

Nursing in 1954-1960: Professor Emerita Gloria Perry offers history lesson in replica attire

December 26 2015 11:25 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Nursing Professor Emerita Gloria Perry, PhD, took students back in time for a glimpse into the nursing profession during the “cusp of change.” Donned in a homemade 1954 replicate uniform, Perry recalled her [journey](#) through nursing school with humor and sincerity.

“I was 17 in 1954, straight out of high school and in a diploma program in St. Louis,” Perry said. “There was rigid socialization. Students were primarily responsible for the nursing care of all patients on all shifts.”

Perry emphasized the hot conditions in which they worked since only the operating room was air-conditioned. She noted that there was minimal charting done, and highlighted the textbook she called pivotal for providing good nursing care: “The Art, Science and Spirit of Nursing” by Alice Price.

“In January, we were exposed to sicker patients, some extremely sick,” she recalled. “There were few medicines in 1954. There were three or four antibiotics. No blood pressure medicines, no chemotherapy, no coronary care units or intensive care units. The designation of patients was either medical or surgical.”

It was during her rotation in the operating room that Perry found her calling in obstetrics. She remembered being called in the middle of the night for an emergency cesarean section.

“It left a lasting impression,” Perry remembered fondly. “The baby weighed just under five pounds. It was a boy. I was hooked right then and there.”

Halfway through her diploma program, the nursing student quit. She followed her soon-to-be husband to the University of Missouri-Columbia. It was there that she entered the baccalaureate program, repeated all of her clinical experience and thrived in what she explained was a markedly different teaching style.

She calls that time in the nursing profession, the cusp between the old and the new.

“The hospital there was brand new in 1957,” Perry said. “It had an amphitheater over the operating room. We were taken there to watch some of the first open heart surgeries performed with a new heart and lung machine.

“It was period of rapid change. So rapid, even as I think of it, I can hardly believe it,” she added. “It was a privilege to experience the two worlds of nursing in a time span of just six years. I started in 1954 and graduated in 1960 with a baccalaureate degree in nursing. What a trip!”

Perry went on to work at Missouri Baptist and taught in its school of nursing. She then achieved her master's and doctorate from Saint Louis University.

But she calls SIUE her home. Perry was an SIUE School of Nursing faculty member from 1975 until her retirement in 1992. The professor emerita has left a legacy in the School and continues to support its nursing students.

Her advice to students: "Stick to it. Persevere. Go for it! If you're at all inclined, go on with your education. Do whatever you need to be doing to attain your highest level of clinical or academic achievement."

She hopes one day students will share their own nursing history lesson with future generations.

"Someday when 2015 is old to them, I hope they will remember the changes that occurred in their lifetime with clarity and share their stories."

The [SIUE School of Nursing's](#) fully accredited programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling nearly 1,000 students in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. Through expanded programs located on the SIU Carbondale campus and SIU School of Medicine campus, the SIUE School of Nursing is helping to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within hospitals and medical centers.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgoVTrYPxgM>