I think that one of the most interesting examples of this is the clinical rotation to Cook County Hospital. It is very interesting to see how the nurses responded to the different sights they saw in and out of the hospital. It is also interesting to think about the fact that there was a need to travel to a bigger city and the implications about the size and diversity of Madison at that time.

Especially because of my interest in medicine, I really related to a lot of the nurses interviewed. In many cases, they were girls about my age when they started nursing school. Many were moving away from home for the first time, making new friends and having a good time. These nurses were similar to my peers and me. They were living in the dorms, dating, going to the beach, going out for ice cream. They were even taking similar classes to me. They were young men and women getting their education. This aspect of oral history is so humanizing. I feel like I gained a richer sense of what it really means to be a student in the medical field by hearing the history of it from their perspectives.